

# Vocations and Prayer



The Catholic Magazine on Vocation Ministry

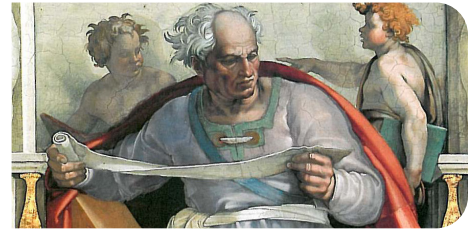
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**Words of Vocation:  
Gratitude, Fatigue, Encouragement, and Praise  
57th World Day of Prayer for Vocations**





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# "Therefore, Ask the Lord of the Harvest" The Foundation of Every Vocation

By FR. ANTONIO FIORENZA, RCJ

*Gratitude, Encouragement, Fatigue and Praise* are the four key vocation words Pope Francis chose for his message to celebrate the 57th World Day of Prayer for Vocations. The Pope's words instill courage, illuminate and support our journey as people of God in these turbulent times due to Covid-19. They will help us to discover and to live in a more profound way the spirit of this annual special day, specifically dedicated to the payer for vocations.

*"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."*

The words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew (9, 37-38) and Luke (10, 2) are the inspiration for the celebration of World Day of Prayer for Vocations. In fact, it was established by Pope Paul VI precisely for this purpose: to highlight the relevance, the primacy of prayer in promoting vocations.

Prayer is the *primum*. It is the first step in the field of countless initiatives to promote vocations. Why? Because prayer is dialogue, encounter, and communion with Jesus. Each vocation is born, grows, and flourishes through this personal encounter with Jesus.

I rediscovered this truth in my priestly life during these days of physical distance and human loneliness due to the global Covid-19 pandemic.

On Holy Thursday, I received a phone call from a friend who wanted to thank me for the gift of the priesthood. I immediately expressed my unease for not being able to celebrate the Eucharist with the people of God, especially during Easter. "I really miss my parishioners," I confided. She replied: "Father, this is a private audience time for you, priests." I did not understand what she tried to convey. She continued, "Yes. The Lord wants to speak to you privately. He wants to renew you; he wants you to return to your first love."

At the end of our telephone conversation, I thanked my friend for her nice thought on how to live this unique and strange time.

Her words, however, were fixed in my mind, and I kept repeating and *commenting* to myself: time of

private audience with the Lord, to *revive the gift of God that is in me for the laying on of hands* (II Tm 1: 6); I must devote more time to prayer to rediscover the beauty of the priestly ministry and live at the service of the people of God with joy and enthusiasm.

I think that was exactly the meaning of the sister's words.

The time of coronavirus is a time of absence of the people of God. Yet, never as in this time, have I felt so strong about the "sacramental" bond between the people of God and me, a priest. Every day, I pray the liturgy of the Hours for and in the name of the people of God. I celebrate mass for and in the name of the people of God. I, a priest, pray, celebrate, and am always united with the people of God. All the faces of the people of my community are before my eyes while I celebrate Mass or pray.

The life of a priest takes place around two poles, God and his people. Two loves, always united and never separated. The quality of time dedicated to God's people depends on the quality of time dedicated to God in daily prayer, in a personal encounter with Jesus.

Precisely during these days of physical absence of God's people, I have a deeper understanding that prayer is the foundation of my priestly vocation.

Prayer is the foundation of every vocation that wants to put itself at the service of God and neighbor. ■



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# Words of Vocation

## Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 2020 World Day of Prayer for Vocations



Photo by Ben White

Photo by Vocations Office of Archdiocese of Los Angeles

Photo by Ryan Franco

Photo by Vocations Office of Archdiocese of Los Angeles

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On 4 August last year, the 160th anniversary of the death of the Curé of Ars, I chose to write a letter to all those priests who daily devote their lives to the service of God's people in response to the Lord's call.

On that occasion, I chose four key words – pain, gratitude, encouragement and praise – as a way of thanking priests and supporting their ministry. I believe that today, on this 57th World Day of Prayer for Vocations, those words can be addressed to the whole people of God, against the backdrop of the Gospel passage that recounts for us the remarkable experience of Jesus and Peter during a stormy night on the Sea of Galilee (cf. Mt 14:22-33).

After the multiplication of the loaves, which had astonished the crowds, Jesus told his disciples to get into the boat and precede him to the other shore, while he took leave of the people. The image of the disciples crossing the lake can evoke our own life's journey. Indeed, the boat of our lives slowly advances, restlessly looking for a safe haven and prepared to face the perils and promises of the sea, yet at the same time trusting that the helmsman will ultimately keep us on the right course. At times, though, the boat can drift off course, misled by mirages, not the lighthouse that leads it home, and be tossed by the tempests of difficulty, doubt and fear.

Something similar takes place in the hearts of those who, called to follow the Teacher of Nazareth, have to undertake a

crossing and abandon their own security to become the Lord's disciples. The risk involved is real: the night falls, the headwinds howl, the boat is tossed by the waves, and fear of failure, of not being up to the call, can threaten to overwhelm them.

The Gospel, however, tells us that in the midst of this challenging journey we are not alone. Like the first ray of dawn in the heart of the night, the Lord comes walking on the troubled waters to join the disciples; he invites Peter to come to him on the waves, saves him when he sees him sinking and, once in the boat, makes the winds die down.

The first word of vocation, then, is gratitude. Taking the right course is not something we do on our own, nor does it depend



solely on the road we choose to travel. How we find fulfilment in life is more than a decision we make as isolated individuals; above all else, it is a response to a call from on high. The Lord points out our destination on the opposite shore and he grants us the courage to board the boat. In calling us, he becomes our helmsman; he accompanies and guides us; he prevents us from running aground on the shoals of indecision and even enables us to walk on surging waters.

Every vocation is born of that gaze of love with which the Lord came to meet us, perhaps even at a time when our boat was being battered by the storm. "Vocation, more than our own choice, is a response to the Lord's unmerited call" (Letter to Priests, 4 August 2019). We will succeed in discovering and embracing our vocation once we open our hearts in gratitude and perceive the passage of God in our lives.

When the disciples see Jesus walking towards them on the sea, they first think that he is a ghost and are filled with fear. Jesus immediately reassures them with words that should constantly accompany our lives and our vocational journey: "Take heart, it is I; have no fear" (Mt 14:27). This, then, is the second word I wish to offer you: encouragement.

What frequently hinders our journey, our growth, our choosing the road the Lord is marking out for us, are certain "ghosts" that trouble our hearts. When we are called to leave safe shores and embrace a state of life – like marriage, ministerial priesthood, consecrated life – our first reaction is often from the "ghost of disbelief". Surely, this vocation is not for me! Can this really be the right path? Is the Lord really asking me to do this?

Those thoughts can keep growing – justifications and calculations that sap our determination and leave us hesitant and powerless on the shore where we started. We think we might be wrong, not up to the challenge, or simply glimpsing a ghost to be exorcized.

The Lord knows that a fundamental life choice – like marriage or special consecration to his service – calls for courage. He knows the questions, doubts and difficul-

ties that toss the boat of our heart, and so he reassures us: "Take heart, it is I; have no fear!" We know in faith that he is ever at our side even amid stormy seas. This knowledge sets us free from that lethargy which I have called "sweet sorrow" (Letter to Priests, 4 August 2019), the interior discouragement that holds us back from experiencing the beauty of our vocation.

In the Letter to Priests, I also spoke about pain, but here I would like to translate the word differently, as fatigue. Every vocation brings with it a responsibility. The Lord calls us because he wants to enable us, like Peter, to "walk on water", in other words, to take charge of our lives and place them at the service of the Gospel, in the concrete and everyday ways that he shows us, and specifically in the different forms of lay, priestly and consecrated vocation. Yet, like Saint Peter, our desire and enthusiasm co-exist with our failings and fears.

If we let ourselves be daunted by the responsibilities that await us – whether in married life or priestly ministry – or by the hardships in store for us, then we will soon turn away from the gaze of Jesus and, like Peter, we will begin to sink. On the other hand, despite our frailty and poverty, faith enables us to walk towards the Risen Lord and to weather every storm. Whenever fatigue or fear make us start to sink, Jesus holds out his hand to us. He gives us the enthusiasm we need to live our vocation with joy and fervour.

When Jesus at last boards the boat, the winds die down and the waves are calmed. Here we have a beautiful image of what the Lord can do at times of turbulence and tempest in our lives. He stills those winds, so that the forces of evil, fear and resignation no longer have power over us.

