

Vocations and Prayer

 The Catholic Magazine on Vocation Ministry

April - June 2018

#110 Vol.XXVII No.2



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Service to the Poor and Vocation Promotion Inseparable Activities

By Fr. ANTONIO FIORENZA, RCJ

I began my priestly ministry as a teacher. In fact, after being ordained as a priest, my superiors moved me from Rome, where I had completed my theological studies, to our house in Naples, which at that time housed about one hundred street children. Each of them had a history of poverty, abandonment, violence and exploitation. They showed no interest in going to school or learning about religion. Their attitude discouraged me very rapidly and made me think that being a teacher was not really my vocation. In addition, I was convinced that, as a priest, I did not have to deal with children facing such difficulties. I decided to meet with the school's principal to share my thoughts. He was also a Rogationist priest and listened to me carefully. At the end of our conversation, he simply said: "Father Antonio, if we do not take care of these children who will?" I remained silent for a while and did not have the courage to add anything else.

The principal's words stayed with me for a long time and revealed themselves as lighting from above. I taught at that school for five years. When I was transferred, I felt sad for leaving my students, but also experienced a sense of deep gratitude to the Lord. He allowed me to discover and to live concretely an important aspect of the Rogationist charism: education and evangelization of the poor, especially young children.

In the Church, many men and women religious Institutes had been inspired by the charism of the service to the poor. Even the religious institutes without a specific mission to serve the poor reserve for them a special attention in their apostolate. I have often heard of "saints of charity," meaning those saints who have dedicated their lives to the education and evangelization of the poor. It is difficult, however, to find saints who have not shown a particular fondness for the poor.

In fact, the poor are at the center of Jesus' mission (see Lk 4: 18-19) and consequently they should be the core of the Church's mission. It is therefore not surprising that Pope Francis, with his constant references to the various forms of poverty affecting today's society, has made the poor the banner of his pontificate, the main path for a consistent return to the Gospel, and the soul of the renewal of the



Photo by Billy Posco

Church. The institution of the annual World Day of the Poor (XXXIII Sunday of Ordinary Time), at the conclusion of the Jubilee of Mercy (2016), is the visible sign of Pope Francis' pastoral vision.

Can the revival of the centrality of service to the poor be considered as a reason for a new bloom of vocations to the priestly ministry and to the consecrated life? I think we can legitimately believe and hope for it.

Saint Hannibal Maria Di Francia, founder of the Rogationists and the Daughters of Divine Zeal (1851-1927), revealed a prophetic teaching about the connection between the service to the poor and vocations. He was convinced that there can be no authentic prayer for vocations without a true love for the poor, neither there can be a fruitful pastoral care for vocations without the care of the poor. Definitely, the service to the poor can be a sign of discernment and vocational decision above all for those who wish to dedicate their lives to the Lord in the priestly ministry or in the consecrated life. ■



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U.S.A. Delegation
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Printing and Design
Challenge Graphics, North Hills, CA
Robert Wielage

Subscription Rates
Single Copy \$5.00
One-year subscription \$18.00
Two-year subscription \$30.00
International:
One-year subscription \$25.00
Two-year subscription \$44.00

Vocations and Prayer is published quarterly by the Rogationist Fathers, U.S.A., in cooperation with:

**ROGATE ERGO/
MONDO VOC**
Via dei Rogazionisti, 8
00182 Rome, ITALY

ROGATE ERGO Asia
24 Calcutta St., Merville Park,
Parañaque,
Metro Manila 1700 - PHILIPPINES

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02926 Sao Paulo - S.P. BRAZIL

Manuscripts, letters to the editor, articles for publication are solicited from all those who wish to cooperate in vocation ministry. All inquiries should be addressed to:

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Cover photo by Steve Halama

The Poor, the Rich, and Pope Francis

The Mud of the Slums is on His Shoes

By Fr. WILLIAM REISER, SJ

At the end of a chapter entitled “The Bishop of the Slums” in his book *Pope Francis: The Struggle for the Soul of Catholicism*, Paul Vallely quotes a woman from one of Buenos Aires’ “misery villages”: “He has gone to Rome,” she said sadly, “but at least he takes the mud of the slums with him on his shoes.” When meeting with the Jesuit community in Myanmar just a few months ago, Pope Francis stated once again what has become perhaps his pastoral signature: “So, what makes the good shepherd healthy is poverty... The People of God are a poor people, a humble people, and a people who thirst for God. We pastors must learn from the people.” Later, in Bangladesh, after meeting some of the Rohingya refugees, he confided, “But this evening, in front of those poor people I met, I felt ashamed! I felt ashamed of myself, for the world! Sorry, I’m just trying to share my feelings with you.” The more we learn about Jorge Bergoglio’s own pastoral and spiritual journey in Argentina, the better we understand what he has been doing, saying, and writing since the day of his election. The mud of the slums is on his shoes.

What’s in a name

The story of how Jorge Bergoglio came to choose the name Francis is worth recalling. At the conclave, with the decisive vote very close, the Franciscan cardinal Claudio Hummes, who was seated next to him, hugged Jorge Bergoglio, saying, “Do not forget the poor.” The Pope recalled: “And those words came to me: the poor, the poor. Then, right away, thinking of the poor, I thought of Francis of Assisi... For me he is the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and safeguards creation... Oh, how I wish for a Church that is poor and for the poor.” Poverty, non-violence, care for creation:



that is what resides in the name Francis, and these have been the themes that run through nearly everything he has done and said. They have caught the world’s attention.

In his message for the First World Day of the Poor (which fell on November 19), Francis urged us to go beyond “impromptu acts of generosity,” however useful they are, and to take up “a true encounter with the poor and a sharing that becomes a

way of life.” For those of us who are socially privileged, coming face to face with people who are poor and not so much hidden as unnoticed, is absolutely essential. Sharpening our evangelical sensibility is the only way to squeeze through the needle’s eye. And this personal contact will lead to an awareness of the everyday reality of their lives that leaves us unsettled. We become increasingly mindful of them each time we step into God’s presence and every time our consumerist

tendencies tug at us. Poverty always has a human face: “faces marked by suffering, marginalization, oppression, violence, torture and imprisonment ... Poverty has the face of women, men and children exploited by base interests, crushed by the machinations of power and money.” We need to be asking ourselves, “Do I know anyone like this?” Paul wrote: “For you know the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich” (2 Cor 8:9). Not only does poverty have a human face; it also has the face of Jesus. I ponder this when hearing Francis’ words, “Jesus Christ today is called Rohingya.”

The expression “the poor” is comprehensive. It certainly includes the destitute and the economically stressed, but it also includes migrants and refugees, the elderly who are forgotten and alone, victims of racism and discrimination, young lives wasted by addiction, people marginalized by disease, those whose have been robbed of their dignity and their rights. Poverty is genocide in Myanmar and martyrdom in Syria. Yet one point bears repeating; poverty always has a human face.

Learning, face to face

In his Apostolic Exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel*, Francis recalled the words of the bishops of Brazil: “We wish to take up daily the joys and hopes, the difficulties and sorrows of the Brazilian people, especially of those living in the barrios and the countryside—landless, homeless, lacking food and health care—to the detriment of their rights.” A little further on he would write, “We may not always be able to reflect adequately the beauty of the Gospel, but there is one sign we should never lack: the option for those who are least, those whom society discards.” And further still: “This is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us... We need to be evangelized by them... We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them.”

Finally, “No one must say that they cannot be close to the poor because their own lifestyle demands more attention to other areas. This is an excuse commonly heard in academic, business or professional, and even ecclesial circles.”

In the deeply personal interview that took place in August 2013 and which later appeared in *America Magazine*, Pope Francis said, “When it comes to social issues, it is one thing to have a meeting to study the problem of drugs in a slum neighborhood and quite another thing to go there, live there and understand the problem from the inside and study it.” Referring to a letter of Fr. Pedro Arrupe, he added that “one cannot speak of poverty if one does not experience poverty, with a direct connection to the places where there is poverty.” Then he used the word “insertion,” which he called “dangerous,” yet “truly important.” Dangerous, I imagine, in the way setting up a field hospital—or going to the peripheries—can be dangerous.

It’s not altogether clear which comes first, embracing poverty as a lifestyle or solidarity with those who are its victims. What is clear, however, is that both of these ways—living simply and solidarity—are what is in store for those whose imaginations get immersed in the gospels. That is the Galilee towards which the Spirit of Jesus draws us; it is all about religious experience, the distinctively Christian experience of the divine mystery. If we listen to how many times Francis refers to Jesus, then there should be no surprise that he would be washing the feet of prisoners in Rome or grieving with migrants at Lampedusa. For his visit to Assisi in 2013, for example, the Pope wrote, “The divesting [despojamiento] of St. Francis tells us simply what the Gospel teaches: to follow Jesus means to put him in first place, to divest ourselves of the many things that we have and that suffocate our heart, to renounce our very selves, to take up the cross and carry it with Jesus... All of us are called to be poor, to divest ourselves; and as a result of doing this this we ought to learn to be with the poor, to share with the one in need, to touch the flesh of Christ... The Christian is one who

meets the poor, who looks them in the eye, who touches them.” In other words, find the poor, and we find Jesus; find Jesus, and we will soon find ourselves in the midst of the poor.

I don’t think Francis had in mind the ethical or moral consequences of embracing the gospel, in the way we draw conclusions from a first principle. The option for the poor is not a spiritual deduction. Besides, the moral teaching of the New Testament has always been pretty clear. Francis’ point is not, if Jesus is truly Lord, then how shall we live? I believe, rather, that the Pope was speaking about (and from) religious experience. Really to know and to love Jesus (the grace of fully recognizing Jesus as Lord) is going to pull the disciple, automatically, into the orbit of the poor. Why? Because that’s where Jesus himself was.

Focusing so sharply on the importance of experience—our experience of the poor and how that affects our experience of Jesus; and, conversely, our experience of Jesus and how that draws us towards the poor—also enables us to understand why Francis insists so much upon discernment. Discernment is all about experience. To use classical language, it is about good spirits and bad spirits, the lights and shadows of our lives; it is about the parsing of desires; discernment is about learning the way of the Spirit. When God starts to feel absent, distant, or abstract, one question we could ask ourselves is, “Where are the poor in my life?” That might not be the only question, but it is a good place to start. And if we should find ourselves physically unable to interact with the poor, there is still the inner place of prayer and imagination, provided we stay in touch with what is happening in the world around us. The Pope carried the mud from the slums on his shoes. At some point in our lives, we will be left carrying that world in our hearts.

The poverty of “Our Common Home”

Evangelical living is dangerous to a culture that is blindly capitalist. In a consumer-oriented society, we tend to think

we are most free when we have the capacity to buy and consume whatever we wish. In such a culture, human beings are valued to the extent that they can advance the market economy. Yet while human beings can be manipulated and formed by such a culture, God cannot be controlled; those who allow God to center their lives threaten and subvert the capitalist ethos. To opt for and embrace life according to the Gospel—the choice to live simply and avoid the pressure to consume more than we need: this makes a person counter-cultural. Along this line, paragraphs 50 to 60 of *The Joy of the Gospel* are well worth re-reading.

Yet not only is Scripture the story of a people in relation to their God; it is also a story of the land. Mentions of and allusions to the land in the Bible—the seas, mountains, deserts, rocks, fields, rivers, streams, hills and valleys—are too numerous to mention. The land is the ever-present but seldom noticed figure that bookends the Bible, from “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1) to “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev 21:1). Perhaps we don’t notice this silent figure because we tend to look at the world so anthropocentrically, which is a point Francis makes quite forcefully in *Laudato Si’*. In Scripture, the human being also lives in relation to the land, that is, to the natural world. Given the environmental crisis, even the earth should be considered a victim of exploitation. “Our common home” has become one of the poor. Recall the opening words of the encyclical:

“This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she ‘groans in travail’ (Rom 8:22).”

And so the option for the poor also becomes an option for the earth. Just as the option for the poor requires a radical change of mind and heart, so now it must be enlarged to include an “ecological conversion”—that is, a conversion “whereby the effects of [our] encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in [our] relationship with the world around [us].”

