

Homily: 4th Sunday of Easter: Cycle C: 2016: Acts 13: 14, 43-52; Ps. 100; Rev 7: 9, 14b-17; Jn 10: 27-30

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

What a gift it is to share in the mission of Christ, the Shepherd of souls. Priests act in the person of Christ the head as Spiritual Shepherds in the Church, especially when they celebrate the Sacraments and Preach. **Deacons** share in the gift of sacred ordination for the service of the Church and their fellow human beings and assist the priests in carrying out their sacred duties. **Religious sisters** are spiritually married to Christ the Bridegroom of the Church to remind us of the need to put Christ first in our lives and by their lives of service, sacrifice and prayer win many souls to Christ. **Missionaries** bring the saving truth of Jesus’s Gospel and the Catholic faith to the ends of the world. The question today is: **how does God reveal that He is calling a person to a religious vocation?**

1. **First it is a fruit of a life of prayer.** Until we seriously cultivate our relationship with the living God by spending time each day in personal prayer and reading His holy Word in the Bible it is unlikely that we are going to hear His quiet voice in the depths of our souls. That’s why is it so important for parents to pray with their children and teach them how to pray from your own love for the Lord. We must help our young people to personally know the Lord. And once we become young adults to make the Faith our own by putting God first in our lives. *Weekly and Holy Day Mass are a given, but additional helps to coming to know and love the Lord include frequent reception of the Sacrament of Confession, praying the Rosary and Divine Mercy Chaplet, making visits to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, Eucharistic adoration, Daily Mass, love for our Lady, living a life of charity through the corporeal and spiritual works of mercy, dying to self daily through acts of self-denial and penance, consulting with a spiritual director and getting involved in the life of your local Catholic community and parish.*
2. **We must be willing to suffer in love for the Lord.** Anything worthwhile in life involves sacrifice and inevitable suffering. This includes living the married life according to God’s standards. Is the priesthood or religious life easy? We only work on Sundays, right? ☺ No, it is not easy, if you try to live it right, without compromises for the sake of ease or human respect and popularity. To embrace a

religious vocation is a call to embrace the Cross in a special and specific way: to put your life at the service of God and the Church to help Jesus save souls. This is **a spiritual battle** on the supernatural level against the principalities and powers of darkness as St. Paul says, but also on the human level, especially in our modern secular world when so many individuals don't seem to be interested in the things of God, or being called to life of obedient faith, or living a life of purity. As a result priests and religious suffer many interior trials, which is why we count on your prayers and spiritual sacrifices, so that we persevere in this noble vocation that the Lord has called us to. But we trust this suffering will bear great fruit in due time, for the Cross brings life; and to the priest or religious who strives for daily fidelity to the Lord's teaching, Jesus fills the soul with joy and peace. What could be more noble than to share directly in the work of Christ to save souls?!

- 3. We must be willing to go against the grain of the world: to be counter-cultural.** I have come across young people in my almost 16 years as a priest who I think deep down are being called to the priesthood or religious life, BUT who resist because they don't want to be seen as "weirdoes" or "uncool" or can't deal with the reality of making the sacrifice of their will to God and the Church for a greater good: *namely embracing the vocation that will lead to their salvation and the salvation of others.* **Don't be afraid of God!** Yes, He will challenge us. Yes, He will stretch us. But in the end we will be so grateful that we gave our lives to a cause greater than ourselves. You see this on a human level in the lives of some young men and women who give their lives to serve others in various volunteer works, or in the military. And our response is: how noble a sacrifice! **Rightly so, but how many of us are actively encouraging our young people to do the same in relation to God?** *Do we really believe our Catholic faith is the key that opens the door to the ultimate meaning of human existence? And even more importantly is it the guiding light that leads us on the narrow path to God's Kingdom?* If so, then we should be encouraging our children, our grandchildren, our godchildren, and the young people of our Parish and Catholic community at large to open their hearts to the possibility of a religious vocation. May we do our part because the Good Shepherd is NEVER outdone in generosity! God bless you.