As we live out our specific vocation, those headwinds can wear us down. Here I think of all those who have important responsibilities in civil society, spouses whom I like to refer to – not without reason – as "courageous", and in a particular way those who have embraced the consecrated life or the priesthood. I am conscious of your hard work, the sense of isolation that can at times weigh upon your hearts, the risk

of falling into a rut that can gradually make the ardent flame of our vocation die down, the burden of the uncertainty and insecurity of the times, and worry about the future. Take heart, do not be afraid! Jesus is at our side, and if we acknowledge him as the one Lord of our lives, he will stretch out his hand, take hold of us and save us.

Even amid the storm-tossed waters, then, our lives become open to praise. This is the last of our vocation words, and it is an invitation to cultivate the interior disposition of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Grateful that Lord gazed upon her, faithful amid fear and turmoil, she courageously embraced her vocation and made of her life an eternal song of praise to the Lord.

Dear friends, on this day in particular, but also in the ordinary pastoral life of our communities, I ask the Church to continue to promote vocations. May she touch the hearts of the faithful and enable each of them to discover with gratitude God's call in their lives, to find courage to say "yes" to God, to overcome all weariness through faith in Christ, and to make of their lives a song of praise for God, for their brothers and sisters, and for the whole world. May the Virgin Mary accompany us and intercede for us.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 8 March 2020, the Second Sunday of Lent

Franciscus



# We Are Not Alone

## A Reflection on Pope Francis' Message for the 2020 World Day of Prayer for Vocations



Photo by San Joaquin General Hospital Family Medicine Program, Stockton, CA

By Fr. WILLIAM REISER, S.J.

The “words” Francis is referring to (as he explains) are drawn from his letter to priests last summer on the anniversary of the death of Saint John Vianney. The four words are praise, gratitude, pain, and courage, although here he chooses the word “fatigue” rather than “pain.” The contemplatively rich scene of the disciples crossing the lake becomes a metaphor for the vocational journeys that are our lives. What we need to keep in mind is that the disciples are only in the boat because Jesus “made” them do so (Matt 14:22). Or, following Mark, because Jesus was the one who said, “Let us go across to the other side” (Mk 4:35). Many of the crises and difficulties in which we find ourselves only arise because we once said yes to the Lord, and we continue to do so every day. And that is true whether

we are religious, priests, married couples, or simply women and men trying to live their baptismal promises. It is because of Jesus that we are in the boat. Crossing the lake was his idea.

The particular gospel text that frames this year’s letter is Matthew’s account of Jesus calming the sea (Matt 14:22-33). At this stage of the story, the disciples have yet to learn that, even though Jesus might not be with them physically in the boat, he is always aware of their plight. He always sees them when the boat—the community of disciples—is facing adverse winds: “And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them” (Mk 6:48). The fact that, in Mark and Matthew, a sea story follows the feeding of the five thousand (in John the sea story precedes the account of the loaves) might lead us to guess a connection be-

tween the two moments—a Eucharistic connection. The sea stories give us a way of imagining the abiding presence of the risen Jesus. “The Gospel,” Francis writes, “tells us that in the midst of this challenging journey, we are not alone.” Indeed.

The annual letter was composed before the pandemic took over our lives, but the Pope turned to a related gospel text in his Urbi et Orbi address, “On Coronavirus and Jesus Calming the Storm” (March 27, 2020). There he drew on Mark 4:35-41, perhaps because in Mark’s account, Jesus is already in the boat when the storm strikes, and because there were other boats also at risk from the same torment. The sight is worth pondering. Yet the disciples do not have a clue: “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” Given the pandemic, with so many of our churches closed and services canceled, “pain” and





Photo by L'Osservatore Romano

"courage" are quite relevant and understandable. But what about gratitude and praise? Francis intimates that gratitude would have been Peter's response to Jesus when he pulled him from the water as he was sinking. I could imagine Peter having a second thought the next time Jesus asked to sail with him! I think Francis' point, however, is that all of us have much to be grateful for, once we recall how often the Lord has rescued us from our mistakes, poor choices, and hardness of heart.

### Talking about vocation in a moment of global crisis

While the annual vocation letter's composition may have preceded the outbreak, it is being read as the Church and the planet are going through it. Vocation, the letter reminds us, includes ordained ministry, marriage, and consecrated life. For each of us there are the headwinds of struggle, pain, or fatigue. Francis refers to these as "the uncertainty and insecurity of the times, and worry about the future." For each vocation the lighthouse or the star that guides the navigation has got to be Jesus. The spiritual means at our disposal for navigating rough seas and staying on course is noticing and recalling God's goodness within the particular circumstances of our vocational choices. Doing this, habitually, becomes a steady source of consolation. Through this practice the Spirit of Jesus reassures us of his presence and enables us to recognize the many reasons we have to be grateful. After all, we have listened to and prayed countless times the words of the Preface, "We do well always and everywhere to give you thanks." Do these familiar words express our deepest conviction, or are they just a lovely formula?

In his letter to priests last August, Francis wrote, "One good way of testing our hearts as pastors is to ask how we confront suffering." He then went on to explain: "We can often act like the levite or the priest in the parable, stepping aside and ignoring the injured man (cf. Lk 10:31-32). Or we can draw near in the wrong way, viewing situations in the abstract and taking refuge in commonplaces, such as: 'That's life...,' or 'Nothing can be done'.

In this way, we yield to an uneasy fatalism. Or else we can draw near with a kind of aloofness that brings only isolation and exclusion... Far from making us compassionate, this ends up holding us back from confronting our own wounds, the wounds of others and consequently the wounds of Jesus himself." Reading these sentences made me think further about Francis' reference to "pain" and "fatigue." There is no vocational path that bypasses engagement with the world. What he says about priests holds true for all of us. Weariness and fatigue are signs of being adrift, like a boat with sails but no wind. Until the storm comes.

## A spiritual dialectic

In the same letter, Francis spoke of a dialectic that determines the identity of the priest, a dialectic that grounds and secures one's vocation. He wrote: "For our hearts to be encouraged, we should not neglect the dialectic that determines our identity. First, our relationship with Jesus. Whenever we turn away from Jesus or neglect our relationship with him, slowly but surely our commitment begins to fade and our lamps lose the oil needed to light up our lives (cf. Mt 25:1-13): 'Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me... because apart from me you can do nothing' (Jn 15:4-5)." One pole of our identity has to be Jesus, necessarily.

But there is also a second pole: "The other essential aspect of this dialectic is our relationship to our people. Foster that relationship and expand it. Do not withdraw from your people, your presbyterates and your communities, much less seek refuge in closed and elitist groups. Ultimately, this stifles and poisons the soul. A minister whose 'heart is encouraged' is a minister always on the move. In our 'going forth', we walk 'sometimes in front, sometimes in the middle and sometimes behind: in front, in order to guide the community; in the middle, in order to encourage and support, and at the back in order to keep it united, so that no one lags too far behind... Jesus himself is the model of this evangelizing option that leads us to the

heart of our people. How good it is for us to see him in his attention to every person! The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross is nothing else but the culmination of that evangelizing style that marked his entire life."

Jesus and the people: these are the two poles within which a vocation breathes, unfolds, and lifts our hearts to praise and thanksgiving. And when our people have to pass through turbulent waters, we find ourselves on the boat with them, just like Jesus was; such was the "style that marked his entire life."

## An unforgettable picture

In reflecting on vocation, many of us have been drawn and one time or another to some of the memorable biblical accounts of being called: the call of the young Samuel, the call of Isaiah, the call of Jeremiah, the call of Amos, the calling of the disciples, the call of Saint Paul. There is undoubtedly a profound consolation that attends the experience of God interrupting our lives and inviting us to something special: what mystery is this, that the Lord wants me? Nevertheless, as warm and formative as the experience is, we need to be careful, too. "I am important to God, I have a mission," we may tell ourselves; and that is true. But the experience also requires some purging, because the mission is not about us; it is about God and God's people. Keeping our eyes off of ourselves and onto the Lord can be one of the most demanding challenges of living a vocation. The self-emptying at the heart of the inner life of Jesus—the one who becomes "obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil 2:8)—is also expected of those who follow him.