Ecological spirituality ought to come easily to disciples of Jesus. Our lives, after all, are already oriented in the right direction. Francis writes later in *Laudato Si’*: “Disinterested concern for others, and the rejection of every form of self-centeredness and self-absorption, are essential if we truly wish to care for our brothers and sisters and for the natural environment... If we can overcome individualism, we will truly be able to develop a different lifestyle and bring about significant change in society.” The Pope is speaking again of *despojamiento*—the letting go which lies at the heart of evangelical poverty, the humility that enables us to get beyond both individualism and our chronic anthropocentric twists.

Becoming poor, schooled in mercy

In the Second Week of the Spiritual Exercises (a “week” devoted to meditations on the Incarnation and the public life of Jesus), St. Ignatius draws attention to a special grace, which he calls the third degree of humility. This is not a prayer for the faint-hearted: “I desire and I choose poverty with Christ poor rather than riches, public humiliation with Christ rather than honors ...” The major place where the grace of “being poor with Christ poor” appears in Pope Francis’ teaching and example might well be mercy. He has used the word “mercy” countless times, both before and after the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy in 2016. Mercy lies at the heart of ministry; it animates preaching and sacramental practice; mercy defines the Christian experience of God, perhaps even more crisply than love. Those who have not yet experienced divine mercy are probably incapable of showing mercy towards others. Perhaps they even grow weary of Francis’ insistence upon its cen-

trality in Christian faith and pastoral practice. It’s a bit ironic that so much of the discontent with *Amoris Laetitia* (“The Joy of Love”) had to do with a footnote in chapter 8 (“Accompanying, Discerning and Integrating Weakness”). The footnote—number 351—is about mercy!

So, what is the connection between poverty and mercy?

Francis’ episcopal motto is “*misericordia atque eligendo*” and it has to do with the call of Matthew—a miserable tax-collector, pitiful yet at the same time chosen. Matthew’s poverty, however, was not about money (that may have come later, once he started following Jesus). Matthew’s poverty was about his emptiness, his failure, and his desperation. The healing of his emptiness and all that went along with it: for Matthew, that was mercy. The human being who is truly poor is the one who is empty of self and at the same time, paradoxically, really free. The gospel text puts it succinctly: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mk 8:34). And then Paul’s words: “but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant” (Phil 2:7). The one who shows mercy has nothing to lose because everything has already been given in the grace of letting go. Poverty, humility and mercy are thus threaded together.

Who, then, teaches us about mercy? Ultimately, it is the Lord, of course. But through whose face and whose voice? Through whose hands and lifestories do those lessons come? Mercy is what we learn by living close to weakness: to our own and to that of our sisters and brothers. Mercy is the charism of a self-emptied heart. We learn it from the poor, and from the one who became poor for our sake. ■

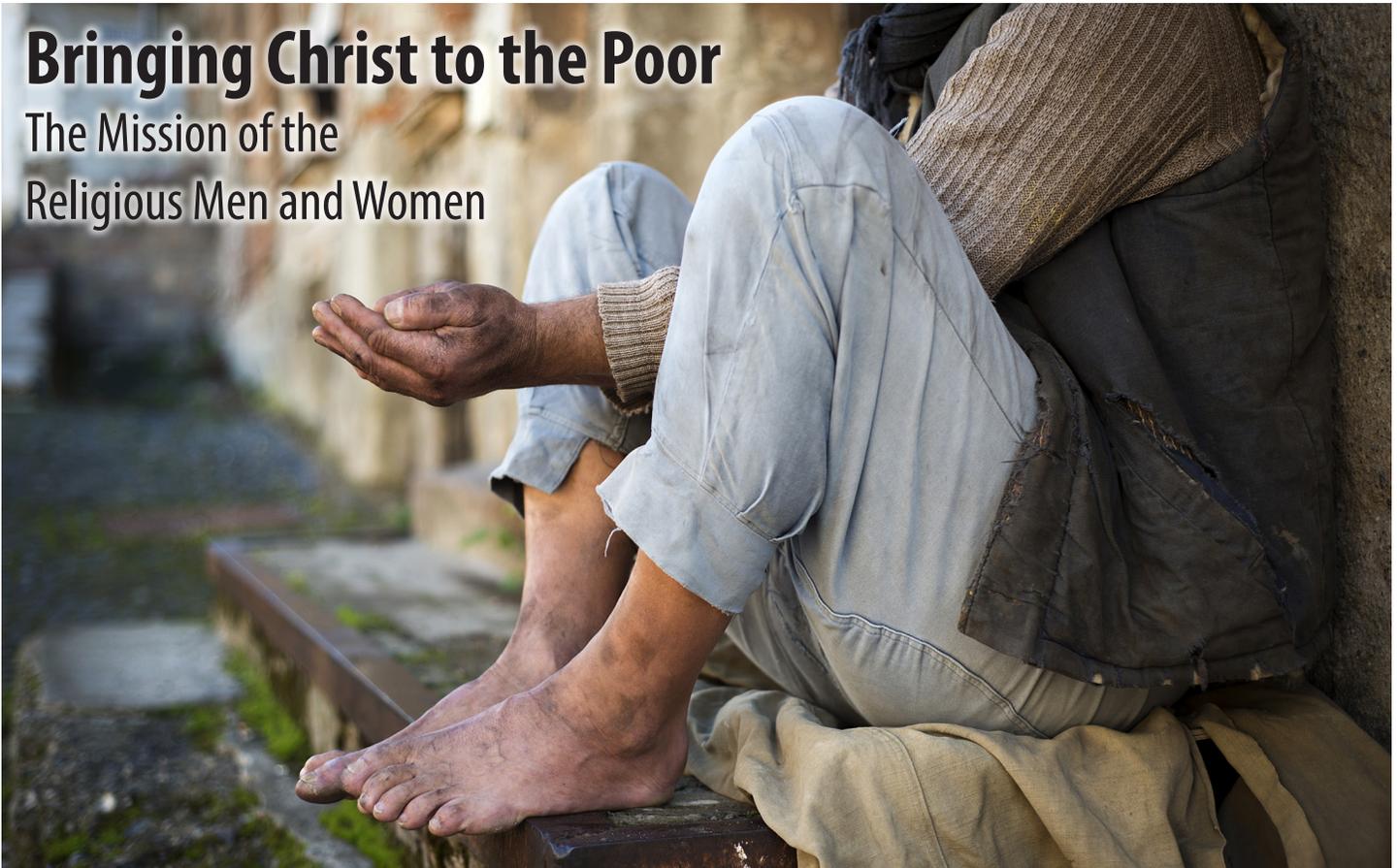


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Bringing Christ to the Poor

The Mission of the Religious Men and Women



By Sr. MELISSA MOXLEY, MS

In Phil. 2:6-8, we read: “Who though He was in the form of God, Jesus did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather He emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness and found human in appearance, He humbled Himself becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.”

We hear in this scripture passage the great humility of God. The God of the whole universe became poor for our sake to save us from sin out of love. How awe inspiring it is to think that God loves us so much that He has no limits to His love for us. Now that we have entered this Holy Season of Christmas, we can meditate on the poverty of Christ who became man as a little baby, was born in a manger, and surrounded by animals. All throughout His life, Jesus understood what it meant to be poor. He lived it to the fullest in spirit and fact. In Jesus’ ministry He had

nowhere to lay His head. But it didn’t end there, He suffered a cruel death and was crucified for our sake and today He humbles Himself by coming to us at every Mass in the Eucharist. We hear Jesus’ words in the Gospels telling us of His love for the poor and for sinners. We see by His many miracles how He reached out to the sick, (physical and spiritual), to the rejected, the outcast, the abandoned, the poor and how He healed them. This was His mission from the Father, that He brings us all to His heart. He desires this relationship with each person.

Following Jesus’ Example

As religious sisters, we have received this call from Jesus to imitate His way of life through our vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience. He is calling us to love as He loves and that is concretely expressed in the way we love others especially the poor. In loving the poor we are not only taking care of their physical needs but we are taking time to share with them the love of Christ by showing them their dig-

nity. We are showing them that we notice them, and that they are somebody, and they should not be ignored. Religious Sisters love the poor in a variety of ways; through the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. This involves, first of all prayer, praying for the poor and with them. Other works of mercy include, caring for the sick, the dying, the elderly, and children. It involves educating the youth and teaching them the love of God; loving the outcast, the abandoned, abused, and the unwanted.

I experienced this poverty in others when I had the opportunity to serve at a soup kitchen. The food lines were filled with people of all ages. My Sisters and I decided to bring holy cards of the image of Divine Mercy to hand out. The cards caused them to light up with gratitude and joy. Many had a look of disbelief that they could have a picture of Jesus all to themselves, some even asked for two! It affirmed that only our Lord can truly satisfy their hunger for love; we are only instruments.

Not Mere Social Works

Many religious orders work with the poor on the streets, for example, Mother Teresa's Sisters, The Missionaries of Charity. They serve the poorest of the poor in the slums all over the world and other religious orders do the same as well as have soup kitchens and shelters for the homeless. But we hear from Mother Teresa about the poverty of heart in the Western World, she says, "The spiritual poverty of the Western World is much greater than the physical poverty of our people. You in the West have millions of people who suffer such terrible loneliness and emptiness. They feel unloved and unwanted. These people are not hungry in the physical sense, but they are in another way. They know they need something more than money, yet they don't know what it is. What they are missing really is a living relationship with God." As religious sisters, our call is not to be mere social workers but to spread the love of Christ to those whom we serve. We pray they encounter Jesus in us as we encounter Jesus in them.

As Marian Sisters of the Diocese of Lincoln one of our many apostolates is running a home for women fleeing domestic abuse and pressures of abortion. It is called St. Gianna's Women's homes. It's a safe place where women and children can come and know that they will be loved and helped. We have a Chapel inside the home where the woman can come spend time with Jesus. It is a life changing experience for the families that come here and for us.

The Holy Spirit has raised up many types of religious orders with a flowering of charisms to serve the many needs of the poor today in the world. We want to be a light in the darkness as Jesus has called us to be. May Jesus be praised in all our apostolic efforts to bring Christ's love to the poor. ■



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Something Challenging, Freeing and Beautiful

A Parish Reaches Out to the Poor



Photo by Fr. Joseph Csetti

By Fr. JOSEPH I. CSETTI

“For I was hungry and you gave me food.”
Matthew 25:35

St. Therese North in Kansas City is a large, suburban parish, with a number of upscale subdivisions in a prosperous county. Despite the prosperity, it is no golden ghetto. Housing options are available for every income level. The same county has many people who live with economic hardship and others who live in poverty. The parish hosts a large and active St. Vincent de Paul Society, which to use the words of Pope Francis, serves those who are on the peripheries.

The parish St. Vincent de Paul Society dates back to 1961. Staffed totally by volunteers who number around 100, the vast majority of these are retired. The food pantry is open three hours a day, five days a week and once a month in the evening. Approximately 300 clients/families are served each month. Nearly all are not parishioners.

Seeking always to empower rather than enable, all clients are interviewed before receiving groceries and records are kept of all those who are helped. Much of the food in the pantry comes from a local community food network called Harvesters. Through Harvesters, the pantry receives food at the low rate of 16 cents a pound. Twice a month, the Harvesters delivery means a busy morning of unloading by parish volunteers.

Respect and Dignity

In addition to the financial support, some parishioners will make the rounds at area grocery stores and other businesses to collect what is left of that day's food so it may be shared with others the following day. At times, some of our parish youth also volunteer to help out at the pantry. Children from the parish school collect food for the pantry and at Christmas, children from our Early Education Center come to sing carols to our clients.

Beyond groceries and toiletries, our St. Vincent de Paul Society also provides rent and utility assistance. Again, seeking to offer a hand up rather than a handout, a home visit is made by two members before assistance is offered. For clients who have additional needs, we are able to provide resources of other community services.

“I was hungry and you gave me food”

Each year in the fall our St. Vincent de Paul Society makes an appeal to the parish. One year, a young boy in fifth grade heard the appeal and decided to give the thirty dollars, he had been saving for a video game. The generosity of that young man moved my heart.

