



From the Pastor
2nd Sunday in
Ordinary Time - B
January 14, 2024

VOCATIONS & THE EUCHARIST. I hope you know by now that we are in the last part of the

USA's Bishops' three-year National Eucharistic Revival which reaches its climax at this summer's 5-day **Congress**, July 17-21 in Indianapolis, Indiana. While the main goal is to reawaken, reaffirm and renew our belief in our **Lord's Real Presence** in the **Eucharist** and our celebration and reception of this great **Sacrament**, it is also a call for more **Priestly Vocations**, without which we cannot have **Eucharist!** And since **Priestly Vocations** are fostered in good **Catholic** homes and schools, we must also pray for an increase in **Vocations** to the **Sacrament of Matrimony** and the **Religious Life**.

IS IT I, LORD? Perhaps it is **Divine Providence** that today's **Gospel** is the call of the first four **Apostles: Peter** and his brother **Andrew, James** and his brother **John** - and our **First Reading** is the inspiration behind a hymn 'instrumental' in my hearing and answering **God's call** to **Priesthood**: "**Here I Am, Lord.**" The first time I heard Dan Schutte's classic hymn, composed in 1981, was at a **Day of Recollection** for those who felt 'called' by **God** to a **Church Ministry**. The refrain's haunting question "**Is it I, Lord?**" kept echoing in my mind and struck a 'chord' in my heart as I kept wondering: why would **God** want **me**, with all my quirks and weaknesses, sins and failings, to be a **Priest?** Could I fulfill the demands of **Ordination** and, some day, of a **Pastor?**

After years of discernment and prayer, several years in seminary formation, pastoral experiences in parishes and hospitals, I felt ready to accept the call to **Priesthood**, I have not regretted it even once after all these years. Now, with many years - even two decades of priestly service under my belt, I am more convinced than ever that we need to trust that when we sense **God's call** to offer ourselves for a ministry, we need to go for it! For the more we open ourselves up to the many ways **God** confirms that call, the easier it is to discern or prayerfully consider if **God's call** is for real.

What I just wrote goes for **every Vocation**: to **Holy Orders** as a **Diocesan Priest** like me, who promises obedience to their **Bishop** and his

successors and to remaining celibate or unmarried; **Religious Life** as an **Order Priest**, who makes vows of poverty, chastity and to living in community; a **Brother** or **Sister**; a **Lay Minister**; or to **Holy Matrimony**, a **relationship** or **friendship**; a **career** or **occupation**. And even if we discern that **God** is NOT calling to a particular future, it is never a waste of time - for through our life experiences - the good and the not-so-good, **God** always teaches us something. Which brings me back to the initial title of this article: **Vocations and the Eucharist**.

By being faithful to the Sunday Mass **obligation**, we open ourselves to the treasure trove the **Church** offers us through **The Liturgy of the Word**. Week after week we hear story after story of men and women, young and old, greatly gifted and terribly sinful - who accepted **God's call** to be a **Prophet** or **Apostle, Minister** or **Leader, Preacher** or **Role Model**. We hear of their difficult struggles to overcome their fears, as our **Blessed Mother** did, who asked the **Angel**: "**How can this be?**" [Luke 1:34a] when asked to be the **Virgin Mother** of **God's Son**. We hear of **Saint Joseph's** initial desire to call it quits when his betrothed was found with child. Today's **First Reading** told of the future **Prophet Samuel's** consternation as he heard **God calling** him in the night. Who has not, in response to **God's call** to a ministry, echoed **Saint Peter's** humble words, "**Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.**" [Luke 5:8b] The list goes on and on ...

However, the **Bread of Life** then comes so He can enter into us to affirm and assure us, to grace and gift us, to strengthen and support us. The hymns and canticles we sing unite us, not only in voice, but in purpose and intent. The array of various ministers at **holy Mass**, both **Ordained** and **Lay**, show the diversity of **Christ's Body**, the **Church**. It also reminds us of all of the encouragement and assistance we can offer to each other as we strive to hear and answer **God's call**. It was, is not, nor ever will be **God's** intention that we go it alone; we are called to be a **Eucharistic Community**, united in the **Lord**.

Are we brave enough to ask, "**Is it I, Lord?**" Are we willing to say, "**I will go, Lord, if you lead me?**" By receiving **Jesus** in **Holy Communion** more often and more worthily, we will be certain and properly fortified to answer ... in the affirmative!

In Christ,

Father Mark

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