There is a striking picture of Pope Francis, alone, on the last Friday of March (the day of his Urbi et Orbi blessing), walking up to the front of St. Peter's Basilica. The Square was gray, rainy and deserted. The more I gazed at the picture, the more intrigued I became by this extraordinary image and the message it was sending about vocation. There was the Pope, a pastor to the core, the shepherd who carried his people in his heart, trying to en-

courage the world. The only gift he could offer was his own deep faith—the faith of a man whose eyes are fixed on the Lord—that Jesus was with us. "In this storm," he said, "the façade of those stereotypes with which we camouflaged our egos, always worrying about our image, has fallen away, uncovering once more that (blessed) common belonging, of which we cannot be deprived: our belonging as brothers and sisters."

We always walk by faith, but sometimes we find ourselves walking alone, forcibly separated from our people, unsure of what tomorrow is going to bring and yet yearning for some word of comfort that we can bring to our people. "For we walk by faith, not by sight," Paul wrote to his beloved Corinthians (2 Cor 5:7). Even Francis cannot see; he has to rely, not on himself or the circumstances of his office, but on the life giving word of God. In that scene, Francis showed himself truly one of us. His faith became God's gift to the world. Vocation does not separate us from the rest of humanity; it draws us ever closer. Perhaps the actual vocation letter this year is not so much what Francis wrote but the example he has given the Church and the world at a time when we desperately need the brightness of Easter hope. ■



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# Fostering a Vocation Ministry in our Parishes

## Why should we care?



By RHONDA GRUENEWALD

**W**e are living in an interesting and challenging time in our world with uncertainty at every turn. As we attend Mass digitally from the intimacy of our domestic churches, instead of the public masses with our parish family, the world is so drastically different from 2019.

Priests are missing their flock as they find other ways to minister. On social media, we see sisters making face masks and praying for all of us and an end to this pandemic. We have read stories about priests and sisters who have died from the Corona virus while comforting the sick, showing us what true heroism looks like.

We are all appreciating the priesthood more than ever. Most parishioners who came to Mass before this pandemic hit did not think twice about their priest, except that he was there. They were thankful that he presided at the Mass, but probably did not say so. Now that life has turned upside down, our only interaction with our parish is digitally through our priest.

### Why should we care?

Without priests, we do not have Eucharist! It is simple but profound, and unfortunately, in the United States, we have 3,500 parishes without a resident priest. Many dioceses, particularly in the north and northeast, are anticipating a 50% drop in the number of priests by 2025. Last year,

33 dioceses did not ordain a single new priest. The number of sisters is down to the amount of 100 years ago, and the idea of sacramental marriage is in decline for our young people.

Most parishioners have no idea that they can do anything about the crisis in vocations. They often observe that their priest is exhausted and could use some help. They see very few, if any, consecrated sisters serving in the schools or at church. Most know that people are not marrying in the Church as often, but many do not recognize that they have the power to make a difference in vocations – right there in their parishes.

## Where do vocations begin?

You may be asking, “Why should we focus on the parish?” Saint John Paul II said, “The family is the seedbed of vocations.” And who is best equipped to encourage and promote vocations in the family? A parish-based ministry! We need to connect in a real way with the families and children of the parish, the seedbed.

According to the 2019 Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) Ordination Class Report, about 70% of those newly ordained first considered being a priest between birth and 18 years of age.<sup>1</sup> This highlights the importance of engaging and encouraging religious vocations early in life, when young people are still at home and more likely to be active in parish life.

Unfortunately, only 10-20% of parishes nationwide have an entity promoting vocations. Each new ministry or committee makes a big difference in the overall number of new priests, consecrated men and women, and sacramental marriages. In a recent Catholic News Agency article, “7 priests ordained in 7 years: What’s the ‘secret sauce’ at this Ohio parish?”, we discover at St. Mary’s in Hudson, Ohio, the effectiveness of intentionally praying for and fostering vocations in a parish.<sup>2</sup>

## A Jump Start

In my book, *Hundredfold: A Guide to Parish Vocation Ministry*<sup>3</sup>, you will find many suggestions for any individual or group starting or reviving a vocation ministry or committee. The pages are full of ideas and activities proven to help bring about a culture of vocations in parishes.

There are nearly 70 vocation-friendly parish activities organized into the following categories: Prayer, Awareness and Education, Youth, and Affirmation. By holding activities from each type of activity, the work of the ministry is balanced. We need prayer and action for the Holy Spirit to have plenty of opportunity to plant seeds. Let us look at a few activities under each.

## Prayer

Fundamental to everything we do for God is prayer, as an encounter with Jesus Christ is at the root of every vocation. Organizing prayer for vocations is likewise the first step toward a successful ministry which begins by consecrating every meeting and activity to Jesus through the Blessed Mother. Moving outward, committees should blanket the parish, at all levels, with prayer cards for vocations and placing vocation intentions in the prayers of the faithful and the bulletin each week. Parishioners, young and old alike, need plenty of opportunities to pray for vocations, their own or others, in the parish setting. Additional activities include coordinating a seminarian adoption program or organizing adoration for vocations as a ministry grows.

## Awareness and Education

I don’t think that many of our parishioners, cradle Catholics or converts, know what the word “vocation” or “discernment” means, how a priest becomes a priest, or that marriage is a vocation to be discerned as much as the priesthood and consecrated life. This education can happen in traditional ways, such as bulletin inserts and book rack materials. Most priests and sisters today will say that a priest, striving for holiness, was the first to encourage them to think of the priesthood. Therefore, having joyful witnesses to vocations within the parish at all levels is crucial to bring awareness to God’s call. A ministry can unconventionally but effectively evangelize about vocations at a parish festival vocation booths or Lenten Vocations Fish Frys.

## Youth

We know that the pre-teen and teen population are the most likely to be contemplating their future, so keeping vocations in the forefront of their minds is at the heart of a vocation ministry. This can happen at the parish school, religious education classes, youth ministry, at weekend Masses, or all the above. A ministry in its early stages may choose to recognize their altar servers or bring seminarians or religious sisters to the parish school to interact with students

as personal encounters are crucial. Later, a ministry can coordinate a panel discussion for their older youth or a Vocation Bible School: Discovery Mission for their parish.

## Affirmation

Equally important, a ministry should give parishioners ample opportunities to affirm their priests, religious sisters and brothers, and married couples. We want those who have said YES to be joyful in their vocation, whether that is done simply sending spiritual bouquets and cards to a local convent or seminary or more elaborately through an ordination anniversary reception for their pastor or a dance for couples on World Marriage Day.

One of my heroes, Mother Angelica, went through many struggles and times of doubt when starting and running EWTN, said: “Unless you are willing to do the ridiculous, God will not do the miraculous.” My hope is that you will see your part in doing what may seem at first glance to be frivolous or ridiculous to start a new wave of vocations in your parish and across your diocese. ■

1. <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/ordination-class/class-of-2019/upload/Ordination-Class-of-2019-FINAL.pdf>
2. <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/7-priests-ordained-in-7-years-whats-the-secret-sauce-at-this-ohio-parish-62664>
3. Gruenewald, Rhonda. Hundredfold: A Guide to Parish Vocation Ministry. [www.vocationministry.com](http://www.vocationministry.com)



**RHONDA GRUENEWALD**

Is an author and founder of Vocation Ministry, a program offering activities and resources, in English and Spanish, to create a culture of vocations in local parishes.



# Each of us is a Vocation Animator

## A Conversation with Fr. Ferruccio Brambillasca, Superior General of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions

By VOCATIONS AND PRAYER STAFF

### May you share with us about your vocation story?

I was born in the year 1964 in Monza, a city close to Milan. When I was eighteen, I decided to enter the seminary. Six years later, I was ordained a missionary priest in PIME. Soon after my ordination, I was assigned for the first four years to work as a formator in our seminary in South Italy and later for another four years in our Seminary in India. Meanwhile, I completed my doctoral studies in Dogmatic Theology. In 1998, I was assigned to Japan and remained there for fifteen years. In Japan after the initial language course, I worked as a pastor of different Parish communities. Apart from the pastoral work, I was also engaged in teaching and interreligious dialogue. Later, I served the Region of Japan as Regional Superior for five years. In the General Assembly that took place in 2013, I was elected as Superior General for a term of six years. This term of office, for another six years, was reconfirmed in the year 2019 during the XV General Assembly in Rome.

### Describe in a few words the mission and charism of your Institute

Our Institute (which was founded in 1850) is a Society of Apostolic Life and it is an Institute which is exclusively missionary. The missionary charism of our Institute comprises of four main characteristics: *ad gentes* (to those who do not know Christ); *ad extra* (to go and work out of one's own country); *ad vitam* (for life long) and *Insieme* (together as a family of apostles).