In addition to food and financial assistance, our St. Vincent de Paul members seek to give something else to all our clients: respect and dignity. Some people who come are at the end of their rope,

others fall into the category of, I never thought this would happen to me. Regardless of their circumstances, our goal is to build up and to serve Christ in the less fortunate. One of our clients shared the following:

My daughter and I and my nearly born granddaughter, almost became homeless all because I could not work anymore. Throughout the years I have had to swallow my pride which was a very, very difficult thing for me and start reaching out for assistance, whether it was the pantry helping me with groceries or with the utility assistance program. So it's been a really rough ride over the last six and half years.

With the help of St. Therese [Parish], I actually feel that I am cared for and people actually care and sympathize with everything I have been going through and they step and they help in whatever way they possibly can. I've never had that feeling before. I never felt that feeling before.

Everything comes around. So you get the blessing of other people helping you out and it makes you want to give back even more. I'm glad I can pass that spirit on.

Each November as the liturgical year ends, we celebrate the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe and every third year on this celebration, we hear from Matthew 25. That gospel reminds us that Jesus is a different type of king with a different type of kingdom. This is a king who will sit upon his glorious throne but at the present time this king goes about in disguise among his people. Jesus travels among us in the hungry, the thirsty, in the stranger, in the naked, the ill and imprisoned, in those who are in need and that include the unborn.

The Second Vatican Council said, In the voices of the poor Christ himself can be heard, crying out for charity from his followers. When Christ cries out, what do we do? Our response is important and as Jesus reminds us, it has eternal consequences.

Seeing Christ in our neighbor, particularly in our neighbor who is in need, is challenging but it is also freeing and beautiful. It is challenging, because it does not allow us to keep God cooped up in a church and because it makes demands of us—for us to give of ourselves to others. It is freeing, because this caring about others, ultimately this loving our neighbor, leads us out of the prison of our own ego and is life giving. And it is beautiful, because it can lead us to realize how close Jesus is to us and how we can see, serve and touch him today. Jesus can be as close as the person next to you. It is also beautiful because at the end of a day, we can look back and see how we may have served the Christ in others.

I was hungry and you gave me food. These words of Jesus, and those that immediately follow it, should ring in the heart of every Christian. This is not simply a matter of doing a good turn or of being nice, but rather of fulfilling a mandate of the Gospel and it is a place of encounter with Jesus. Sometimes Jesus reveals himself in what St. Teresa of Calcutta described as, the distressing disguise of the poor. The scripture scholar, Father John Meier has noted that,

It is not as if he [Jesus] considers these works “as though” they were done to him; in virtue of his mysterious presence in all who suffer, they were done to him.

Being Helped and Feeding Others

In the Eucharist we see Jesus under the form of bread and wine. The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that the Eucharist commits us to the poor (#1397). In the early Church, St. John Chrysostom observed that the same Jesus who said this is my body and this is my blood, is the same Jesus who said, I was hungry and you gave food.

It is an architectural coincidence but above our parish food pantry is our Eucharistic Adoration chapel. This coincidence reveals an important truth: the Christian life involves both prayer and work; contemplation and action. It in-

volves both being fed and feeding others.

The Second Vatican Council also spoke of the Eucharist as, the source and summit of the Christian life. Everything we do as Catholic Christians is both to flow from the Eucharist and lead to the Eucharist. Because we are fed at the Eucharist, we seek to feed others. And we feed others physically in hopes that one day they may be nourished spiritually at the Eucharist.

As a pastor, it makes me feel good to know that while some parishioners are spending time before the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, others are spending time with the Lord in the person of the poor. Not surprisingly, some of our St. Vincent de Paul volunteers are some the people who participate in Eucharistic Adoration.

With lives of intentional faith, may we respond to his call that is challenging, freeing and beautiful. May we have eyes to see, ears to hear, hearts to love and arms to serve Christ in others, especially those in need, to Jesus on the peripheries. ■



REV. JOSEPH I. CISETTI

Is a priest of the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph where he worked in the Vocation Office for many years. Presently, he is pastor of St. Therese North in Kansas City, Missouri.

Prayer is the Powerhouse Essential for Vocations

A Conversation with Most Rev. Richard E. Pates, Bishop of Des Moines, Iowa

By PAMELA SELBERT

Since 2008 Richard E. Pates has served as Bishop for the Diocese of Des Moines, appointed to the post by Pope Benedict XVI on April 10th that year, and installed as the diocese's ninth bishop on May 29th. Previously auxiliary bishop for the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, Bishop Pates is the third consecutive Twin Cities auxiliary bishop to receive the appointment.

Born in St. Paul, Minnesota, Bishop Pates attended Nazareth Hall Seminary in St. Paul, and in 1965 graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Philosophy and Latin from St. Paul Seminary in St. Paul. He attended graduate school in Rome, at Pontifical North American College and holds a License in Sacred Theology from Pontifical Gregorian University. Bishop Pates was ordained a priest by Bishop Francis Reh on December 12, 1968 at St. Peter's Basilica, Rome.

Over the nearly forty years prior to his current appointment, Bishop Pates held an impressive number of pastoral and administrative roles: Associate pastor for the Church of the Blessed Sacrament, St. Paul; Vocation director for the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis; Secretary to the Apostolic Delegation (Vatican representation in the United States) in Washington, DC; chaplain to Pope John Paul II; and Rector of St. John Vianney Seminary in St. Paul, among others.

Bishop Pates has served on several committees of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, including Education, Evangelization and International Justice and Peace, and is on a number of boards, among them the National Catholic Life Conference; Board of Regents, Conception Seminary, Conception, MO; and Bread for the World. Since shortly after his installation as Bishop of Des Moines, he has written a monthly column for



The Catholic Mirror, and hosted a weekly radio program, "In the Heartland with Bishop Pates."

He recently discussed several vocations-related questions:

Are you seeing increased interest in vocations to the priesthood or religious orders in your diocese?

The Diocese of Des Moines is very blessed to see an increase in vocations.

Seven years ago we counted seven seminarians and last fall some twenty-one seminarians began formation. Most encouraging is that to a man they are quality individuals.

Do you think that last year's Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy is at least in part the reason?

All the initiatives of recent popes have been impactful in the rise of vocations. This holds true for the Extraordinary Ju-

bible of Mercy inspired by Pope Francis. Young people have tuned into the message of the present Holy Father and are especially taken by its authenticity amplified by his lifestyle.

Is it mostly young people who are considering a vocation? Or are older people also answering the call (in your diocese)?

The Diocese of Des Moines has been blessed with a cross section age-wise of seminary applicants. At the same time, our experience is trending toward a younger candidate somewhere between the ages of 18 and 30.

What do you do to encourage a person's interest in pursuing a religious vocation?

To begin, we urge widespread prayer for vocations across the diocese. The diocese also strives to develop a culture of vocations whereby one senses a vocation as being broadly accepted and well received in the community. We also have programs such as Andrew Dinners, discernment retreats and visits to nearby seminaries. It might be described as a comprehensive approach. Personally, I speak of and encourage vocations at every appropriate opportunity I have. If one confides in me of a possible vocation, I strongly urge that it be pursued through resources available in the diocese, in particular, the vocation director.

How do pastors and youth ministers help a person discern God's call?

Pastors, associate pastors and youth ministers initially point out personal qualities of the individual that give evidence of a possible vocation. If there is positive interest, it leads to further discussion and spiritual direction. Eventually, it comes to the attention of the diocesan vocation director, who along with others becomes a companion in the discernment process.

How does your Office of Vocations work? What sort of spiritual direction do you offer?

The Office of Vocations conducts a program that helps support a diocesan-wide "culture of vocations" through prayer and calling attention to vocations. There are also programs as described above -- Andrew Dinners, etc. The most important role of the Vocation Director is to identify candidates and accompany them in discernment. In addition, a number of our priests have been trained in spiritual direction and are available for candidates.

Is there prayer for vocations throughout the parishes?

Prayer is the power house essential for vocations. We employ a diocesan prayer for vocations, inclusion in the prayer of the faithful and pray at every other opportunity we have.

What is the role of parents and other family members in helping a young person discern God's call?

The role of parents, grandparents, even siblings is most helpful in helping a young person discerning a vocation. Most say that whatever makes my child happy enjoys my full support. Unfortunately, in a few instances parents, mothers surprisingly, have put up serious blockades for their sons in responding to a vocation. The son becomes very conflicted. So far, the mother wins out because the son does not want to fracture the parental relationship.

Should they -- family members -- actively encourage pursuing a vocation?

If a child genuinely exhibits a call to a religious vocation and seems to have the right aptitude, by all means family members should encourage further discernment of the vocation. I urge them not to frustrate God's plans. On the other hand, when I was a seminary rector, if a mother exercised undue influence and in reality had the vocation, I would suggest to her son to leave and ask the mother to take his place.

How can a person be certain they've been called?

It is my belief that a person cannot be absolutely certain of a vocation. If one has a healthy sense of a possible vocation, he should definitely give the seminary a try. Because of the human and spiritual growth opportunities it will always be beneficial. Once in the seminary, the discernment process will eventually lead to the right decision.

How is Pope Francis' leadership affecting interest in vocations?

Pope Francis is a charismatic individual who obviously has a close personal relationship with Jesus, which has enabled him to become a fully committed disciple. He is authentic. He is loving. The scriptures have become interchangeable with him as a person. He is very attractive to people who want to make a difference and for the right reasons.

How do you in your diocese create an inclusive vocation culture?

The message we convey is that in the providence of God, each person is being called to undertake a specific way of life in service to His Kingdom to experience fulfillment and inner peace. The vocation might be as a married person, a single individual, a consecrated religious, a deacon or a priest. We emphasize being in touch with God's call and responding accordingly. If one does, it leads to contentment. ■



PAMELA SELBERT

Is a freelance writer who lives just outside St. Louis. Over the past 30 years, Pamela has had nearly three thousand articles published in more than 75 newspapers and magazines.

Trends of Catholics and Vocations in the World

An Overview from 2015-2017



The pattern described is in many respects known: through the process of secularization, the number of the faithful is decreasing in countries of ancient Catholic tradition, but the decline is currently minimal due to the presence of a faithful elderly population benefitting from an increased life expectancy. On the other hand, the number of Catholics in developing countries is on the rise, especially in Africa. In 2015, however, trends from recent years begin to invert, and the number of priests in the world began to decrease.

The data from the 2015 Statistic Yearly Report attests the presence of 1,285 million baptized Catholics, representing 17.7% of the total global population and an increase of 1% relative to 2014, when there were 1,272 million Catholics.

The largest increase is recorded in Af-

rica at 19.4% relative to 2014 levels. On the other hand, growth in Europe has stalled: in 2015 the number of Catholics amounted to almost 286 million, representing a mere 800,000 more Catholics relative to 2010 and 1.3 million less than in 2014. “According to our analyses, this stagnation is to be attributed to the established demographic situation in Europe, whose population is growing slowly and is expected to decline sharply in the coming years.”

On the American and Asian continents, the results are mixed. The growth of Catholics in these regions is, respectively, 6.7% and 9.1%, but, according to the Statistic Yearly Report, “everything aligns with the demographic development of these two continents.” Regarding Oceania, there are stationary patterns in growth. Africa is increasingly preparing to become a global central location for Catholics. On the Af-

rican continent, the baptized faithful as percentage of those throughout the world increased from 15.5% to 17.3%. This trend opposes that occurring in Europe, where the percentage of baptized Catholics from the global population fell from 23.8% in 2010 to 22.2% in 2015. America remains the continent where there is almost 49% of the world’s baptized Catholics. In Asia, the percentage of the global Catholic population was 11% in 2015. In Oceania, the presence of Catholics is stable, although it is with a consistency and stagnation that does not reach above 0.8% of the global Catholic population.

Surprisingly, the country possessing the most amounts of Catholics is a non-African country. In fact, Brazil holds the record of having the most faithful: 162.2 million, representing 26.4% of all Catholics on the American continent. The following countries have the next highest

amount of Catholics in the world: Mexico (110.9 million), the Philippines (83.6 million), USA (72.3 million), Italy (58 million), France (48.3 million), Colombia (45.3 million), Spain (43.3 million), The Democratic Republic of Congo (43.2 million), and Argentina (40.8 million).

