

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

April 25, 2010



HOMILY NOTES

During Mass some years ago, a priest was using the penitential rite for the blessing of people with holy water. As he began the rite, the priest realized that the sacramentary (the book used for prayers in the liturgy) had been left in the sacristy. Without a word, the priest immediately left to retrieve the book in the sacristy. In the meantime, the little server, not knowing what had happened to Father, picked up the holy water container and went up and down the aisle blessing all the people! The people were smiling and making the sign of the cross. When the priest returned, he laughed and said: "I couldn't have done a better job myself," and continued with the Mass. In this true story, we readily understand how the little server saw a need and then felt called to do something about it. The boy had seen this holy action celebrated before—one that reminds us of our baptism—and he was ready to get involved.

On this *World Day of Prayer for Vocations*, we are reminded, as baptized Catholics and all Christians, that our central vocation is both a call to holiness and to service. "Holiness . . . is the vocation of our times, of all of us," said Pope Paul VI in Vatican Council II. Pope John Paul II constantly called upon young people and all of us to give our lives in service as followers of Jesus Christ.

We know that all vocations flow from baptism. But what do we mean by the word "vocation?" A good understanding of the word "vocation" might well be considered within the following sequence of statements: 1) Through the sacrament of baptism each person receives a "call" or vocation. 2) God calls all who are baptized to holiness and service. 3) This call is lived as a single, married, ordained or consecrated person.

In this last statement, we understand that "vocation" is to be lived as a life commitment. Those who are single have responded to the vocation of joyfully acknowledging that God has called them to be a prophetic witness of what it means to be a single, loving, committed Christian in today's world. Those who are married have responded to the vocation of joyfully relying upon a God who has called them to a shared witness of what it means to have a covenantal commitment of love in today's world. Those who are consecrated and ordained have responded to the vocation of joyfully journeying with God's people as priests, sisters, brothers and others who have promised and vowed to grow in faith and holiness while helping God's people to do the same. In each vocational commitment we are called to be loving and supportive of one another.

As we celebrate this *World Day of Prayer for Vocations*, the Gospel passage could not have been better chosen. In the story of the Good Shepherd, as recounted in John 10, we listen to the words of Christ: "My sheep hear my voice and they follow me." This passage confirms the contemporary story of a man who went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The man tells of how in the city of Bethlehem he watched two shepherds caring for their flocks of sheep.

To his amazement, at the end of the day, he watched the shepherds put their respective flocks in the same cave—the sheep intermingling with each other. Wondering how the shepherds would ever be able to separate the sheep, he arose early the next morning to observe. The pilgrim watched while one of the shepherds walked some distance from the cave. At a certain point, the shepherd gave a particular call and immediately his flock ran out to him. The sheep knew the shepherd’s voice. Together, shepherd and sheep went on their way.

The question is posed to you and me. Do we have a familiarity with the voice of the Good Shepherd in our lives? When God calls us to a commitment of single, married, consecrated or ordained life have we prepared ourselves to respond? And are we prepared to continue that response every day of our lives?

Ultimately, a vocation is not defined by “doing” but rather by “being.” We are called to live our lives in a generous response to the One who gave us life. Being in the presence of the Father, sharing in the mission of Christ, and witnessing in the power of the Holy Spirit is what being a follower of the Good Shepherd is all about.

How do we prepare ourselves? Personal and communal prayer, frequent reception of the sacraments, the reading of scripture, educating ourselves in the faith, and being of service to one another are ways in which we can more readily discern the Good Shepherd’s beckoning voice in our daily lives.

In 2002, Pope John Paul II called for a joint U.S. and Canadian pastoral plan to create a culture of vocations in North America. In the plan we were all reminded that: “The vocational reality of the Church calls for a deep respect for the complementarity and interdependence of all Church vocations. Because the Church is at once community and communion of vocations, all its members need to be concerned about and committed to the flowering of all vocations in the Church, and not merely their own.”

So let us pray for vocations in our Church. We need committed men and women who believe that their call to single, married, ordained or consecrated life is from God. We need to support each response of vocation and make sure each kind of vocation is an encouraged and viable option for our children.

On a personal note, I thank God for the gift of your vocations as I thank God for the gift of my own vocation in serving you as priest (deacon). Thank you for the many ways you witness God’s love to me in this parish (campus or community).

My friends, the Good Shepherd calls each of us by name. May we respond to that call with the familiarity of truly knowing, loving and serving the One who calls us?

Other notes that may be helpful in homily preparation:

Harvard’s Dr. Barry Brazelton once demonstrated to a television audience that even very young infants quickly become aware of the identity of their parents. He took an infant in his arms and asked the audience to watch the infant’s eyes. He spoke to the baby. Then he asked the other people to speak. There was little recognition from the baby. Then the mother of the baby spoke and the baby’s eyes visibly brightened. The infant turned toward the sound of the mother’s voice. It was obvious that the child knew his mother’s voice in distinction from the others.

A good vocation is simply a firm and constant will in which the called person has to serve God in the way and in the places to which Almighty God has called him. (St. Francis de Sales)

There are two powerful words that Jesus often used in relation with his disciples. Those words are “come” and “go.” Living one’s vocation is knowing how to do both.