Apart from these four pillars that distinguishes us is that the Institute works in areas of mission not to establish its own structures but exclusively foster the growth of the local Churches in close communion with the local bishops. Another important characteristic of the Institute is



its Internationality. The diversity of origins and cultures of our members is indeed a great asset, which portrays the universality of the Church and its mission.

### Where is your Institute present around the world?

Our Institute is present in nineteen countries spread across the five continents. Right from the beginning, a special pref-

erence has been reserved for the Asian continent. In fact, our first missions were in India, China and Myanmar. We continue to get many requests to start new presences in various countries, but being a very small Institute of not more than 450 members, we are unable to answer positively to all the requests.



Photo by Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions

## Describe the presence of your Institute in the United States

PIME arrived in the United States of America in 1947. Since then we have worked in many dioceses and were fruitful even in accepting young men who later went on to become PIME missionaries. For that matter, we even had a Seminary where we had candidates from not only the USA but also from Italy who were sent for studies.

With the decline of personnel in recent times, just around ten PIME missionaries are serving in the dioceses of Detroit, New York and Brooklyn. They work basically in three areas, namely missionary animation of the Local Church, pastoral work amongst the ethnic minorities and fundraising for the needs of the missions.

## Are you seeing an increased interest in vocations to religious life in your Institute around the world? If so, is it mostly young people who are considering a vocation?

As mentioned earlier, we are at the service and the development of Local Churches hence our priority is not to gather vocations for the Institute. Nevertheless, in the recent past, many young people in the missions have come forward with a desire to begin a vocation journey with our Insti-

tute. At times if we perceive that the Local Churches need vocations, we encourage the young people to join the seminaries of their respective dioceses. Our intention is not to 'snatch away' vocations from the missions where we work. But at times when young people are inspired by the style of life and the work of our missionaries and they insist upon joining our Institute, we welcome them and help them realize their missionary vocation even though they come from Churches that lack local clergy.

## In which places of the world have your Institute seen the greatest increase in vocations?

Our Institute, which was founded in Italy, always had numerous vocations and later on, vocations came from Brazil and the USA. Since the past twenty years, there has been a drastic decline in the number of vocations for our Institute from these three countries; meanwhile, there has been a considerable increase in the number of vocations from India and a few of the African countries (Cameroun, Ivory Coast, and Guinea Bissau). For instance, in India we have a Major Seminary and two Formation Communities with more than a hundred candidates; not forgetting a few scores of young men in formation in other mission territories. The whole phenomenon surely is a sign of hope for our Institute for the next few years.

## What about vocations to religious life in your Institute in the United States?

As I said earlier, many years ago, we have had many vocations from the USA. Some of these confreres worked in our missions and at present, there are around ten American confreres still working in Brazil, India, Japan and Papua New Guinea. Unfortunately, in recent years, we did not have any vocations from the US. Since the missionary nature of the Church is real and always present in the communities, we still hope that many young people, desiring to proclaim the Gospel to non-Christians, will come forward to dedicate their lives to the missions.

## As a Superior General, you have several meetings with superiors of other Congregations around the world. What is your impression about the general trend of vocations to men/women religious life?

In recent years, I have had the chance of participating in various meetings with Superior Generals of different religious Congregations. We have also reflected together on the theme of vocations. It is noteworthy observing that in almost all the Congregations the vocations are predominantly from Africa and Asia; while there is a startling decrease of vocations in Europe and the Americas. Even the Superiors themselves





Photo by Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions

who once upon a time were from the Americas or Europe, today most of them are from Africa and Asia.

What I discovered in the different meetings of the Superiors is that the new generation of young people who seek to enter our formative communities are those in search of an authentic life, a family (the religious congregation), of closeness to the poor and of a lifestyle based on simplicity. Congregations that have been attentive to listen and respond to the quest of such youth have been able to gather vocations to consecrated life.

I believe there are still many young people in different parts of the world who desire to serve God through a specific way of life in the Church. At the same time, there is also an urgent need for all religious Congregations to be an authentic and uncompromising point of reference for these young people!

**According to your experience and charism, what are the main points for effective pastoral care for vocations to religious life today?**

I think that even our Institute, if it still wants to attract young people to missionary life, must first remain faithful to its missionary vocation. In concrete terms, it

means that our confreres must always be ready to go to the missions, with a great sense of detachment, ready to face difficulties and endure sacrifices. And all this, with the spirit of joy and happiness.

Furthermore, as we often say, each of us is a vocation animator. To be effective animators we should always keep fixed in our minds that someone has to continue our work. If we are conscious of this fact, we can be sure that vocations will come.

**How are the activities of the pastoral care for vocations organized in your Institute?**

I wish to enlist a few pastoral and vocational animation activities that we do in different parts of the world:

- In some countries where we are present, we have full time personnel engaged in vocation animation. These animators, apart from organizing specific meetings or visits to the parishes, also guide young people in their vocational discernment.
- We even have confreres who though not full time animators are kind enough to welcome young people into their communities and help them discern their vocation.
- In many countries where we work, we have specific communities for vocational

discernment (prior to their admission to the seminary). Such communities that are generally taken care of by one of our young confreres, also provide time and space for prayer, study and common life. Normally, these communities are attached to some of our Parishes.

- Especially in Italy, we have specific programs of vocational discernment, such as the Biblical Journey, the Discernment Program, and many other initiatives. Among the many other initiatives, two of them need a special mention:
  - a. "Youth and Mission" is a two-year formation program that concludes with a period of experience in our missions for the young people;
  - b. "Presence in the Universities" through which some of our young confreres guide many young people through spiritual direction and counseling thus contributing to missionary animation and vocational discernment. ■

# Crisis or Opportunity?

## Our Response to Covid-19



By JOHN M. RINALDO, D. MIN

This moment in history is “a time to choose what matters in life and what passes away, a time to separate what is necessary from what is not. It is a time to get our lives back on track with regard to you.” -Pope Francis

“Do not be afraid.” -The Bible, 365 times

There is no doubt that Covid-19 has upended the way we do Church today. In a matter of weeks, everything, literally everything has changed.

Mass? Cancelled and live-streamed.

Faith formation and sacramental preparation? Gone.

Working in the parish office? Not possible.

Schools? Closed.

Interacting on a daily basis with parishioners, co-workers, friends, and family? Absolutely out of the question.

None of us are doing Church the same way we were when Lent began. And we are all winging it. There is not a single one of us that took a seminary or graduate level course on how to lead Church during a pandemic. Yet, the Bible and Pope Francis remind us to not be afraid. During a crisis is when true leadership is revealed. How do you and I respond during this crisis? Do we go into hiding, wait until it's all gone, then come out of our cave and pretend nothing happened? Or, do we step into the crisis and begin to see and act with new eyes?

One thing is true: This is a crisis AND this is an opportunity.

Just think:

- Two months ago, most parishes did not have the capability to stream live Masses. Now many do.
- Two months ago, most parishes had no idea how to use Zoom or other video technology. Now, many have embraced this technology.
- Two months ago, most parishes depended on face-to-face “classes” for children’s faith formation and youth ministry. Now, many parishes have put formation in the hands of parents.

A crisis exposes the vulnerabilities of any Church almost immediately. At the same time, a crisis exposes creative ingenuity from its leaders as we all begin to re-imagine parish life. In my work with



# Catechists as Vocation Promoters

## 1. Introduction

Catholic educators, priests, consecrated persons, parents, and teachers have a great responsibility promoting vocations. The catechists' mission is particularly important. Their service is fundamental for the orientation of young people to answer their vocation. Let us pray to the Lord of the harvest to enlighten and support all those who have educational responsibilities in our parish community, especially catechists.

## 2. Exposition/Eucharistic song

*Brief silent adoration prayer (kneeling before the Holy Sacrament)*

## 3. Liturgy of the Word

*The presiding minister then goes to the chair, where he prays the following opening prayer:*

### Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Good Shepherd of our souls, you who know your sheep and how to reach our hearts, open the minds and hearts of young people searching for and awaiting a word of truth for their lives. Let them understand that only in you do they find full light and meaning in life. You who lives and reigns with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever, Amen.