There is also an unexpected average decline in priests. The vocational crisis in western countries is by now significant enough to nullify the progress made in developing countries. In 2015, the clergy numbered 466,215: 5,304 bishops, 415,656 priests, and 45,255 permanent deacons. 2015 was the first year in which the increasing trend from the period of 2000-2014 was broken. The decrease between 2014 and 2015 was of 136 priests, a trend resulting mainly from reductions in Europe (-2,502), given that the remaining continents possessed positive variations from one year to the next: +1,133 for Africa, +47 for America, +1,104 for Asia and +82 for Oceania.

While Africa and Asia show a sustained dynamic (respectively, of +17.4% and of

+13.3%), and America remains almost stationary at +0.35%, Europe and Oceania register in the same period variation rates decidedly negative and equal, respectively, to -5.8% and -2.0%. It should be noted that the most significant reduction concerns religious orders, while the number of new diocesan priests is fairly consistent. The decline in number of priests is accompanied by the emptying of seminars. In 2015, the major seminarians amounted to 116,843, compared to the 116,939 in 2014, the 118,251 of 2013, the 120,051 in 2012, the 120,616 in 2011, and the 118,990 in 2010. There are more seminarians only in Africa, where they have seen an increase of 7.7%. The following data emerge from other continents: -8.1% in America and -9.7% in Europe. In 2015, European seminarians numbered 18,579, more only than those of Oceania (1,004). Asia is in first place with 34,741, followed by America with 33,512 and Africa with 29,007.

Europe, America, and Oceania registered a sharp decline also of those in consecrated life, not priests, a category that

had a slight increase in Asia and Africa. In general, there were 54,665 in 2010, a number that became 54,229 in 2015. The number of religious also declined. At a global level, they went from 721,935 in 2010 to 670,320 in 2015, a relative decrease of 7.1%. In this category, Africa is also an exception, where the religious were 66,375 in 2010 and 71,567 in 2015. There was also a light increase in Southeast Asia, while decreasing elsewhere. In Europe, they decreased 13.4% from 2010 to 2015, with an average yearly decrease of 2.7%.

On the other hand, the amount of permanent deacons increased 14.4%: in 2015 there were 45,255 compared to the 39,564 in 2014. ■

Source: 2017 Pontifical Yearly Report and 2015 Annuarium Statisticum Ecclesiae

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Vocations and Prayer magazine's fundamental mission is to spread the primacy of prayer in fostering a culture of vocations. A quarterly publication on vocations ministry, for priests, religious men and women catechists, different groups of ecclesial movements, faithful, and young people, *Vocations and Prayer* offers points of reflections and practical suggestions for vocation animation, prayer for vocations, and help in the vocational discernment process.

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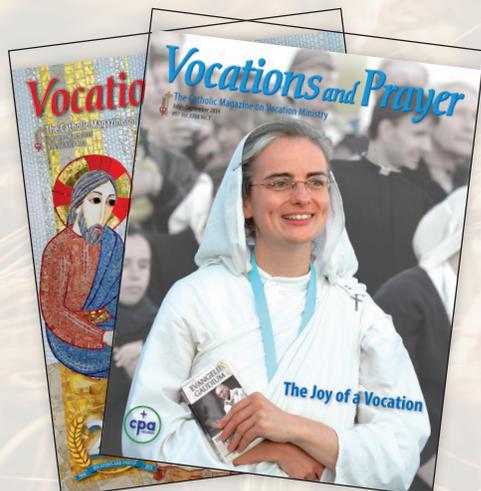
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Listening to God's Call

1. INTRODUCTION

Brothers and sisters, in his message for the 55th World Day of Prayer for Vocations, Pope Francis tells us that because God comes silently and discreetly, without imposing on our freedom, it can happen that his voice is drowned out by the many worries and concerns that fill our minds and hearts.

We need, then, to learn how to listen carefully to his word and the story of his life, but also to be attentive to the details of our own daily lives, in order to learn how to view things with the eyes of faith, and to keep ourselves open to the surprises of the Spirit.

We pray during this eucharistic adoration for the grace to listen attentively to the Spirit speaking in the depths of our soul and to respond with generosity and full trust in God's loving plan for our lives.

2. EXPOSITION

*O salutaris Hostia quae caeli pandis ostium
bella premunt hostilia da robur fer auxilium.
Uni Trinoque Domino sit sempiterna gloria
qui vitam sine termino nobis donet in patria. Amen.*

3. ADORATION

V. O sacrament most holy, O sacrament divine,

R. All praise and all thanksgiving be every moment thine.

O Jesus, Lord of the harvest, we believe you are here.

We adore you and love you with our whole heart and soul because you are most worthy of all our love.

R. We adore you and we love you, Lord Jesus.

We desire to love you as the blessed do in heaven. Flood our souls with your spirit and life. Penetrate and possess our whole being utterly, so that our lives may only be a radiance of yours.

R. We adore you and we love you, Lord Jesus.

Shine through us, and be so in us, so that every soul we come in contact with may feel your presence in our soul. Let them look up and see no longer us, but only you, Lord Jesus!

R. We adore you and we love you, Lord Jesus.

4. SONG

Christ be beside me (James Quinn), or another hymn may be sung.

5. SCRIPTURE READING

1 Samuel 3:3-10	The call of Samuel
1 Samuel 16:1-13	Samuel anoints David
Matthew 17:1-8	The transfiguration of Jesus
Luke 2:15-20	Mary pondered in her heart
John 1:43-51	Jesus calls Philip and Nathanael
John 10:22-30	My sheep listen to my voice

6. HOMILY/BRIEF EXHORTATION

7. SACRED SILENCE/SONG

Open my Eyes (Jesse Manibusan & Patrick Loomis) or another song may be sung in response to the homily.

8. HOLY ROSARY

Rosary Mysteries with vocation intentions are found at the end of this section.

9. PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

Let us call upon Christ, the Good Shepherd who comes to the aid of his people, saying: *Lord, hear our prayer.*

- For Pope Francis and his efforts to call our youth to embrace their vocation in its fullness, we pray to the Lord.
- For the members of parish vocations committees: that they may see the fruit of their efforts in a rich harvest of vocations to the priesthood and religious life, we pray to the Lord.
- For all parents who by prayer and example nourish the call of God in each of their children, we pray to the Lord.
- For all permanent deacons and their families: that they may be blessed for their gift of generous service to the people of God, we pray to the Lord.
- For all the young people of our parish who are making life choices at this time: that their decisions may be inspired by the Holy Spirit, we pray to the Lord.

All: Good and gracious God, you have called us to life and gifted us in many ways. Through Baptism you have sent us to continue the mission of Jesus by sharing our love with others. Lead us to choose the way of life you have planned for us. Open our hearts to listen to your call. Fill us with your Holy Spirit that we may have listening hearts and the courage to respond to you. Enkindle in our hearts the desire to make the world a better place by serving as Lay Minister, Sister, Priest, Brother or Deacon.

Hear and answer our prayer through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

10. BENEDICTION

*Tantum ergo sacramentum veneremur cernui
Et antiquum documentum novo cedat ritui
Praestet fides supplementum sensuum defectui.
Genitori genitoque laus et jubilatio
Salus, honor, virtus quoque sit et benedictio
Procedenti ab utroque compar sit laudatio. Amen.*

V. You have given them bread from heaven,

R. Having all sweetness within it.

Let us pray.

Lord our God, in this great sacrament, we come into the presence of Jesus Christ, your Son, born of the Virgin Mary and crucified for our salvation. May we who declare our faith in this fountain of love and mercy drink from it the water of everlasting life. We ask this through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

11. REPOSITION

Blessed be God, Father and Creator.

Blessed be Jesus Christ, Son of God and our Brother.

Blessed be his Word that endures for ever.

Blessed be his Body delivered up for us.

Blessed be his Blood shed for the forgiveness of sins.

Blessed be the Holy Spirit, our Advocate and Comforter. Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

May the Heart of Jesus in the most blessed Sacrament be praised, adored and loved with grateful affection at every moment, in all the tabernacles of the world, even to the end of time. *Amen.*

Discerning God's Call

1. INTRODUCTION

From the message of the Holy Father for the 55th World Day of Prayer for Vocations:

When Jesus, in the synagogue of Nazareth, reads the passage of the prophet Isaiah, he discerns the content of the mission for which he was sent, and presents it to those who awaited the Messiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Lk 4:18-19). In the same way, each of us can discover his or her own vocation only through spiritual discernment. This is a process by which a person makes fundamental choices, in dialogue with the Lord and listening to the voice of the Spirit, starting with the choice of one's state in life.

Brothers and sisters, let us pray during this holy hour for the grace to grow in the ability to "read within" our lives, and to understand where and to what the Lord is calling us in order to carry on his mission.

2. EXPOSITION (*O salutaris Hostia*)

O saving Victim, open wide the gate of heaven to us below.

Our foes press on from every side; your aid supply, your strength bestow. To your great name be endless praise, immortal Godhead, One in Three; O grant us endless length of days in our true native land to be. Amen.

3. ADORATION

V. O sacrament most holy, O sacrament divine,

R. **All praise and all thanksgiving be every moment thine.**

We adore you, O Jesus, God of Love, truly present in the Most Holy Sacrament.

R. **"We adore you, Lord Jesus Christ."**

We adore you who has come to your own but were not received by them. We adore you, whom the majority of mankind rejected and despised. R.

We adore you, O infinite goodness, who has wrought so many miracles to reveal your love to us.

We adore you, with all the angels and saints, and with those chosen souls that are now already the blessed of your Father and are all aglow with burning love for you. R.

We adore you with all your friends, O Jesus! With them we prostrate ourselves at the foot of the altar, to offer you our most profound homage, to receive your divine inspiration, and to implore your grace. R.

4. SONG *An adoration song may be sung.***5. SCRIPTURE READING**

Choose one of the readings from daily Mass or from the following list:

Sirach 15:14-20	Loyalty is doing the will of God
Matthew 16:13-23	Peter's confession about Jesus
Acts 6:1-6	The selection of the first deacons
Romans 8:14-17	Led by the Spirit
1 John 4:1-3	Test the spirits

6. HOMILY/BRIEF EXHORTATION**7. SACRED SILENCE/SONG****8. HOLY ROSARY**

Rosary Mysteries with vocation intentions are found at the end of this section.

9. PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

Let us pray to God who cares for all, and with earnest humility say: *Lord, in you we place our trust.*

- For a deeper faith, hope and love among all Christians
- For all Catholic families to esteem the grace of each child's vocation.
- For an increase in our dedication to keep the command of the Lord of the Harvest to pray for vocations.
- For all those who experience opposition in the discernment of their vocations.
- For a deeper sense of gratitude for the profoundly beautiful mystery celebrated at every Mass.
- *Other intentions may be added.*

All: Creator God, life is your gift to us. Through Baptism, you invite us to share the gift of our lives in service to others.

Give us the courage and generosity to respond to your love, to your call. We pray especially for priests, brothers, sisters and all those who endeavor to serve you in witnessing to the Gospel. Keep them close to you. Open the minds and hearts of many other men and women that they may accept your challenge to build the Kingdom. Through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

10. BENEDICTION (*Tantum ergo*)

Down in adoration falling, this great Sacrament we hail. Over ancient forms of worship newer rites of grace prevail. Faith will tell us Christ is present when our human senses fail. To the everlasting Father and the Son who made us free, And the Spirit, God proceeding from them each eternally, Be salvation, honor, blessing, might and endless majesty. Amen.

V. You have given them bread from heaven,

R. **Having all sweetness within it.**

Let us pray. Lord our God, may we always give due honor to the sacramental presence of the Lamb who was slain for us. May our faith be rewarded by the vision of his glory, who lives and reigns for ever and ever. *Amen.*

11. REPOSITION

Blessed be God. Blessed be his Holy Name. Blessed be Jesus Christ, true God and true Man. Blessed be the Name of Jesus.

