

Homily: 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter: Cycle A: 2023: Acts 2: 14a, 36-41; Ps. 23; 1 Peter 2: 20-25; Jn 10: 1-10

***“How to foster more Vocations to the Priesthood and Religious Life”***

On this 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, we as a Church celebrate **Good Shepherd Sunday** based on the Gospel passage of today. It is a special day of prayer for an increase in vocations to the priesthood and religious life each year. What are the factors that lead to this holy vocation?

1. **Ultimately one is called by God** - you don't take on this vocation simply by you deciding it. God however, often, works through human instruments, so **personal example** is so important. I remember when I was considering if I should pursue the call to the priesthood, there were a few priests that God put in my path who helped me, and my mom's and later my dad's encouragement helped a lot. If you see a priest who is living the Faith and who teaches it with integrity and love it will attract others over time. It is a great mystery of our Catholic faith that the Lord entrusts His sacred mysteries to human beings. He has more confidence in us than we often have in ourselves. Just think about the trust He places in us: *for priests to be the ones who are instruments of His love and forgiveness in the Sacraments; for religious sisters and brothers to point the way to God, hopefully, by their words and example; for married people to be given often the blessing of children whom God entrusts to their care both on a human and spiritual level as is brought out when we celebrate the Sacrament of Baptism.* It's truly amazing when you think of it, **this divine trust**, and it can be kind of scary, but remember if the Lord gives a call, He also gives the grace to fulfill it.
2. **Disciples beget disciples.** You will not embrace a priestly/religious vocation if you don't know the Lord. For our young people to embrace the fullness of the Catholic faith and to come to know the Lord on a personal level, we adults need to be growing in our own Christian discipleship. This involves what St. Peter says today in the first reading: *repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ... Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.* Young people will respond to the call of Christ to give their lives to Him: be it in the priesthood or religious life, or in the Sacrament of Marriage, or a consecrated single life - if we adults live out our vocations with fidelity and integrity. **To repent means to change, to be different**

**than the world.** We can't soft-peddle the difficult teachings of the Lord - since these are the very things that gives us true meaning and purpose: the truth of who God is, the gift of the Mass and Confession and the other Sacraments, the reality of death, judgment, and our destiny in eternity, the reality of Heaven, Hell and Purgatory, the call to live a life of sexual purity in every vocation, and to realize the purpose of life is to make a difference for the better in God. To become a priest or religious today is to be **counter-cultural**, but to live the married life the way God wants it to be lived is also **counter-cultural**: open to the blessing of children, in contrast to the contraceptive mentality of the world, and to be faithful for life, in contrast to the worldly mentality of temporary commitments. Hence as Abp. Charles Chaput once said, *we will see an increase in vocations to the priesthood and religious life when more Catholic married couples live out their vows more generously and faithfully.*

3. **This is where prayer and sacrifice come into the vocations picture.** On Saturday of this coming week, we will celebrate 1<sup>st</sup> Saturday, like every month in honor of Our Lady of Fatima. When Mary appeared back in 1917 to the 3 young shepherds in the village of Fatima, Portugal her main message was one of ***praying the daily Rosary and sacrificing for the conversion of sinners.*** If we do our part in terms of prayer and sacrifice - not just for the conversion of sinners which is probably needed now even more so than back in 1917 - but for an increase in vocations to the priesthood and religious life, God will NEVER be outdone in generosity. As St. John Paul II put it so well when he was Pope "*God is not calling fewer people to the priesthood and religious life today, it's just fewer people are listening or heeding His voice because the noisiness of the world far too often drowns it out.*" We need to teach our young people how to hear God's voice by showing them the example of daily **prayer** at home, beautiful Liturgical prayer at Church, and showing them how to have a living relationship with God, the Blessed Trinity. The element of **sacrifice** is shown in our daily duties, which we need to consecrate to the Lord in company with our Lady, as well as bearing the **sufferings** that come from life, in patience, and offering daily acts of penance in reparation for sin. May the Lord bless our Diocese, going forward, with many holy priestly vocations. Our Lady of Fatima, pray for us and help us in this.✠