### A Reading from the First Letter of St. John (1: 1-4)

### Responsorial Psalm (or an appropriate song)

*Psalm 8:2ab and 5, 6-7, 8-9*

### R. O Lord, our God, how wonderful your name in all the earth!

O Lord, our Lord,  
how glorious is your name over all the earth!  
What is man that you should be mindful of him,  
or the son of man that you should care for him? **R.**

You have made him little less than the angels,  
and crowned him with glory and honor.  
You have given him rule over the works of your hands,  
putting all things under his feet. **R.**

All sheep and oxen,  
yes, and the beasts of the field,  
The birds of the air, the fishes of the sea,  
and whatever swims the paths of the seas. **R.**

## 4. Meditation

### A Reading from the Writings of Saint John Paul II (see p. 18, #1)

### Homily

## 5. Adoration/Prayer Time

*Silent Prayer (The Rosary may also be said here, whole or part)*

## Intercessions

God has made an everlasting covenant with his people, and he never ceases to bless them. Grateful for these gifts, we confidently direct our prayer to him:

*Lord, bless your people.*

- Lord Jesus, through baptism you conferred on us a royal priesthood, inspire us to offer you a continual sacrifice of praise, let us pray:
- Send workers into your vineyard, and glorify your name among the nations, let us pray:
- Let your ordained ministers grow toward perfect love, and preserve your faithful people in unity by the bond of peace, let us pray:
- Lord Jesus, grant our catechists an intimate experience with you, so that they can announce you with the testimony of their life, and educate young people to respond generously to your call, let us pray:
- Lord Jesus, give intelligence and wisdom to the parents that they may know how to instill in their children's hearts the beauty of the vocation to priestly ministry and to consecrated life, let us pray:
- May our young people be concerned with remaining blameless in your sight, and may they generously follow your call, let us pray:
- May our children imitate your example, and grow in wisdom and grace, let us pray:
- Mary, your mother, was obedient to your word, bless our young people and help them to share in Mary's openness to God's voice, let us pray:

*(Other intercessions may be offered here)*

Our Father...

God our Father, look at your people with merciful eyes as we implore you for the gift of vocations. Bless our families, our priests, catechists, and teachers. In the midst of life's countless changes, strengthen us with your never-changing love. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever, Amen.

### Community Prayer for Vocations (kneeling before the Holy Sacrament)

O Jesus, Good Shepherd of the Church, we entrust our catechists to you. Under the guidance of our Bishops and priests, may they help those entrusted to them to discover the true meaning of the Christian life as a vocation, so that, open and attentive to your voice, they may follow you generously. Bless our parishes, make them living communities where prayer and liturgical life, attentive and faith-filled hearing of your word and generous and fruitful charity may become the fertile field for an abundant harvest of vocations. You who lives and reigns with God the Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever, Amen.

## 6. Benediction/Reposition

# The Family as Nursery of Vocations

### 1. Introduction

The main mission of Catholic families is the education of new generations, hope and future of society and Church. Parents are the first models and teachers of faith for their children. By helping them to grow in faith, they also help them recognize and develop the seeds of vocation that the Spirit continues to place in the hearts of young people. The pastoral care of vocations finds its first natural sphere in the family. The family is the natural "nursery" of vocations.

### 2. Exposition/Eucharistic song

*Brief silent adoration prayer (kneeling before the Holy Sacrament)*

### 3. Liturgy of the Word

*The presiding minister then goes to the chair, where he prays the following opening prayer:*

#### Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, to you we entrust our families. Open their hearts to the faith, help them to welcome in their lives the word of God, and make them Christian witnesses, so that they may become a source of new and holy vocations. You who lives and reigns with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever, Amen.

**From the Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians (5:21-33;6:1-4)**

**Responsorial Psalm** (or an appropriate song)

*Psalm 128:1-2, 3, 4-5*

### R. Blessed are those who fear the Lord.

Blessed are you who fear the Lord,  
who walk in his ways!  
For you shall eat the fruit of your handiwork;  
blessed shall you be, and favored. **R.**

Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine  
in the recesses of your home;  
Your children like olive plants  
around your table. **R.**

Behold, thus is the man blessed  
who fears the Lord.  
The Lord bless you from Zion:  
may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem  
all the days of your life. **R.**

### 4. Meditation

**A Reading from the writings of Saint John Paul II** (see p. 18, #2)

#### Homily

### 5. Adoration/Prayer Time

**Silent Prayer** (The Rosary may also be said here, whole or part)

### Intercessions

The son of the living God let himself become the son of a human family. Let us pray to him:

*Lord, you are our example and our savior.*

- Lord Jesus, you came to announce the Good News of God to the world: make people now more than ever proclaim your word, and ever more people hear it. Let us pray:
- Lord Jesus, you loved your parents and they loved you: may every family stand firm and peaceful in mutual love. Let us pray:
- You gave Mary the joy of motherhood; give all parents true joy in their children. Let us pray:
- Lord Jesus Christ, after two days your parents found you in your Father's temple: teach us to seek the kingdom of God before all else. Let us pray:
- Touch the hearts of parents, so that with prompt charity, wise care, and loving devotion they may be for their sons and daughters steady guides towards spiritual and eternal values. Let us pray:
- Stir up in the hearts of young people a right conscience and a free will, so that growing in "wisdom, age and grace," they might welcome generously the gift of a divine vocation. Let us pray.

*(Other intercessions may be offered here)*

Our Father...

Lord Jesus Christ, help us follow and fulfill the will of God. Grant us the wisdom of the heart to accompany with foresighted sensitivity those among us who are called to follow you more closely in priestly ministry and consecrated life. You who lives and reigns with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever, Amen.

**Community Prayer for Vocations** (kneeling before the Holy Sacrament)

O God, you called men and women to dedicate their lives to you through priesthood and religious life. Continue to stir up the grace of a religious vocation in the hearts of many within our families. Grant them the willingness and generosity to place their lives completely in your hands as priests, religious brothers and sisters. Help us to support them by our own fidelity to your call to holiness through prayer and Christian service. If you desire that one of my family or friends follow you in this way, grant me the wisdom and insight to support and encourage that person to listen to your voice and follow you without delay. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

### 6. Benediction/Reposition



# Communities Promoting Vocations

## 1. Introduction

For many young people, disoriented by consumerism and the crisis of ideals, the choice of a serious and committed lifestyle can mature if supported by the coherent and joyful testimony of their parish community. Then, it is easy for them to open their hearts and welcome with generosity the gift of vocation to the priesthood or consecrated life. Let us pray to the Lord of the harvest to make our community fruitful of vocations and dedicated to God for the evangelization of new generations.

## 2. Exposition/Eucharistic song

*Brief silent adoration prayer (kneeling before the Holy Sacrament)*

## 3. Liturgy of the Word

*The presiding minister then goes to the chair, where he prays the following opening prayer:*

### Opening Prayer

May the dew of your grace descend upon your Church, Lord God our Father, and allow us to grow in your love and in the love of our neighbors. Grant us, O God, the grace to live in our community with a spirit of faithful service and of total gift, so that our witness will be credible and bear fruit. You who lives and reigns with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever, Amen.

*A Reading from the Acts of the Apostles (4, 32-35)*

*Responsorial Psalm (or an appropriate song)*

*Psalm 83:3-5, 10-11*

## R. How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord, mighty God!

My soul yearns and pines  
for the courts of the Lord.  
My heart and my flesh  
cry out for the living God. **R.**

Even the sparrow finds a home,  
and the swallow a nest  
in which she puts her young,  
Your altars, O Lord of hosts,  
my king and my God! **R.**

Blessed they who dwell in your house!  
continually they praise you.  
O God, behold our shield,  
and look upon the face of your anointed. **R.**

I had rather one day in your courts  
than a thousand elsewhere;  
I had rather lie at the threshold of the house of my God  
than dwell in the tents of the wicked. **R.**

## 4. Meditation

*A Reading from the Writings of Saint John Paul II (see p. 18, #3)*

## Homily

## 5. Adoration/Prayer Time

*Silent Prayer (The Rosary may also be said here, whole or part)*

### Intercessions

Brethren, let us pray to the Lord Jesus, Master of the harvest; let us ask him:

*Most loving Lord, have mercy on us.*

- Lord Jesus, you are the stone rejected by the builders which became the chief cornerstone, make us living stones in the temple of your Church.
- Lord Jesus, send the Holy Spirit upon your Church, preserve it in the unity of charity and in the fullness of truth.
- Through your resurrection you confirmed the faith of your disciples and sent them out into the world, making all bishops and priests faithful preachers of the Gospel.
- Through your resurrection you became our peace and reconciliation, unite the baptized in perfect communion of faith and love.
- Call men to serve at your altar, and to follow you more closely in chastity, poverty and obedience.
- Take care of your handmaidens vowed to virginity that they may follow you, the divine Lamb, wherever you go.
- Send laborers into your harvest, Lord, to teach the truth to all nations, and to baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

*(Other intercessions may be offered here)*

Our Father...