Blessed be his most Sacred Heart. Blessed be his most Precious Blood. Blessed be Jesus in the most Holy Sacrament of the Altar. Blessed be the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete. Blessed be the great Mother of God, Mary most holy. Blessed be her holy and Immaculate Conception. Blessed be her glorious Assumption.

Blessed be the name of Mary, virgin and mother.

Blessed be St. Joseph, her most chaste spouse.

Blessed be God in his Angels and in his Saints.

May the Heart of Jesus in the most blessed Sacrament be praised, adored and loved with grateful affection at every moment, in all the tabernacles of the world, even to the end of time. *Amen.*

Living God's Call

1. INTRODUCTION

From the Message of the Holy Father for the 55th World Day of Prayer for Vocations:

The fullness of time has come... Vocation is today!

The Christian mission is now! Each one of us is called – whether to the lay life in marriage, to the priestly life in the ordained ministry, or to a life of special consecration – in order to become a witness of the Lord, here and now. We should not wait to be perfect in order to respond with our generous “yes”, nor be fearful of our limitations and sins, but instead open our hearts to the voice of the Lord.

Brothers and sisters, let us pray during this holy hour for the grace of perseverance, that we may live faithfully the ideal of life totally consecrated to the Lord's service.

2. EXPOSITION (*Adoro te devote*)

God, with hidden majesty, lies in presence here,

I, with deep devotion, my true God revere:

Whom this outward shape and form secretly contains,

Christ in his divinity manhood still retains.

Blest reminder of the death suffered for mankind,

Sacrament of living bread, health to every mind,

Let my soul approach you, live within your grace,

Let me taste the perfect joys time shall not efface. Amen.

3. ADORATION

V. O sacrament most holy, O sacrament divine,

R. All praise and all thanksgiving be every moment thine.

Lord Jesus, each time we look at the sacred Host, sanctify our eyes, that they may close more and more to all that is merely earthly.

R. We adore you and we praise you, O Lord.

Lord Jesus, each time we look at the sacred Host, send a ray of divine light into our soul, that we may better know you and ourselves. **R.**

Lord Jesus, each time we look at the sacred Host, send a flame of divine love into our hearts to consume everything in it that is displeasing to you and to set it all on fire with your love. **R.**

Now and in eternity may our only desire be to contemplate the infinite beauty of your divine countenance which delights the angels. **R.**

4. SONG

You alone are Holy (The Maranatha Singers), or another adoration song may be chosen.

5. SCRIPTURE READING

Jeremiah 29:10-14

God's plans for our welfare

Matthew 28:16-20

The commissioning of the Disciples

Mark 10:17-27

Go and sell everything you own
and follow me

James 1:2-4

Steadfastness produces perseverance

James 2:14-26

Faith and works

Hebrews 12:1-13

Persevere in running the race

6. HOMILY/BRIEF EXHORTATION**7. SACRED SILENCE/SONG****8. HOLY ROSARY**

Rosary Mysteries with vocation intentions are found at the end of this section.

9. PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

Jesus said, “Whatever you ask the Father in my name will be granted.” Therefore, with confidence let us pray:

“Lord of the harvest, listen to our prayer.”

- That all those initiated by baptism as followers of Christ may discern and live out the vocation to which Christ is calling them, we pray to the Lord.
- That all Catholics will recognize that they are entrusted with the commission to pray for vocations and so beg the Holy Spirit to guide those who are discerning their vocation in Christ, we pray to the Lord.
- That in imitation of Christ who emptied Himself for our salvation, more men and women will share in His passion for souls through a vocation to the priesthood or consecrated life, we pray to the Lord.

All: Heavenly Father, we believe in your wisdom and love. We believe you created us for heaven, marked out for us the way to reach it, and await us there to give us the reward of the faithful servant. Give us light and show us this way. Grant us the strength to follow it generously. We beg this of you, through Jesus Christ, your Son, and through Mary, our Queen and Mother. At the moment of death, may we be able to say with St. Paul: “I have finished the course. I have fought the good fight. Now there is laid up for me the crown of the just.” Amen.

-Blessed James Alberione, S.S.P. (1884-1971)

10. BENEDICTION (*Tantum ergo*)

Come adore this wondrous presence, bow to Christ the source of grace.

Here is kept the ancient promise of God's earthly dwelling place.

Sight is blind before God's glory, faith alone may see His face.

Glory be to God the Father, praise to his coequal Son,

Adoration to the Spirit, bond of love, in Godhead one.

Blest be God by all creation joyously while ages run. Amen.

V. You have given them bread from heaven,

R. Having all sweetness within it.

Let us pray. Lord our God, may this sacrament of new life warm our hearts with your love and make us eager for the eternal joy of your kingdom. We ask this through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

11. REPOSITION

Blessed be God. Blessed be his holy name. Blessed Jesus Christ, true God and true Man. Blessed is the Name of Jesus. Blessed be his Heart filled with love. Blessed be Jesus, present in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Blessed be the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete. Blessed be the Mother of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary. Blessed be Saint Joseph, chaste and responsible spouse. Blessed be God in the glory of all his saints. May the Heart of Jesus in the most blessed Sacrament be praised, adored and loved with grateful affection at every moment, in all the tabernacles of the world, even to the end of time. *Amen.*

The Holy Rosary for Vocations

JOYFUL MYSTERIES

1. The Annunciation

God's call comes to us as a gentle invitation to know him better and to follow his will. Through Mary's intercession, may we learn to be open to God's call in our lives and, like Mary, respond to that call generously.

2. The Visitation

God's life stirs our hearts to love and service. Through Mary's intercession, may we seek ever more to serve the Lord in our brothers and sisters, and lead lives of faithful and humble service.

3. The Birth of the Lord

God's Son became flesh for the salvation of the world. Through Mary's intercession, may there be in the Church new servants of the Incarnate Word who will make Jesus present through the sacraments and through the witness of their lives.

4. The Presentation of the Lord

Jesus was presented in the temple in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord. Through Mary's intercession, may we offer our lives in response to God's call, and may those who are called to priesthood and consecrated life find the courage to be signs of contradiction in our world.

5. The Finding of Christ in the Temple

Jesus is found among the teachers in the temple. He returns home and is obedient to Mary and Joseph. Through Mary's intercession, may we always be found going about our heavenly Father's business and obedient to the teaching magisterium of the Church.

LUMINOUS MYSTERIES

1. The Baptism of the Lord

Let us pray that, through Mary's intercession, those who guide others to find their God-given vocation may be immersed in a life of prayer themselves, and be able to guide others to attentive spiritual listening, discerning, and responding.

2. The Wedding at Cana

Let us pray that, through Mary's intercession, all parents, as they strive to live out their own holy vocation to marriage, will lovingly and willingly give their parental blessing to a son's or daughter's expressed desire for a vocation in service to the Lord and say with Mary, "Do whatever He tells you."

3. The Preaching of the Kingdom

Let us pray that, through Mary's intercession, all who are being called to a life in service to the Church may grow deeper in their life of prayer and union with God, and may their acceptance and willingness to go forth, to answer this special call to discipleship, will be the fruit of their time in prayer – of hearing His voice and falling in love with the One who calls.

4. The Transfiguration of the Lord

Let us pray that, through Mary's intercession, all seminaries, convents, and houses of formation, faithfully living the life envisioned by their holy founders and the teachings of the Church, may be the right place to live one's call to serve the Lord, so that one may truly and rightfully say with Peter, "Lord, it is good for us to be here."

5. The Institution of the Eucharist

Through Mary's intercession, let us pray that, through frequent reception of the Eucharist and time spent adoring the One who is Love, those who are being called will at last be able to surrender their lives entirely to the Lord, follow him, and say:

"My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready..."

SORROWFUL MYSTERIES

1. The Agony in the Garden

Jesus was in agony and, in his human nature, struggled over what lay ahead. Through Mary's intercession, may those who are filled with doubt or struggling with their vocation remain faithful to prayer and be enlightened so that they may know the Father's will and find peace in surrendering to it.

2. The Scouring at the Pillar

Jesus is cruelly scourged and beaten by the soldiers. Through Mary's intercession, may those who are persecuted and those who are imprisoned or prevented from serving the Lord receive the courage to endure hardships that their generous gift of self can bring upon them.

3. The Crowning with Thorns

Jesus is mocked as king and his precious head is cruelly pierced by thorns. Through Mary's intercession, may those who suffer for defending authentic Catholic doctrine resist temptations to compromise doctrine in the face of cultural and social pressures.

4. The Carrying of the Cross

Jesus, bruised, bleeding and exhausted, is forced to carry the cross up the hill of Calvary. Through Mary's intercession, may those with heavy crosses to bear, those who are weak, lonely or have fallen from God's grace in some way, know the presence of Christ who walks with them to help shoulder the burden.

5. The Crucifixion and Death of Jesus

Jesus sheds the last drops of his precious Blood to redeem us from sin and death. Through Mary's intercession, may those who enter willingly the life-long process of dying to self to live in surrender to God's will and in the service of others, joyfully dedicate each minute of their lives for the salvation of souls.

GLORIOUS MYSTERIES

1. The Resurrection of the Lord

Jesus rises from the dead and appears to the Apostles. Through Mary's intercession, may those who suffer from despair when they see so little fruit from their labors remember that the Crucifixion is followed by the Resurrection, and share the joy of the Risen Christ.

2. The Ascension of the Lord

Jesus instructs his Apostles and returns to his Father in heaven. Through Mary's intercession, may those who live lives of utter poverty and deprivation to bring the Gospel to all people continue to grow in their love for God and remain faithful to the Gospel.

3. The Descent of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit comes down upon the Apostles who are gathered with Mary. Through our blessed Mother's intercession, may we be open to the graces of the Holy Spirit that will strengthen us for the task of bringing souls to God.

4. The Assumption of Mary

Mary's role in salvation history did not end with her Assumption into Heaven. Through her intercession, may the newly ordained and professed grow in humility, remain faithful to their duties and, as they turn their face to this loving mother each day, find her present in their every need.

5. The Coronation of Mary, Queen of Heaven and Earth

Mary, the "handmaid of the Lord", is now exalted far above even the Angels. Through her intercession, may those who have been called to priesthood and consecrated life understand that to serve God is to reign with Him.

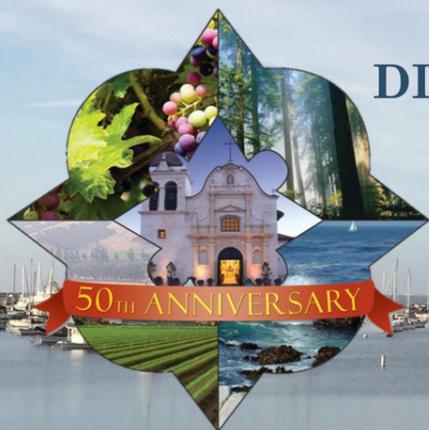
V. O Mary, mother of the Church,

R. Pray for us and obtain for us many and holy vocations.

By Fr. Peter Quinto, RCJ

Seminarians Promoting Vocations

Providing Meaningful Help in the Diocese of Monterey



DIOCESE OF MONTEREY
1967-2017



By Fr. KELLY M. VANDEHEY

With a history dating back to the mission era of the 1700's and the incredible missionary activity of Saint Junipero Serra, the Diocese of Monterey, composed of four counties on the Central Coast of California, has maintained its unique missionary spirit. Throughout the many transitions that eventually established the Diocese of Monterey 50 years ago, we have been dependent upon clerical and religious missionaries from various parts of the world. While this has begun to change and vocations are emerging from within the diocesan boundaries, there is a continued recognition of the need for missionaries, priests and religious; to serve the spiritual needs of the people of Monterey.

As many of our priests and religious have come from outside the diocese of Monterey, they hold a unique awareness of vocations and God calling us to service outside of our comfort zone. Seeking to respond to that calling continually in their own lives, they are very attentive to the potential calling of the Lord within the lives of those they serve. As a result, they become the best promoters of priestly and religious vocations in this diocese. Although not an official program of the

vocation office, the personal relationships that they form enable them to encourage vocations and eventually put them in contact with the vocation office.

