

“The World Day of Prayer for Vocations to the Priesthood and Religious life”

This Sunday we celebrate as a Church the annual World Day of Prayer for vocations to the priesthood and religious life as we hear the Gospel passage of the Good Shepherd – always on the 4th Sunday of the Easter season. It is such an important intention. We need to daily beg the Harvest Master to send laborers into the harvest field of souls. **As we all should know vocations to the priesthood and religious life have fallen dramatically over the last few decades.** There are several serious reasons for this as sociologists will point out, but the biggest one I think is the fact that our society is becoming increasingly **secular**, or non-religious as the years go on, and as a result most young people don’t even consider whether God might be calling them to become a priest, or a religious priest, brother, or sister, and are not encouraged to do so by their families. By **religious**, in this context, I mean someone who is consecrated to God and His service but lives in community dedicated to an apostolate (s) which serves various needs in the Church. A **diocesan priest** on the other hand often lives alone and cares for a parish or parishes. What can we all do to encourage vocations to the priesthood & religious life?

1. **Pray, pray and pray some more.** At least remember to say *one Our Father, Hail Mary and a Glory Be daily* for this intention. Offer Masses, rosaries, chaplets of Divine Mercy, and time before the Blessed Sacrament for this noble cause. Take a day a week and offer all your prayers, daily duties, sacrifices and penances for this intention. Many of you are probably already doing some of these things, but we need to pray even more (*storm Heaven with your prayers, as the saints say*): begging the Harvest Master to send laborers into His harvest of souls esp. here for our Diocese in AJ. Remember prayer/spiritual sacrifices is the primary means along with the Sacraments by which God’s grace comes into the world and bears spiritual fruit, as I spoke about last weekend: the most important thing we do in this life is to grow in intimacy with the Blessed Trinity. Considering that, our prayers for more vocations to the priesthood and religious life will not be in vain. And please remember to pray for all the sick and elderly priests and religious and

all those who have died, and might be in Purgatory, as is brought out in the book I gave to the Parishioners on Easter Sunday: *My Conversations with the Poor Souls*.

2. **Be generous with God yourself, especially if you are in the married life.** The more generous parents and grandparents are in loving others and giving of themselves on a daily basis, the more the spiritual ground is prepared for young people to make the noble sacrifice of their life to serve God and others, by showing them by word and example **the path of self-giving love**. If parents are selfish and materialistic and unspiritual and always fighting with each other in daily life, how likely is it that one of their children is going to even consider becoming a priest or a religious? **About zero!** The reality of **the crisis in family life** in our society, over the last few decades, with rampant divorce and other struggles, has led to a decline in the number of priests and religious. If married couples are generous in being open to having children and not putting a limit on that generosity by giving into **the contraceptive mentality** of our world, it's so much more likely that one of their sons or daughters will be willing to be generous with God and give their lives to Him as a consecrated person. Also, we must encourage our young people to consider **in deep thought and prayer** whether God might be calling them to make a gift of their young lives to Him as a priest or a religious. Recent surveys have shown that upwards of 70% of Catholic families in our day DO NOT encourage their children to consider the priesthood or religious life. **That is not a good sign of the vibrancy of Faith life in a family: because if a family loves the Catholic faith, they would naturally encourage their children to consider the priesthood or religious life.** All these factors are challenges to be looked at and hopefully changed over time with God's help, so that we can turn the tide and more young people will say **Yes** to the Lord. All our recent Popes, have said repeatedly over the last few decades, *God is not calling less people to the ordained priesthood and religious life, we are just hearing less His quiet voice amid the constant noise of the modern world*. There is a desperate need for have more quiet and deeper reflection in all our lives, but especially in young ppl, to be in tune with the Lord as He is trying to show them the vocation

He wants for them, to give them ultimate meaning and purpose, and to make a difference for good in this world, serving God and other people in self-giving love which will then carry into eternity, for the glory of God and salvation of souls.

3. Finally, a word of encouragement to our young people in the Parish: **don't be afraid**. If you feel a stirring in your heart and mind that the Lord may be calling you to the priesthood or religious life, **don't bury it; but seek out an answer**. I am here as your Pastor to help you discern and most of all the Holy Spirit will assist you if you open your heart to Him in prayer. I have encountered men and women later in life who have told me that they think they were called to be a priest or a religious back when they were teenagers, but were too afraid or intimidated by what other people thought of them (*the tragedy of giving into human respect* – which always holds us back spiritually) to pursue it, and now it is one of their life-long regrets that they didn't at least try it out. There is no shame in visiting a seminary or a religious house of formation, or even joining up and later discovering it is not for you. **Remember it is a wonderful life to be a priest or a religious - if you are called to it: *to share in Jesus's mission of bringing people to salvation in Him by offering Mass and Confession and the other Sacraments, to preach and teach and witness in His name, to love and proclaim that Jesus alone is the Savior of the world, and there is no other name under Heaven by which the human race is to be saved, to lay down one's own life for the good of the flock in imitation of Jesus.*** All of you, young people, please pray and sincerely ask the Lord to show you if He is calling you to be a priest or a religious. **You will never regret that prayer** because, even if you are not being called to the priesthood or religious life, the Lord will reveal Himself to you in such a personal way that your life will be changed for the better, and you will want to serve Him in whatever path He leads you on, whether it be the priesthood, religious life, or the married or the single life. Your life will then become increasingly a self-gift in imitation of Christ, *who did not come to do His own will but the will of His Heavenly Father*, as you grow in intimacy with the Trinity. This is the narrow path that leads to Heaven. Never forget that! God bless you. †