Lord Jesus, look, upon our whole human family and show your mercy to your Church: make her fruitful of numerous and holy vocations dedicated to the preaching of the Gospel and to the service of charity. You who lives and reigns with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever, Amen.

*Community Prayer for Vocations (kneeling before the Holy Sacrament)*

Lord, you have willed to save men and have founded the Church as a communion of brothers and sisters united in your Love. Continue to walk in our midst and call those whom you have chosen to be the voice of your Holy Spirit and leaven of a more just and fraternal society. Obtain for us from the heavenly Father the spiritual guides, which our communities need: true priests of the living God who, illuminated by your Word, will be able to speak of you and teach others to speak with you. Make your Church grow by means of a flourishing of consecrated persons, who will give all things over to you so that you might save all. May our communities celebrate the Eucharist in song and praise, as thanksgiving to your glory and goodness, and may they know how to walk the paths of the world to communicate joy and Peace, precious gifts of your salvation, Amen.

## 6. Benediction/Reposition

## Readings for Meditation

### 1. From the Message of Saint John Paul II for the XXVIII World Day of Prayer for Vocations, 1991

#### *Catechesis and Vocations*

I wish my words to reach all those whom the Holy Spirit calls to cooperate with him: Christian parents, priests, religious and the many lay people involved in education. I especially desire that this exhortation should reach the hearts and minds of the many catechists who generously collaborate with the Church's Pastors in all the particular Churches in the great work of evangelizing each new generation.

Dear catechists, how important and delicate your mission is! The children and young people entrusted to you depend on your service for their growth and development as Christians. In the Church, catechesis is needed so that the word of God, the Sacraments, the Liturgy and the duties proper to the Christian life may be properly known. But there is also a need, especially at certain moments of young people's development, for a catechesis which offers guidance in choosing a state of life. For only in the light of faith and of prayer can we grasp the meaning and the power of God's individual calls. May your ministry as catechists be carried out in faith, nourished by prayer and sustained by genuine Christian living; may you become experts in speaking to today's young people, and may you be effective and credible teachers in presenting the Gospel ideal as a universal vocation and in shedding light on the meaning and value of the various vocations to the consecrated life.

[...]

I urge parents to cooperate with catechists by providing a family environment rooted in faith and prayer, so as to guide their children's whole lives in accordance with the demands of the Christian vocation. Each particular vocation is, in fact, a great gift of God which comes into their home.

Finally, the entire Christian community, with authentic missionary fervour, should recognize the seeds of vocation which the Holy Spirit never ceases to sow in human hearts, and it should strive to create, especially by unremitting and trusting prayer, a climate which will help adolescents and young people to hear God's voice and respond to it with generosity and courage.

### 2. From the Message of Saint John Paul II for the XXXI World Day of Prayer for Vocations, 1994

#### *The Family: First Seminary*

The pastoral care of vocations finds its first and natural setting in the family. Indeed, parents should know how to welcome as a grace the gift which God gives them in calling one of their sons or daughters to the priesthood or religious life. Such a grace must be asked for in prayer and received actively, by means of an education which allows the young people to perceive all the richness and joy of consecrating oneself to God.

Parents, who welcome the call of a son or daughter to a special consecration for the kingdom of heaven with a sense of gratitude and joy, receive a special sign of the spiritual fruitfulness of their union, as they see it enriched by the experience of love lived out in celibacy and virginity.

These parents discover with amazement that the gift of their love is, as it were, multiplied, thanks to the sacred vocation of their children,

beyond the limited dimensions of human love.

To bring families to the awareness of this important aspect of their mission requires a pastoral activity aimed at leading spouses and parents to be "witnesses and co-operators of the fruitfulness of mother Church, as a sign of, and a share in that love with which Christ loved his bride and gave himself for her" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 41).

The family is the natural "nursery" of vocations. Pastoral care of the family, therefore, should direct a very special attention to the properly vocational aspect of its task.

### 3. From the Message of Saint John Paul II for the XXXIII World Day of Prayer for Vocations, 1996

#### *Vocations are Born in the Parish Community*

Every vocation is born, is nourished and develops in the Church and is linked to the Church in its origin, growth, purpose and mission. For this reason diocesan and parish communities are called to strengthen their commitment to vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life, especially with the proclamation of the Word, the celebration of the sacraments and the witness of charity. They should also keep in mind some of the necessary conditions for an authentic pastoral care of vocations.

In the first place, one condition is that the *community know how to listen to the Word of God* in order to receive the divine light which gives direction to the heart of man. Sacred Scripture is a sure guide, when it is read, welcomed and meditated upon in the Church. Coming to know the events involving the major figures of the Bible and, above all, the reading of the Gospels provide moments of unexpected insights and permit radical personal choices. When the Bible becomes the book of the community then it is easier to hear and comprehend the voice of God who calls.

It is necessary, furthermore, that *communities know how to pray intensely* for fulfilment of the will of God, accenting the primacy of the spiritual life in daily existence. Prayer offers precious energies towards giving a positive welcome to the Lord's invitation to put oneself at the service of the spiritual, moral and material good of humanity. Liturgical experience is the principal way to educate for prayer. When the liturgy remains isolated it risks impoverishment; but if it is joined with prolonged periods of personal prayer and silence, passed in the presence of the Lord, it becomes the high road which leads to communion with God. The liturgy must become the centre of Christian existence, in order that through it there be created an atmosphere favourable to the making of important decisions.

The community should also be sensitive to the *missionary dimension*, taking upon itself the burden of the salvation of those who do not yet know Christ, the Redeemer of mankind. In a living and widespread missionary sensitivity there is found another basis for the coming to be and the strengthening of vocations. [...]

Finally the community must be open to the *service of the poor*. In presenting the most authentic face of the Christian community committed in all its members to helping brothers and sisters who are tried by need and by suffering, a style of humility, of self-denial, proper to a choice in favor of the poor, contributes towards the creation of an environment particularly favorable to welcoming the gift of a vocation.



parishes and dioceses across the country over the past two months as we dealt with Covid-19, there are three main vulnerabilities that have become apparent almost everywhere.

### 1. Our database for our parishioners is severely out of date.

For the first time ever, we could not depend on seeing our parishioners face-to-face. That means we had to find other means of connecting with them. What we discovered is that we don't have accurate email addresses or phone numbers. When our parishioners need us most, we can't connect with them.

**Take away:** What we have learned through this time is that we need to be much more intentional about gathering accurate data on our parishioners so that we can build a relationship with them that is not solely dependent on seeing them on Sunday. Now is the time to begin not only calling our parishioners to check in on them, but to also update our data. This will need to continue post Covid-19.

### 2. We've lost our revenue stream completely.

Every parish is dependent on the weekend offertory to fund our mission of making disciples. These funds are used to pay staff, keep the lights on, and for a myriad of other things. Now, parishes have little revenue because we don't have Mass.

**Take away:** We need robust online giving platforms at every parish so that people can give online and regularly whether or not they go to Mass on Sunday. This is true even when we are not dealing with Covid-19. Many parishes made this move quickly and have kept up with their offertory budget. One parish I work with in particular has gotten their Covid-19 revenue up to 95% of their original revenue projections. Online giving is the gold standard for any parish to embrace. Envelopes will eventually go the way of the Dodo bird (extinction) and we must move now to these online platforms.

### 3. We have not used technology as an effective means of evangelization.

Now, we don't have a choice. The only way we can connect with people and offer Masses and formation is via technology.

**Take away:** In a matter of two weeks, parishes went from zero miles per hour to 100 miles per hour in their use of technology. Parishes that were kicking and screaming going into using technology are now experts (relatively speaking). Catholic leaders across the country have now seen the power of these technologies as a way to evangelize. Not only are parishes offering online Masses, but I've seen parishes do rosaries, novenas, and adorations through technology. I have seen parishes develop virtual youth nights, bible studies, and other formation opportunities through these means. And many parishes are holding staff meetings, parish council meetings, and ministry team meetings via these technology tools. The creativity I have seen with the use of technology has literally been endless.