The vocation office works closely with our seminarians to make sure they are exposed to the parishes of the diocese. Each student receives an assignment for Holy Week and the summer months where they are involved in the unique life of that particular parish and its people. This exposure also grants an opportunity for those who might be discerning a priestly or religious vocation to inquire and learn about church life and ministry from one who is currently in that discernment process. Our seminarians put a real face on vocations and help those who might be discerning to see just how human we all are, complete with imperfections and diverse personalities, opinions, and goals.

It is most important that our vocation office be attentive to inquirers and those expressing interest. A top priority for our vocation office is that we respond to each and every person who might be seeking information and guidance on their journey of discernment; this is to recognize the dignity of persons seeking to follow God's will in their lives. Part of our current response to those discern-

ing a priestly vocation is the formation of a monthly dinner gathering with local priests. Casual in nature, our hope is that dinner conversations can establish some good and healthy relationships with those in discernment. As a Eucharistic people, we are most comfortable with one another when we gather around food. Some of Jesus' greatest moments of teaching took place around a shared meal.

Saint Junipero Serra came to this western state of California as a missionary. He carried a message for which he offered so much of his life: the love of Jesus Christ. As he proclaimed that message he challenged the people to spiritual growth. Today the Diocese of Monterey stands upon a strong foundation of faith calling men and women to church ministry as priests, deacons, and religious. Saint Junipero, pray for us! ■



FR. KELLY M. VANDEHEY

Is the Associate Director of Vocations for the Diocese of Monterey, CA. He was ordained a priest in 1996. In 1999 he completed his Licentiate Degree in Canon Law.

Martha and Mary

To Serve or to Listen to the Lord?



By Fr. GIUSEPPE DE VIRGLIO, Ph.D.

Bethany, House of Friendship

Martha, Mary, and their brother Lazarus' home was in Bethany, a village that lay a few kilometers from Jerusalem next to the "Mountain of the Olive Trees." Above all, Bethany represented a resting point during holidays and periods of festivity, when it was almost impossible to find

lodging in Jerusalem due to the innumerable crowds gathered there. Jesus spent a lot of time as a guest with Lazarus' family. Lazarus, whose nickname was professed to be "friend of the Lord" (cf. Jn. 11.1s; 12.3), shared his home with Jesus, leading to a new name for his home as the "house of friendship." In our writing, we will concentrate on the identity and roles fulfilled by his two sisters: who are Martha and Mary? Evangelists report three scenes in which the two sisters find themselves with Jesus in Bethany: the

hospitality scene (Lk. 10.38-42); Lazarus' resurrection (Jn. 11.1-44), and the anointing scene in Bethany (Jn. 12.1-8). We will focus primarily on their personal traits and their theological message.

Martha served, Mary listened

The first story portrays Jesus walking along the road leading to Bethany, where he meets Martha and Mary (Lk 10.38-42). The two women greet Jesus with very generous gestures of hospitality. First,

Martha “welcomes” the Master, working to the point of leaving herself breathless from “lots of service” (v. 38). Mary reveals her silent attitude and nature in the act of listening. At the center of the scene is the figure of Christ, seated as a master while “proclaiming” the Word. Interestingly enough, we are not informed of the content of the Word; rather, the focus is on the diverse attitudes and actions of the two sisters. Martha was breathless and worried. Mary, on the other hand, was seated at Jesus’ feet and listened to his Word (v. 39). Two different attitudes in the face of Jesus: to serve and to listen, to carry out and to accommodate the Word, to put oneself on her feet for Jesus and to “lay herself at the feet” of the Lord. The Evangelist highlights the contrast between the two different ways of welcoming Jesus. On one hand, Martha demonstrates a certain preoccupation with things and activities. On the other hand, Mary acts in a way that enhances the presence of the “bridegroom” (cf. Lk. 5,34).

The only thing truly necessary

Martha’s reaction towards her younger sister is one of blame. Martha pretends to be helped by her sister, and she does so wanting to show Jesus their devotion to him in her way of thinking, in her way of existing, and in her rationale behind her actions. Martha’s attitude aligns with the traditional line of thinking at the time, while Jesus surmounts this mentality. The younger sister is the image of the disciple who opens herself to the listening and faith of Christ. Jesus’ tenderness in his response should be noted in calling by name “Martha, Martha,” showing that the model of Christian service does not oppose the act of listening, but rather is subordinate to it. Jesus shows in Mary’s attitude the “best part” of the Christian faith, and he calls Martha to choose the only thing that is truly necessary: To know how to serve without living in servitude; to know how to live and exist in one’s own place in life without being a slave there. The liberty of service is born from the liberty of hearing, and not vice-versa. Only those who know how to listen will be able to serve. Mary transforms the breathless hospitality of Martha into the

intimate reception of the Guest. Her heart becomes the true “house of reception.”

The master is here and he calls you

A second episode is portrayed in the resurrection of Lazarus (Jn. 11.1-44), a text with significant symbolic value. In the text, we identify four stages of the resurrection scenes: Lazarus’ illness, his death, Mary and Martha’s meeting with Jesus, and the resurrection itself. In the precious dialogue of the third stage, we are able to understand the traits of the two persons. Martha runs immediately to the Lord, while Mary remains inside consumed by her pain. The Evangelist describes the arrival of the Lord in Bethany and focuses on the revelation regarding the mystery of life and the resurrection, beginning with Martha and then with Mary. Martha is more enterprising and receptive to action, while Mary is shown to be more contemplative. The dialogue with Martha reveals the nature of faith: to believe means to accommodate the mystery of Christ the son of God who gives life. The vocational aspect of the story should be understood in the context of the appeal addressed to Mary: “The master is here and he calls you” (Jn. 11,28). It is only then that Mary arises and leaves her house to go meet Jesus and entrust him with her pain and hope. Mary’s gesture of affection and of humility in throwing herself at the feet of Christ confirms the women’s confidence in believing in the power of the resurrection. Jesus’ emotional response is the liberating gesture of the resurrection. Martha and Mary are witnesses of an unconditional, limitless love. The two live in the first person the dynamic of faith, knowing to search, wait, and hope. In this search and in this hope, they will see the miracle of their risen brother, a sign that will foreshadow the Easter of Christ.

The beautiful work

Martha and Mary return home in the context of dinner in Bethany with Jesus and his disciples six days before Easter (Jn. 12,1-8). While Martha serves, Mary completes an unusual gesture, greasing Jesus’ feet with abundant perfumed oil of true nard and drying them afterwards

with her hair. If in the passage from Luke, Mary “listens” to Jesus’ feet, in this scene from John, Mary performs an “enigmatic opera” by pouring the perfumed nard on Jesus’ feet. Jesus defends Mary’s actions, as the disciples criticized her, calling it the “beautiful work.” Following the teachings of the Beatitudes of the “beautiful work,” we focus on the fact of being poor and all of the implications that are mentioned in the Beatitudes. Mary’s gesture belongs to, therefore, not efficient works, but to beautiful ones that define a person, just as the Beatitudes are attitudes lived by the person. It is beautiful because it is unexpected. It arrives in the middle of the banquet, giving an incredible scent to the entire room, without anyone having asked for it. It is an expected gesture yet is because of an unexpected guest. It is beautiful because it is prophetic: Jesus will say that “in view of his sepulcher.”

In memory of Him

The memory of Mary’s gesture accompanies the announcement of the Gospel. While the balsamic scent is lost in the darkness of the house in Bethany, the disciples criticize the waste of the precious perfume. Mary is the true disciple, while the bad disciples are those who do not understand the beautiful nature of every gesture, which the Father in heaven sees, including those of men sensitive to the perfume’s scent and charm of the evangelical beatitudes. Jesus praises Mary, just as he had defended her from the accusations of Martha that she was wasting time listening to the Word and not serving him. In the prophetic act of little Mary is hidden the memory of the great Christian faith, which spreads throughout the world like the perfume of Christ, the crucified and risen Lord (cf. 2 Cor 2,16). ■

Translated from Italian by Stephan Llerena



FR. GIUSEPPE DE VIRGILIO, Ph.D.

Is a professor and doctor of New Testament exegesis and biblical theology. He is also a faculty member at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome.

“As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace.”

1 Peter 4:10



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Gal 2:10

“Be Mindful of the Poor”

A Call to go Beyond Myself

By Sr. Emily Beata Marsh, FSP

As a Daughter of St. Paul, I have a special place in my heart for the Letters of St. Paul. But for anyone in discernment, the Letters of St. Paul can be a great help because the words of St. Paul always lead us to dialogue and relationship with Jesus.

In the second chapter of his Letter to the Galatians, St. Paul is recalling his ministry and his interaction with the other apostles and the Church in the Jerusalem. Paul describes his mission to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the “uncircumcised,” that is, to the non-Jewish world. He also recognizes St. Peter’s mission to bring the Gospel to the Jewish world. What is more, he tells the Galatians that he received this mission from Christ, but through the hands of Peter, James, and John, whom he calls the “pillars” of the Church. He concludes by sharing the instructions communicated to him by Peter, James, and John—“Be mindful of the poor”—and his commitment to observe these instructions—“which was the very thing I was eager to do.”

This short selection tells us several important things about the character of St. Paul. He is convinced of his call and of his mission. He is also profoundly free in his call and in his mission: he is able to recognize and appreciate his own call as well as the call of others. Paul is also convinced of God’s initiative in his life, of the authority of the other apostles, and of the integral role of mindfulness of others both in the Christian community and in each Christian’s life, prayer, and discernment.

As always, our Lectio Divina is not simply a Scripture study, but an invitation to allow the Word of God to touch our own

life. Praying with these characteristics of St. Paul, I imagined the scene in which Paul encountered Peter, James, and John. I imagined them sitting down to a meal together, talking and sharing the stories of their travels, their missions, and the lives that Jesus had touched through them. I imagined them praying together and discerning together how the Spirit wanted them to proceed.

At a certain point, when all the conversations were finished, the apostles prepared to say good-bye and go the ways the Spirit had pointed out to them. As Peter said good-bye to Paul, he left him with these words: “Be mindful of the poor.”

“Be mindful of the poor.” What does this have to do with Paul’s mission to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles? Even more, what does it have to do with our discernment or our prayer or our relationship with Jesus? It has everything to do with it. To say, “Be mindful of the poor” is to say, “Make space in your heart for others.” It is a call to go beyond myself, to see more than my own situation, and to open my eyes, my heart, and my creativity to the situation of others. This presupposes that I am letting Jesus make a space for himself in my heart as well. It is only in the company of Jesus that I can leave myself behind, even if just for an instant, and make space for others, be mindful of others.

It is a risk to be mindful of others—it can make me feel insecure or unsure of what is going to happen. It’s easier to remain in my own world, with my own concerns, my own preferences, my own opinions. In a certain sense, it impoverishes me to be mindful of others, to go beyond my own world, and to enter into the world of others. However, when we take this step in the company of Jesus, this

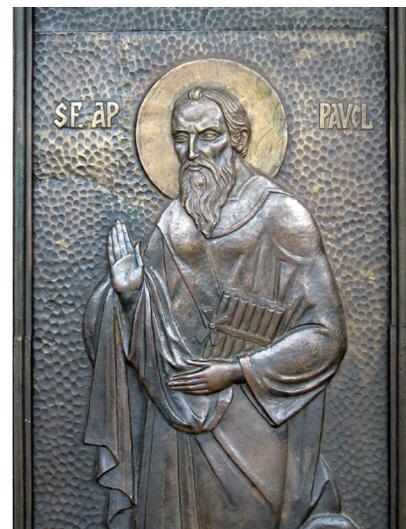


Photo by Eugen Visan

“impoverishment” actually enriches us. When I allow Jesus to live my insecurity with me—or rather, when I allow Jesus to inhabit my insecurity—my feelings of insecurity become filled with His grace and His love.

Discernment is a journey to live always more in union with Jesus, always more filled with His grace, always more dependent on His love. St. Paul’s brief but powerful words in this passage from his Letter to the Galatians invite us to this journey. May we open our hearts to the gratuitous love of Jesus, may we allow him to inhabit our closed-minded-ness, insecurity, and poverty, and may we make space in our hearts for the poverty of others—a poverty that enriches and enlarges our hearts.

