

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

May 15, 2011



HOMILY NOTES

“Pray that the Master of the Harvest will send out workers into his harvest.” These words of Jesus are the source and inspiration for today’s celebration of *World Day of Prayer for Vocations*. Today the Catholic Church worldwide makes the same prayer: that there will be more workers to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ to all nations.

We might think it was easier for the disciples of Jesus’ time to proclaim his message than it is for us today. After all, they had Jesus himself to guide them, right? How can we be expected to do as well as they did? But remember what happened to those disciples at the time of Jesus’ death. Most of them abandoned him at his crucifixion. After his burial, they locked themselves away in fear. Even at the site of Jesus’ ascension to heaven, the disciples doubted (Mt 28:17). Where was their courage then? How did they eventually move beyond their fear to heal the sick, cast out demons and preach the coming of God’s kingdom; to even *die* for Christ?

It was the momentous outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost that renewed their courage. At Pentecost and its aftermath, Jesus’ life and ministry began to be properly understood. Pentecost preceded the activities we heard about in our 1st reading today from the Acts of the Apostles. Emboldened by the Holy Spirit the disciples helped bring 3000 people to accept baptism and faith in Jesus the Christ that day.

Over the course of 2000 years, that small band of believers has grown to over one billion Catholic Christians. Each of us shares the power of that same Holy Spirit given to the disciples at Pentecost through our baptism. And with our baptism comes our vocation.

The word “vocation” literally means “call” – and the vocation we received at baptism is a call from God. It is a two-fold call. First, as the Second Vatican Council taught, we are all called to holiness. Through a process of conversion, we turn away from sin and turn our lives toward God. As St. Paul tells us, we shed our former selves so that Christ may reign in our lives. In this way we become Christ for others and “workers” for the harvest of God’s kingdom.

The second aspect of our baptismal calling is sometimes referred to as our “particular” vocation. This is the “state of life” in which we are called to live. Most Catholics are called to the vocation of married life. Others are called to be priests, religious brothers or sisters, deacons, or single people. All of them are rooted in the universal call to holiness, all are needed and all contribute to a healthy, vibrant Catholic Church.

How does one decide between the different particular vocations? How do I know if I'm called to the single life, to marriage, priesthood or the religious life? The process of determining which particular vocation is yours is called discernment. It is a prayerful process in which one puts his or her complete trust in God and his will for our life. What God wants becomes what we want. We orient our lives toward Christ and he leads us to the Father's will, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

[At this point the homilist might want to share his own vocation story].

On this *World Day of Prayer for Vocations* I would like to make a particular appeal to the young people here today. God created you and has a vocation for you that will bring you joy and fulfillment. Often, however, we don't want to let go and let God have his way with our life. Sometimes we just aren't sure if we can trust that what God wants is best for us. If you aren't ready to turn your life over to God just yet, acknowledge this fact and begin the process by praying that God give you the grace to want what he wants for you.

Don't be afraid to seek God's will in prayer, in the sacraments and in speaking to others who have come to know their own vocations. Speak with your parents or to a mature married couple about how they realized their vocation to marriage. Speak with priests and religious sisters and brothers about how they came to know their vocation. Seek out dedicated single adults to learn more about their commitment to God. Become informed by talking to those who have successfully discerned their vocation. This will help you better discern your own.

Every Catholic young person ought to consider the vocation to the priesthood or religious life. Don't be afraid to discern these countercultural vocations! Perhaps you wonder whether you could live happily without being married. Most priests, religious brothers and sisters asked themselves the same question at some point. Living outside of marriage as Christ did, they are better able to give themselves completely to serve others. It is a radical calling, but one that brings great satisfaction and joy to those who are called to it. This faith community, especially parents, can encourage our youth to consider a vocation to priesthood and the consecrated life. Adult assistance in the exploration of all the Christian vocations can help youth in their vocation discernment.

So on this *World Day of Prayer for Vocations* let us each consider where we are with our own vocation. Are we living it fully? Are we stuck in a holding pattern, like the disciples in the upper room? Are we somewhere between the two? Pope John Paul II said it well when he took up his pontifical ministry, "Be not afraid. Open wide the doors to Christ!" May his words inspire us to fulfill our own vocation.

In today's gospel, Jesus describes himself as the gate for the sheep. They know his voice and follow him wherever he goes. The destination Jesus is leading his sheep to is, of course, our heavenly home. On this *World Day of Prayer for Vocations*, let us pray that all members of Christ's flock listen carefully to the master's voice; that they respond generously to their call to holiness and to their particular vocation. To nourish us along the way Jesus has given us his greatest gift: himself in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. May our communion with him and each other strengthen us to become the "workers for the harvest" that our heavenly Father seeks.