Some ministry leaders might see the three topics from above as a problem. A true leader sees these things as an opportunity. Parishes have changed the way they do Church in a matter of weeks which otherwise would have taken years, if not decades, to embrace.

### The Big Takeaway:

When Covid-19 ends, how will we be doing Church differently than we did pre-Covid-19?

If you and I go back to our normal pre-Covid-19 way of life after Covid-19 is gone, then we missed this opportunity. We wasted it. Many of us are still sheltering in place. Our parish campuses are closed. Now is the time to begin planning for the world of the Church after Covid-19. We may not know when we can get back on campus and begin offering ministry face-to-face again. Maybe that will happen this summer, or this fall,

or, God forbid, not until 2021. But now is the time to plan.

Here are a few steps I recommend taking immediately:

1. Reflect on your own what you have learned about Church and ministry during Covid-19. What are your own takeaways? Write them down. Encourage your team and staff to do the same thing.
2. Get your staff together (via technology of course) and share what each of you have learned thus far. Then, start brainstorming about the vision for your parish post Covid-19. What are the things you are doing now during Covid-19 that you will take with you into the future?
3. If you have not done so already, call, don't email, all your parishioners and check in on them. People are isolated and human beings are not meant for it. Introverts are more likely to embrace this time more than extroverts, but the reality is that we all need human contact.

I continue to believe that, as tragic as Covid-19 has been to people's health and the economy, there is always great opportunity in the midst of the darkness. As Catholics, we are experiencing our own Good Friday due to the virus. But, ultimately, we are an Easter people.

We know that God wins in the end.

Do not be afraid. Embrace the unknown. See the light at the end of the tunnel and lead your parish through the darkness and into the light of Easter. ■



JOHN M. RINALDO, D. MIN

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# Augustinian Recollects

## Walking in the Footsteps of Saint Augustine

By FRAY JORGE MATEOS, OAR

The Augustinian Recollects are a Religious Order formed by one thousand religious who, living fraternal life in community, want to follow Christ, chaste, poor, and obedient. They seek the truth and are at the service of the Church; they strive to grow in charity according to the charism of Saint Augustine and the intensity of the recollection, movement of interiority and evangelical radicalism.

### Origin and charism

In the sixteenth century, some Augustinian religious of the Province of Castile, impelled by a special shared calling, wished to live with renewed fervor and new standards the form of consecrated life that St. Augustine founded in the Church, contained in his doctrine, shown in his example and ordered in his holy Rule. Something similar happened, at the beginning of the 17th century, in the Augustinian Province of Colombia.

The Augustinian Recollects are heirs of the way of life inspired by St. Augustine (354-430) and assumed in the thirteenth century with a mendicant spirit by the Order of St. Augustine (Great Union of 1256). After more than three centuries of history, in 1912, the Augustinian Recollects were recognized by the Church as an autonomous religious order.

Our way of life is simple, quite normal, and every day. There are no differences in our houses; we are all equals, and we feel ourselves to be equal; in the houses there are no outsiders, nor private property which any other members of the community cannot share.

Praying in common the Liturgy of the Hours and the celebration of the Eucharist give structure to our day. However many tasks and responsibilities we may have, we don't go without sitting around the table

for a chat after meals. Everyone shares in the various jobs entrusted to the community, according to the place and the duties each person has.

It's not all just praying, working, and enjoying each other's company. We also dedicate part of our time to study, good sons of St. Augustine as we are. It's that knowing more enables us to serve better, gives us more freedom, and helps us to understand ourselves better as persons and to understand the world around us.

### World Presence

There are about 1,000 of us in the Order, which is divided into four provinces, spread over nineteen countries in four continents: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Spain, United States, Philippines, Guatemala, England, Italy, Mexico, Panama, Peru, the Dominican Republic, Sierra Leone, Taiwan, and Venezuela.

We belong to the province of St. Nicholas of Tolentino. We can be found in seven countries: Brazil, China, Costa Rica, Spain, United States, England, and Mexico. Over 300 religious make up the province.

### Vocations

The personal vocational process is something very intimate, personal, and different for everyone. In our houses there are vocational animators with whom you can talk for the first time. In each zone, there are also one or several vocations promoters who will start a personalized search to see whether or not you really are called to this life.

Whoever makes the decision to follow Jesus as an Augustinian Recollect enters in a process of formation and guidance according to the IVAR (Augustinian Recollect Vocational Program, from its initials in Spanish), prior to entering a formation

house.

Generally speaking, to arrive at being an Augustinian Recollect means passing through three stages: an aspirancy, in which one begins to know our way of life; a postulancy, for those who have a clearer idea about their option to follow Jesus as an Augustinian Recollect and thereby begin our particular course of studies; and a novitiate, an full year of deep spiritual experience and thorough knowledge of our way of life, our history, and our laws.

### St Augustine Postulancy and Initial process

At the end of the novitiate the first profession is made, by which one becomes an Augustinian recollect, a member of the Order. Following on from this profession, there is a time of initial formation that lasts for at least three years. Everything is designed as a preparation for the final step, the solemn profession: the one who makes this makes a life-long commitment as an Augustinian Recollect. ■



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# The Spirit will be Poured on All Flesh

## The Point of Joel's Prophecy



*By Fr. ISAAC KALINA, OSB*

Despite the fact that very little is actually known about the Prophet Joel, scholars can scarcely agree that he lived close to a thousand years before Christ; he still remains the most popular among all the ancient prophets because his message was the most clear-cut, poignant and simple to understand. Our Joel, the son of Pethuel, who preached mainly to the people of Judah, expressed a particular interest in Jerusalem and was very familiar with sacrifice and worship in the Temple. The

prophet Joel, whose name means 'The Lord is God,' has been given a nickname or two; he is called the Prophet of Pentecost and of Visions since his words were echoed when Christ filled and amazed the early Church with the Promised Paraclete, the Spirit of truth.

### "The Day of the Lord"

As a contemporary of the Prophet Elisha, Joel is one of the earliest writing prophets. He gives some of the most striking details in the Holy Scriptures about 'the

day of the Lord," a specific season 'cloaked in darkness, with armies conquering and consuming like fire and the moon turning to blood.' His unique style is unmistakable for nobody is as descriptive of that "dark and terrible day," not before or after or since. Not even the Apostle John, the author of the Book of Revelation, comes close to Joel in his more than vivid manner of expressing the heart of the divinity through poor, plain human language.

Joel's writing seems to build on nature, the images of the sun, moon, the grass,

other cosmic portents--demonstrating an understanding of the reality that truth has a significant impact on this world. Joel wanted his readers to anticipate that unmistakable gushing-forth, that high tide of God's presence that would flood the early Church just as Jesus Christ said it would when he explained to the Twelve the purpose of His journey to Jerusalem, the Paschal Mystery, Ascension or His departure. Joel tries to get his people to realize that God wants to saturate us with Himself, with the Gift of His Spirit.

### A Natural Disaster to Wake People Up

We have at the start of the Book of Joel an account of a unique "current event"--a snapshot in hindsight of a moment that actually took place--one not easily forgotten, because it is branded into their common memory, not too different from the bombing of Pearl Harbor or the September 11th terrorist attacks. Here, in Joel's preaching we find a real devastating plague, an invasion of locusts which historically took place in Joel's time-window and can be verified through artifacts, other historical data and eyewitnesses who experienced it.

And so, our prophet is using his preaching in a similar way as a newspaper-clipping does, becoming a record of and a sacred memorial of what took place on that horrible day and he tried to make sense of it. Joel is using it as a catalyst to prepare them for an even more devastating invasion to come from a fearless and terrible army commanded by the Lord Himself. The locust tragedy is the backdrop for Joel's urgent demands for repentance, and the reason why a reading from Joel's prophecy is regularly included at the beginning of the Lenten Season to encourage us toward an attitude and disposition of true contrition and compunction.

Joel wants the mood he set by his first chapter to turn around, from gloom and doom to hope in the second chapter where God calls the people to return to Him with their whole hearts. He will have compassion on His people again and again so that His people may know that He is the Lord their God. The gist of Joel's

preaching is that God will judge them, yes, and save them as well. In layman's terms, he probably would have said, "If you desire to be part of those who are saved, then you all better turn to Him, and He will turn to you."