Dear Jesus, you who “for our sake became poor although you were rich, so that by your poverty we might become rich” (cf 2 Cor 8:9), today, in this moment, I open myself to your love. I welcome your love; I receive your love. I long for your love. Fill my heart with your presence that I might learn to go out to others and be your loving presence to them. Amen. ■



Sr. Emily Beata Marsh, FSP

Is a Daughter of St. Paul. She is currently studying theology at The Catholic University of America, as well as serving in the Pauline mission of evangelization in Alexandria, Virginia.

Miracles and Extraordinary Signs

A Special Confirmation of our Faith



© oldparish.org

By Fr. MICHAEL WENSING, STL

Eucharistic related miracles still happen in our midst. As a former vocations director for our diocese and as a priest and pastor for forty years, I have observed countless vocations to the priesthood and religious life, which came about through the grace and reality of the Eucharist in the Catholic Church. When St. Elizabeth Ann Seton was in La Verna Italy staying with a Catholic family while her husband was quarantined on board a ship in the harbor with TB she attended daily Mass with this family. One day, standing in the back, she observed the Eucharist elevated at the altar and the truth of the reality of the presence of

Christ overwhelmed her and she fell to her knees. Thus began her journey to Catholicism and religious life and founder of a religious order in America. My own Bishop of the Sioux Falls diocese relates his conversion to Catholicism as a young lawyer through the same gift of faith while attending Mass. And the saints relate many a private revelation while in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. Thus I put into context what happened to our pilgrim group since believers everywhere are rewarded with the daily miracle of the Eucharist and receiving the body and blood of Christ in Holy Communion. And yet, sometimes, there is the extraordinary 'something extra' which is a reward for such faith, a grace to be sure, and a confirmation of faith that is already present.

A Pilgrimage to the Holy Land

My present and former parishioners convinced me to lead a pilgrimage the Holy Land late in 2015. As once the director of the Institute for Continuing Theological Education at North American College (2008-2011), I led priests on sabbatical each semester to the Holy Land. I, myself, studied there in the Fall of 1994, and thus I looked forward to his trip with nearly fifty pilgrims. Prior to the trip I had completed a way of the cross in the prairie grasses behind our parish church. My brother had been clearing rock from his fields and I chose a smooth beautiful one to begin the Via Dolorosa and the fourteen crosses of the way of the cross. It was to commemorate the begin-

ning of Christ's passion in the Garden of Gethsemane. I had a local monument company carve the words "Remember Gethsemane" into the rock and we had it placed. Little did I know the prophetic nature of that move until a month later at the actual Garden of Olives in the valley east of Jerusalem.

We covered the usual holy sites in our tour and toward the end we were coming down the Mount of Olives as I had typically done so often. Most tours tend to do this and the buses are waiting outside the Basilica of The Church of All Nations which houses the famous rock at which Jesus prayed before His arrest on Holy Thursday night. The crowd was immense and so our guide suggested we try early in the morning, before any crowd arrived. He was able to get permission from the sacristan to open the basilica for a Mass I would celebrate a half hour before the tours would begin to arrive. This was the morning of Nov 4, 2015. The gates around the rock were opened and my pilgrims arranged chairs around the rock and I had Mass at the altar at the head of the rock. The altar is carved to look like a chalice in order to commemorate Jesus words to His Father: "If you will, take this cup from me; still, not my will but yours be done." This referred to Jesus' destiny to the cross and our salvation that would involve immense suffering.

Moisture on the Rock

Usually we do not administer Holy Communion under both species on our tours. But it seemed so warranted in this case that I gave communion under both forms and the cup circled the rock as each answered Amen to the words: "The Blood of Christ." Several of the pilgrims and I had noticed during Mass a slight glistening of moisture on the rock and thought this curious. But it was early morning and we figured it might be dew. However, we were indoors and this should not be happening. The Franciscan sacristan, who was not present during Mass, had instructed us to be done within a half hour. I noticed my time was up and quickly concluded Mass and rushed to the sacristy to divest. Then I heard shouts: "Fr. Mike, come see."

Many of my pilgrims were standing in awe around the rock, which now had even more moisture, some of which was flowing into the crevices of the rock. But all were pointing at three cavities about the size of a quarter, which was filled with a thick red substance. I was stunned. I wondered if it was some kind of trick. I immediately reached down and touched the water and substance and blessed myself. Others did the same. Three actually tasted the substance and said it was definitely blood for it tasted like a nosebleed. One dipped her paper Kleenex into the substance and still has it to this day as a relic of the event. My pilgrims with their smart phones and cameras took dozens of photos. Another Franciscan from the back of the church, a friar from Lebanon who could not understand our English, was anxious that we leave the church for other tourists were arriving. One of my pilgrims rushed back in after leaving for one more last look and took pictures of a dry rock. The phenomenon had evaporated before other groups could witness it.

Unreported Miracles

I instructed my pilgrims to write up accounts of their experiences immediately when we got back to Notre Dame Hotel. I told them I intended to forward all the evidence, pictures and accounts (21 written accounts) to the Custos of the Holy Land, Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, ofm and await instruction from him. He asked us to keep our stories among ourselves until he had a chance to study them and see the pictures. He did not know of such a phenomenon ever happening during the Franciscan guardianship of the holy site. He indicated this was a delicate matter and wanted to investigate first. He was to be in WASHINGTON, D.C. two weeks later and we arranged that one of our pilgrims who lived near D.C. would entrust the photos and accounts to him, which she did. There were several email exchanges between our representative and Fr. Pierbattista when on January 8, 2016, he finally wrote to her to pass along to us the following: Thank you for your letter. After investigation, I have to say that the phenomenon you saw at the Gethsemane basilica was not experienced by others (out-

side your group, *italics mine*). We have to close the file, therefore. You can talk about this experience freely, of course, saying that this was only your (*i.e. members of the group... italics mine*) experience and that there are no other witnesses of this. All the best, Fr. Pierbattista, ofm Custos.

We arranged an interview with a local radio station, KXLG FM 99.1 now that we were free to share. Our diocesan paper printed a brief report of the experience as well. This radio station still archives the interview with picture attachments under the title Holy Land Interview.

I believe there are many miracles that go unreported in our modern age. Many fear the doubts of a scientific and secular age. And, as I tell my pilgrims who still wonder what it all means, that often miracles and extraordinary signs are a special confirmation of the gift of faith already received. Be thankful for the special grace to an out of the way traveling group such as we were. And reflect always on the passion of Christ whose first blood was shed at the Rock of Gethsemane, as we read in Luke 22:44 "He was in such agony and he prayed so fervently that his sweat became like drops of blood falling..."

As a postscript, readers can investigate the very real but rare phenomenon of Haimatidrosis, how blood and sweat become mixed in extreme anxiety. Likewise, the Garden of Gethsemane is one of the most attested ancient holy sites from early Christianity. Ancient olive trees are still preserved there such that, if they are not since the time of Christ when the Romans may have cut them down, then there is some chance they grew back again from the roots of those same olive trees. ■



FR. MICHAEL WENSING, STL

Recently director of the Priest Sabatical Program in Rome. Fr. Michael is currently the pastor of Holy Name Parish in Watertown, South Dakota.

Helping God's Poor

How my Vow of Poverty turned me into God's Beggar



By *SISTER LOU ELLA HICKMAN, I.W.B.S.*

Before I entered the convent in 1970, like so many other young women who do, I gave away my personal belongings. With my entrance, came the beginning lessons in poverty—a common shower room and dorm sleeping quarters.

I would have been surprised had I been told then that I would later become God's beggar for His poor. This is because when my community began some 400 years ago, teaching was and has been our main focus. In other words, when I entered, I knew I would become a teacher. While teaching is still a high priority, we have become more open to respond to the needs of the Church since Vatican II. We, along with many other religious communities, became more involved with society and the poor.

A Part-Time Sales Clerk

A number of years ago, I personally became more involved with our society when I left my parish work and my superior asked me to find another ministry. After some searching, I called someone I knew in religious retail. She had mentioned once in a conversation some months earlier that she was looking for a part-time sales clerk. I called, asking if she would be interested in hiring me. Thirty minutes later she called back and told me to come in that Friday afternoon

Summer came and went. Fall moved quickly into Advent. At some point, one of my co-workers gave me a heads up for the coming Christmas rush. "Sister Lou, since our store is in the mall, you will get to experience 'insanity at its finest.'" The Christmas crush would have been a better description. Yet I also knew that between Thanksgiving and Christmas, many of

these same people found time to donate either money or goods to numerous local agencies. How did I know? Our city newspaper carried story after story of generosity and caring.

Struggling With Many "Why's"

Yet I struggled with the "why" they gave and the why they gave just between Thanksgiving and Christmas. I had grown up watching my mother support those who needed help and it wasn't just at Christmas. So I knew from first-hand experience the poor were still poor the rest of the year. Her example also taught me to be sensitive to the needs that don't often get met. Once, when our community allowances were increased, I sent a donation to one of the chaplains at M.D. Anderson so that a family of a cancer patient would have money for the parking garage.

Thanks to our fluctuating economy, I also knew these agencies depended on such donations to get them through the most difficult part of the year when more of their services were needed. However, I still had to deal with what I thought might be their motivation, that is, "I have done my duty. Now I can get on with life." Looking back, I can see my struggle was a prayer as now I am too busy helping God's poor to question these people's motivation.

Because I struggled with others' motivation in giving, I am sure there are many readers who also find giving to God's poor challenging. It is no surprise that some of the poor do take advantage of the welfare system as well as take advantage of the agencies or programs set up to help those who need it. Perhaps it would be well to remember that Jesus trusted Judas with the common purse through His entire ministry. Jesus gave Judas the gift of trust with no strings attached.

Then there are those who want to give but are having difficulties making ends meet. My earlier experiences of convent poverty helped me to learn to depend on my community for my daily needs as well as my education and health insurance. This would be the foundation of my learning to depend on God to supply, that is, "drop in my lap" what I will pass on to His poor. The words of St. Paul expresses my situation well:

"God Loves A Cheerful Giver"

God can multiply his favors among you so that you may always have enough and even a surplus for good works, as it written: 'He scattered abroad and gave to the poor, and his justice endures forever,'
(2 Corinthians 9:7-9)

One of the earliest lessons I learned in religious life was that I shouldn't ordinarily enter into a conversation about money as I am aware that my vow of poverty often limits my credibility. However, I often share with people that God cannot be outdone in generosity. The more

I give away that He sends me, the more often He sends it to me. I also want my joy and enthusiasm to tell my story and if it doesn't, it probably won't matter what I say. This would be especially true for someone who is nominally Catholic, and, therefore, gives little or nothing. I believe telling that person, "God loves a cheerful giver" would be of little help. If I were to say something to someone who is hesitant about tithing or making a donation, it would be, "Do it anyway for a specific time and see what happens. After all, everything belongs to God anyway."

As I am also a spiritual director, I might ask a directee who is struggling with tithing, "What might this be saying about your relationship with God?" While an obvious answer might be, trust; perhaps a more pointed question might be, "Where is God in your struggle?" That answer could be the crux of the matter.

*"The more I
give away,
the more I
receive."*

Begin With Prayer

So where do I begin if I want to be more generous? If you don't already have a favorite charity, begin with prayer. Ask God where to give, how much, and for how long. Sometimes the answer can be as simple as a call to your diocesan chancery office to locate the nearest crisis pregnancy centers. I mention this example as I have helped supply items for our local center, Hope House, for a number of years. Recently, I drove two of my community sisters to visit a friend in a nursing home. As I turned a corner, I spotted

a metal baby bed in mint condition on a neighborhood corner. Within an hour after I got back to the convent the bed found a new home at Hope House. Tithing doesn't have to even include money so ask for the gift of awareness as well.

The lesson I am presently learning is that poverty comes in different forms. Now when I pray, I continue to wrestle with God over the lack of religious vocations (especially for minorities like Native Americans), divisions in our country, world violence and the poverty of indifference. So if your budget is tight, consider tithing your time for prayer instead. The cost: only twenty-four minutes a day.

