

Homily-Vocations and Family

I preach this homily between the ordination of Matthew Long to the priesthood, which took place yesterday in the Cathedral and the celebration of the 50th Anniversary of Fr. Moore's ordination, which will take place this Thursday, also in the Cathedral. I can't help but preach on vocations.

At the end of the ordination ceremony Bishop Duca invited Matthew forward to speak to the congregation. Matthew spoke about the role of his family in the discernment of his vocation. He said that his call to the priesthood did not begin five years ago when he entered the seminary nor did it begin ten years ago when he entered the Catholic Church. He said that his call from God began in his Sunday school class as a young boy. Matthew then told how his parents drove him to the seminary at a time when they did not agree with his decision to enter seminary and how his parents picked him up at the seminary and drove him back home after his graduation from the seminary. Matthew indicated the first trip was more meaningful to him as more love was involved in that first trip.

Matthew's comments after his ordination show that many people are involved in planting the seeds of a vocation. Parents, brothers and sisters, family members, friends and teachers are all involved in the development of one's vocation.

As Catholics we believe that while many people may help one with the understanding and acceptance of his/her vocation ultimately God is the one that plants the seed. It is God who calls one to priesthood, religious life, marriage or lay service within the church. God is the sower that attempts to plant his seed within us. From the early centuries of our church it has held that God chooses ministers within the church.

While it is God that calls men and women to their vocation the role of parents and grandparents is to prepare the soil of our children's life to accept the vocation to which God calls them. We are to help dispose children to accept God's call. We do this through setting up the home environment in which a vocation can grow and develop.

Two weeks ago I spoke about the meaning of one of the most ancient images of both God and Christ – Jesus the Good Shepherd. Today I would like to speak about an image of God which deals with vocations. In the Gospel of Mark Jesus tells a parable in which he represents God as a farmer who goes out and lavishly plants seeds. The farmer does this by casting seed onto his field. Jesus says that some seed falls on a path. The path is hard and so the seed is never planted. The birds come and eat the seed. Some seed falls on rocky ground. Some of this seed is planed but it sprouts up quickly and withers and dies for lack of roots. Other seed falls on thorn bushes. This seed grows but is choked by the bushes. Then some seed falls on rich soil and bears thirty and sixty and one hundred fold.

Jesus explains to his disciples that the seed is God's word. The path, the rocky ground, the thorn bushes and the rich soil represent our lives. Jesus says that Satan, anxiety and desires can hinder us from receiving God's word and bearing fruit.

We are to help others to be open to receiving God's word into our lives and bearing much fruit. This includes God's call to a vocation. We need to be aware of the ways that God calls each of us as well to a vocation.

When I reflect on the creation of an environment in which a vocation can grow and develop I think about my parents.

My parents helped me to be open to the word of God. In many ways this was done unknowingly. My Father loved to make pancakes for the family most Saturday mornings. He loved to make different flavors of pancakes with orange and lemon rinds and nuts. These experiences taught me that dad cared about me. When the family moved to Spain I remember when there was no altar server at Mass Dad who was in 40's would walk up to the altar and serve. The English Speaking Church would invite speakers to come and talk to us about the Saints after Mass. Dad was always the one who would introduce the speakers. I believed my Dad was a great leader. I certainly wanted to grow up to like my father.

My mother was different. While my father was reserved and did not deal well with emotional situations I knew I could always go to mom with any problem or dilemma and she would help me. Mom always had great confidence in me. She often seemed to believe more in me than I believed in myself. Mom's confidence in me led me to have a greater sense of self-confidence.

Both Mom and Dad had a deep love for the church and this was communicated through our weekly attendance at Mass and our family prayer. Their love of church led me to attend daily Mass and to pray daily. This prayer helped me to be open to the voice of the Lord when He finally called me to the priesthood.

Mom and Dad never told me that I should be a priest. Their love of God and neighbor and of the church allowed me to listen to God's voice and so to be able to say yes to the vocation to the priesthood.

What seeds are you planting in the lives of your children? What do we communicate to our children? What place does God's call and the freedom to answer that call have in your communication with your children?

We are called to prepare the lives of our children for vocations. We are called to confirm the call of God.

Some of the seeds that are planted in the lives of children may be meant well, but often go against God's call to vocation. Statements that marriage is the only valuable vocation for a young person or that priesthood or the life of a religious sister would not be worth the effort are seeds that are often planted in the lives of young people. Messages that power, prestige and wealth are the most important goals to which young people should aspire also hinder young people from hearing God's call.

In this homily I want to remind the parish that God is active in calling men and women to the priesthood and religious. I want to remind parishioners of their duty to create an environment in the family in which a religious vocation can grow. At the same time I want to remind each of you that the vocation to the priesthood is a vocation which brings fulfillment and happiness.

To this end I have written Fr. Mark's Top 10 Reasons for Becoming a Priest.

So here we go....

Fr. Mark's top ten reasons for becoming a priest...

Reason # 10

Friends...Priests are accompanied by good friends...Fr. Charles, Joann, Susan and Ryan. All of my friends are sources of great joy and support...

Reason # 9

Prayer and Liturgies...The opportunity to say Mass, celebrate baptisms, funerals and weddings, to anoint the sick and to pray for and with others.

Reason # 8

Building Community...bringing people together so that they can better know God through knowing others and have the support of other committed Christians in difficult times.

Reason #7

Service...Making a difference in the lives of those who need the basic material and spiritual necessities of life.

Reason #6

Leadership...Knowing that you can bring a group closer to Christ and that you can help take them where they would not otherwise go.

Reason # 5

Jesus the Good Shepherd School...Stations of the Cross...Shooting hoops with students...School Mass... Wednesday morning assembly and helping students to grow....

Reason # 4

Adventure...Life is meant to be an adventure...mission trips...Masses for migrant workers...pilgrimages to Europe and the Holy Land.

Reason # 3

Parties...Mardi Gras Parties, Christmas Parties, Enchilada Meals, the Poor MAN'S SUPPER AND Super Bowl Parties, and especially Birthday parties.

Reason # 2

The ability to teach others and to grow with others... RCIA, JustFaith, Greco, Book Club, Speaker Series

And now my All Time, Number One, Favorite reason for being a priest... (Drum roll please...)

The ability to give hope to others through the sacraments, counseling and prayer.

In 2001 I wrote that my greatest joy as a priest "has been getting to know many parishioners from across the diocese. I have enjoyed journeying with them and helping them to encounter the risen Christ." My greatest joy continues to be becoming a part of the lives of parishioners and both leading them and journeying with them to Christ. This has taken place in daily Mass, weekend Mass, in ACTS, in JustFaith, in various Small Faith Communities, in the Senior Shepherds, etc.

May we through our lives and words help assist God through fostering vocations.

The Parish Vocation Awareness Committee has provided seeds that in order to remind us that example and words of parents are ways in which we help to confirm the message of vocations that God plants in the lives of men and women. I ask that families take the seeds home, plant them with their children and use this as an opportunity to discuss vocations with them. The seeds are located on the table on the right side of the gathering space.