I began my journey into the gift of my vow of poverty with giving away my belongings when I entered the convent. Then I learned to depend on my community for what I needed. Out of that grew an increasing awareness of how I could net-work and use the resources at my disposal to help God's poor. It is no accident I am a member of Sisters of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament. God's love is a bountiful one and I want to show people how to en flesh that love, especially for His beloved poor. How blessed I am that I can. ■



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16: Facing, or Helping Teens Face a Mid (Teen) Life Crisis



Photo by Gaelle Marcel

By BRUCE L. THIESSEN, PH.D.

**You walk to school and the teacher says:
“Wipe that smile right off of your face...”
You step in your room and your mama
screams,
“Boy, when ya gonna clean up this
place?!!
16...**

*(Extracted from the song, 16, words and music
by Dr Bruce L Thiessen, aka Dr BLT copyright
2017)*

This is for struggling parents and leaders, commissioned with the task of turning teens into Godly, psychologically-stable, spiritually-seeking souls. This is for all of the teens caught in between all of life’s conflicting messages and drives.

Most of us are familiar with the phenomenon that has been labelled “mid-life” crisis, but we often fail to acknowledge that newly aging adults have not cornered the market on age-related crises.

The mid-teen years are met with colossal developmental challenges. Not finding the resources to face and rise above these challenges can lead a teen to develop dysfunctional patterns of relating to the world, and/or, to turn to drugs, alcohol, suicide, and other, self-destructive paths.

Renowned development theorist, Erik Erikson (1950, 1963), proposed that individuals are tasked with overcoming a relatively predictable series of developmental challenges, as they move from the

beginning, to the end of their lives. The degree of success in meeting and overcoming a new developmental challenge, for Erikson, has to do with whether or not one achieved success with the previous developmental challenge(s).

Erikson proposed eight distinct stages, and we will examine teens through the prism of these stages---especially the one most unique to mid-teens---Identity vs. Role Confusion. As we proceed, we must do so, keeping in mind that genetic factors; one's racial/ethnic heritage; one's socio-economic status; and the societal era in which one is born, and develops, also impact the way in which one approaches developmental challenges, and the degree of success one may achieve.

**Your best friend is stealing your girlfriend
And you just got cut from the team
And people always tell you that your life is so good
That your life is just peaches and cream
16....**

(Extracted from the song, 16, words and music by Dr. Bruce L Thiessen, aka Dr BLT copyright 2017)

IDENTITY VS. ROLE CONFUSION

The development stage and corresponding developmental challenge that Erikson most closely associated with adolescence was Identity vs. Role Confusion. Once again, for Erikson, the ability for a teen to successfully resolve internal conflicts associated with his/her identity and role, within the family, within one's group of peers, and within society, as a whole, is, in part, depend on how successfully one achieved the developmental tasks associated with previous stages of development.

These previous stages include, Trust vs. Mistrust; Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt; Initiative vs. Guilt; and Industry vs. Inferiority. For example, if a child is born into a chaotic family environment, or if a child is abused in any way at an early age, he/she will learn that the world is a dangerous place, and he/she will likely be stuck at the Trust vs. Mistrust stage of

development, a stage Erikson suggests begins with infancy. Of course, with this stage unresolved, autonomy cannot be adequately achieved, because the child, innocent though he/she may be, will take on the shame and doubt that corresponds to a lack of trust in oneself, and a lack of trust in those who have betrayed or violated that trust. A betrayal of trust generally is projected onto new characters in a person's life, who may or may not be trustworthy.

Going back to the first verse of my song, 16, the character in the song, who is in the midst of a mid-teen-life crisis, is facing a reinforcing of stereotypes of adults---more specifically, a stereotype in which the role of adult caretakers is one of a scolding burden---one who "serves" with the sole purpose of rebuking the teen for not meeting expectations.

In verse two, of the song, 16, above, disappointment comes with another example of betrayal of trust, by a once-trusted friend, and, we learn, in the second half of verse 2, that the subject has been "cut from the team,"--- excluded from a group he longs to be a part of, an experience that often results in a shadow of shame and doubt, which, in turn, interferes with the teen's ability to achieve autonomy. When that developmental milestone results in failure at a younger age, experiences accumulated during the early and mid-teen years, will be used to confirm, in the mind of the impacted teen, negative aspects of his/her self-concept and will leave a 15 or 16- year-old without the confidence to take initiative. That lack of confidence, reinforced again and again, by failure or perceived failure, could ultimately lead to a deep sense of inferiority, and, ultimately, to despair.

Without a sense of industry or competence, how can a 16-year-old expect to establish an authentic sense of identity? When trust is profoundly violated as a child, and shame, doubt, and subjective guilt take hold, what building blocks are left to establish a consistent image of who one is? Where does identity come from at that point?

GRACE FOR THE WORLD THAT TODAY'S TEENS FACE

Though I believe that the stages that Erik Erickson identified are highly useful in understanding the potential crises that mid-teen-agers face, I am not sure they are necessarily as age-specific in their emergence, and I'm not sure that they necessarily unfold in such a linear fashion. Also, though these stages may seem universal, and timeless, they do not apply in the same way, to all individual teens, in every era, or with every generation.

PRE VS POST INDUSTRIAL TEENS

Prior to the industrial revolution, Identity vs. Role Confusion, the stage Erikson most closely identifies with the teen years, was not a big deal. A male teen, either worked on the family farm, or was an apprentice in his father's business. Female teens assumed a domestic role. They helped their mothers clean the house, cook meals, and were, basically servants of men and children. In their teen years, each female teen was groomed to look at other teen men with the sole purpose of finding a husband, and having children with that husband.

After the industrial revolution, opportunities to establish roles independently of the family became readily available. After the sexual revolution, and the women's liberation movement of the 1960s, women were afforded opportunities to become independent from men, from children, and from a clearly domestic role. "The pill" led to both male and female sexual behavior that strayed from the previously established primary goal of having children, and contributed to the centrality of pleasure as a goal-in-and-of-itself, when it came to sexual behavior. Reproduction took a back seat. Although Catholics, and believers, in general, held on, and continue to hold on, to traditional values, all of culture was impacted, and continues to be impacted, in some ways, by these movements, and both young men and young women continue to struggle more with role confusion, and identity crises.

Along with these changes, came the breakdown of the traditional family unit. Broken homes and single-parenting went from being an aberration, to nearly the norm, though, once again, Catholicism stood as a buffer, and protected some from the downside of “progress.”

Then the gay movement, the movement towards government-sanctioned gay marriage, and the emergence of the LBGT community came. Children and teens now face more confusion than ever when they look around.

My 12-year-old daughter recently noticed a male-to-female transgender person, in the local shopping mall, for what I believe was the first time, and she approached me with the question, “Daddy, why is that man dressed like a woman?” Being a psychologist, I should have been prepared with the perfect answer, but I fumbled around to find the right words. I was never confronted by this experience--not as a child, not as a teen—not even as a young adult. I have been as a professional, who works with prison inmates, but I have never had to face the idea of answering my child’s questions regarding such a subject matter.

Teens face more ambiguity in more areas of their lives than ever before. Enter social media. Now there’s a complication not factored into Erickson’s developmental stages. Social media is relatively new, and so the science that examines the relationship between social media and psychosocial development is just in its infancy.

The one thing we know as parents, or as teens, facing a mid-teen-life-crisis, is that the world is changing rapidly, that there is more ambiguity and fewer clear-cut choices than ever before. Where do we turn as parents, and religious leaders, who serve as role, and guides, for teens? Where do you, as a teen in the middle of it all, turn when things are just moving and changing too quickly, or when you sense that nothing is permanent in your life?

Well, that’s where universal principles and core values come in. The develop-

mental challenges are the same; they are just offered in the context of a more complex world. So the challenges are more challenging. If you are a teen with a mid-teen-life-crisis, turning to friends in the midst of the same, or a similar crisis, who are handling it in ways that are constructive and, not destructive, will help. Turning to parents and trusted adults (if you managed to get through Erickson’s Trust vs. Mistrust stage), can offer you an even more solid foundation.

Then, if you have been successful enough in meeting the Trust vs. Mistrust challenge, to trust God, you can turn to God. If you haven’t, then, and your level of trust has been betrayed on every level, you may need to seek the help of a mental health professional. In such a case, it may seem that, even God has turned his back on you, or perhaps, for you, God has even been kidnapped or never existed to begin with.



Photo by Christopher Sardegna

But if you have always trust God, or once you have lost, but re-established trust in a loving God—the God who is for you and not against you, then you have a whole additional dimension of support, strength, and comfort available to you as you face life’s developmental challenges.

If you serve the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, then you serve a God for all times, and for all challenges. There is nothing that can hold you back from meeting every challenge, and rising about every problem. The verse that says, “I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me,” is the same as it was when those words were written.” The verses that say, “I will be with you always, even until the end of time,” provide us with assurances that transcend the changes that come with society’s ever-evolving (or devolving, depending on how you see it) ages. Some of you teens may have actually concluded that this journey just isn’t worth it. If so, take heed. Pay attention to the final words of my song...

**I know you wish you could end it all
But you must hold onto your dream
One day you’ll come to realize
That it ain’t half as bad as it seems
To be 16...**

(Extracted from the song, 16, words and music by Dr Bruce L Thiessen, aka Dr BLT copyright 2017)

**In short: HOLD ON! BE STRONG!
FIND A SONG! ■**

For a free mp3 copy of “16” by this author, Dr. BLT, email me at drblt@drblt.com

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CHINA



China Study Tour

US-China Catholic Association

The USCCA (US Catholic China Association) seeks to build bridges “between the Catholic communities and all people on both sides of the Pacific.” True to their mission, they conduct study tours of the Catholic community in China. This year’s tour will take place in June and participants will have the opportunity to visit several regions in China while obtaining a “deeper understanding of Chinese Catholic history, community life, and social services.”

This tour is particularly intended for members of religious congregations, journalists, and members of social service agencies who want to learn more about Catholics in China. Please visit USCCA’s website to learn more about their work:

<https://www.uscatholicchina.org/tour-current>

ITALY



Pre-Synodal Meeting for Young People

March 19-24, 2018

The Pre-Synodal Meeting took place in Rome and gathered 300 young people from around the world. Those who were unable to attend the event in person could join via social media. Participants had the opportunity to share their views and recommendations to be included in the Final Document of the Pre-Synodal Meeting of Young people.

The XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will meet in October of this year to discuss the topic: “Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment.” To sign up in the Facebook group for the Pre-Synodal Meeting visit:

<http://www.synod2018.va/content/synod2018/en/pre-synodal-meeting.html>

VATICAN CITY

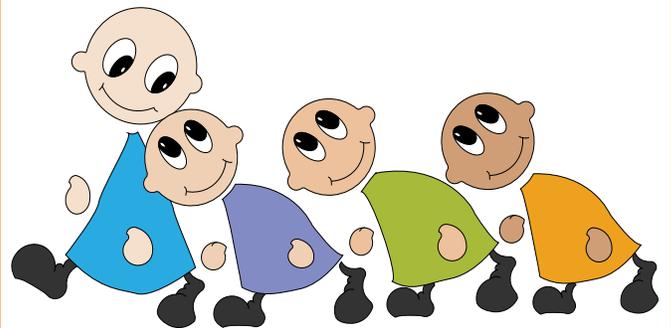


“...Vocation demands that somebody else take your picture”

Pope Francis met with priests, consecrated men and women, and seminarians at the Cathedral of Santiago, during his Apostolic Journey to Chile and Peru last January. Pope Francis reminded them that even though each of them is called individually, they are always part of a larger group. He said, “Where vocation is concerned, there is no such thing as a selfie! Vocation demands that somebody else take your picture.”

Mindful of the challenges facing the Catholic Church in Chile, Pope Francis encouraged priests, consecrated men and women, and seminarians to continue praying to God for strength and clarity, and to renew their vows with enthusiasm and passion.

CORNER MESSAGE



“The other must support you as you have to support him.”

St. Augustine

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