Much of people's lives was spent 'having a good time' and getting drunk, so Joel tells them, "Wake up, you drunkards, and weep!" These people were bringing their grain, their offerings and sacrifices like good Hebrews were required to do by law. They rent their garments (and still do to this day), they took long penitential fasts, weeping and mourning...But their hearts were far from God! This is what the Lord indicted them for through Isaiah, who came on the scene to prophesy right after Joel. So, like in Isaiah's case, it took the death of a king to be able to see who the real King was, in the same way for Joel's time it took a natural disaster of epic proportions to wake people up! God has His ways of bringing His people around, and He cannot let them go since He loves them as His own. This relationship with God was their very pride and identity as Jews.

For a devout Jew, being cut off from offering sacrifices was far more serious than any other loss imaginable, for daily sacrifices guaranteed them the special covenant-relationship with God. As long as they were able to offer sacrifice, they thought the Lord had to keep His part of the bargain and continue to take care of them with His blessings. But when sacrifices are taken away, there was no guarantee of any blessing from the Lord above.

God was trying to communicate to Joel's readers that God indeed cares for the complete, the whole person, not just a part or only the "good" part of ourselves. The people who heard Joel's warning had a real physical need since that disaster had destroyed all their food and any hope for a future. But they had an even greater spiritual need that they may have not even realized. God cared for the whole person: both physical and spiritual.

### A Prophecy about Pentecost

But, the focus and magnificent end highlighted by Joel's prophetic means are important enough that nine hundred years later, the very Spirit of which he spoke, inspired the Apostle Peter on the Day of Pentecost, so that Christ's Rock found it necessary to call to mind its very fulfillment, as quoted in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. When Joel says that God will pour out his Spirit on all flesh, he basically meant that God would one day draw nearer and closer to his people than ever before; Joel wanted us to know that this is how God gets our attention, not quietly, but in a very powerful and blatant way! Such an experience of God is not only for the professional spiritual elite. The point of Joel's prophecy is that the Spirit will be poured on all flesh--over all created things--whether you are man, woman, old or young, servant or master; the promise is for us all. And, no one would ever be excluded on that day.

Joel's book of signs and portents is like a manual of instruction for anyone seeking God and meaning in this life with so many choices and options. We are all living in this valley of tears, blessed with talents, pummeled by our countless questions and the remembrance of experiences that cost us more than a monetary price. For anyone praying for or struggling with a vocation to priesthood, religious life or marriage or a secular living-out the message of the Gospel... God speaks to us right where we happen to be here and now! And He still speaks to us today through others, through natural disasters, the tragic misfortunes of others, through loss, struggle, disease and disappointment... This is precisely where we find God and His will! ■



**FR. ISAAC KALINA, OSB**

Is a native Californian who became a Benedictine monk at St. Andrew's Abbey in Valyermo in 1984. He has worn many hats: Prior, Subprior, Kitchenmaster, Youth Director, Asst. Novicemaster, Vocation Director & Junior master. Fr. Isaac holds a Master's in Addictions Counseling.



# “My Soul Proclaims the Greatness of the Lord”

## Discovering God’s Plan of Salvation for Us

By SR. EMILY BEATA MARSH, FSP

*“For he has looked upon his handmaid’s lowliness...the Mighty One has done great things for me”*

Luke 1:48

There is a prayer that priests and religious brothers and sisters pray every evening—the Magnificat. This prayer came first from the lips and the heart of Mary, the mother of Jesus. When Mary travels to visit her cousin, Elizabeth calls her blessed for believing in the promise of God. Mary’s response is the prayer that the Church continues to pray every evening.

The Magnificat is a truly beautiful prayer. It’s really poetry, and the words themselves can lift us up to God. But it’s more than that. It is salvation history taking place in the life of one person. It is the story of the salvation that God is working out for his people reflected in the experience, the words, the heart of one person.

This is reflective of something that I have been praying about for a long time, and that is the saving action of God in the world and in my life. God is always saving—it is who he is. Think about when the angel Gabriel reveals Jesus’ name to Mary and Joseph. In the Gospel of Matthew, Gabriel appears to Joseph in a dream and says, “She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Mt 1:21). Jesus’ saving action is as intimately connected to him as his name.

What does it mean that God saves? I have found two primary meanings to that phrase, “God saves.” The first is that God is at work on a big scale to save the world and all people in it. Sometimes it can be easy to forget that God is in charge. Illness, accidents, tragedies, and natural disasters

dominate the news, and we can’t always see the good that comes out of these things. But faith tells us that God is bigger than us, our countries, or world events, and that he has our good and the good of the whole world at heart. St. Paul says, “We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28). We are invited to believe that God is present and working in the world to bring the whole world to himself.

We are invited to believe this on the smaller scale of our own lives, as well. “God saves” means that God is constantly at work to save me. None of the events of my life are outside God’s plan of salvation for me. Think about this for a minute—think about what happens in your life in a given day, week, month, year. These very real events are how God is saving you, because his salvation is real. This is true for those things, people, and events that bring us joy, and for those that bring us sorrow. God does not will our pain and sorrow. He is, however, bigger than our pain able to save us in and through it.

What does this have to do with discernment? Everything. If God is working out his salvation in every aspect of my life, then this means that he is working out his salvation through my discernment and through my vocation. A few months ago, I realized in prayer how closely connected vocation is to salvation. God is saving me by calling me to be a Daughter of St. Paul. For my brother and sister-in-law, God is saving them by calling them to the vocation of marriage. The invitation to discern your vocation is likewise an expression of God’s salvation in your life.

I have two recommendations for discernment in this light. The first is to write your own story of salvation. What have been the

major (and maybe not so major!) events in your life up to this point? How has God been present in these events? What have you learned about God, and about yourself? How have you encountered him? As you answer these questions, you will begin to see the story of your salvation emerge.

The second suggestion is to write your own Magnificat. As you ponder your story of salvation, what rises up in your heart? Mary said things like, “The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name” and “The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty.” What would you say?

Blessed James Alberione, the founder of my community, once looked back on his own story of salvation saying, “Everything is God’s: everything leads us to the Magnificat.” May this be our sentiment, too, as we gaze at God’s work in our discernment and our vocation. *My God, everything is yours—my discernment, my vocation, my life. Everything is yours and everything leads to the Magnificat. My soul glorifies you! Amen.* ■



SR. EMILY BEATA MARSH, FSP

Professed her final vows in June 2018. Sister Emily is currently the National Vocation Director for the Daughters of St. Paul.

# Being “too much of a Catholic”

## Blessed Marcel Callo, a Layman Martyr (1921-1945)

By Fr. PETER QUINTO, RCJ

Blessed Marcel Callo was born in Rennes, France, on December 6, 1921, the second of nine children to Marcel Callo and Felicita Maria Giuseppina. As a child, he was known for being a leader and a perfectionist. He helped his family with the household chores and in taking care of his younger siblings. He was also known for his good sense of humor as well as for his fondness for games such as wrestling, football, ping pong, cards and bridge.

Marcel's mother taught him the faith at home and he developed a strong inclination to follow Jesus. On one particular occasion, his mother asked Marcel if he wanted to become a priest like his older brother, Giovanni. A candid Marcel responded to her: "I do not feel called to the priesthood; I think I would do more good by remaining in the world".

While attending a range of schools in Rennes, Marcel also served as an altar server. After finishing his primary studies, he found work as an apprentice in a print shop in Rennes at the age of thirteen. He became a scout and considered himself to be as such for the remainder of his life. Scouting indelibly marked his Christian formation and left it only out of obedience to the ecclesiastical assistant who wanted him to be engaged in the midst of young workers.

Marcel did not like to associate himself with fellow workers who swore or who told improper stories, and who, out of contempt, nicknamed him “Jesus Christ.” His coworkers shunned Marcel, but he managed to earn their esteem for the seriousness and diligence with which he worked, and for having supported the dignity of some of his colleagues, settling disagreements among the workers, defending their jobs, and motivating them to do good.



Photo by conquestyouthministry.com

Preferring the company of good Catholic friends, Marcel joined in 1935 the Young Christian Workers Movement (Jeunesse Ouvriere Chretienne), also known as the Jocists, that Joseph Leo Cardjin (future cardinal) had established. At the age of 20, he fell in love and became engaged to Marguerite Derniaux (d. 1997), but due to the war the couple never married. He did not degrade women like his fellow workers but instead had deep respect for women. He said, "I am not one to amuse myself with the heart of a lady, since my love is pure and noble. If I had waited until I was 20 years old to go out with a young lady, it is because I knew that I wanted to

find real love. One must master his heart before he can give it to the one that is chosen for him by Christ." Derniaux remained faithful to her fiancé despite the fact that they were never married.

The two also enacted a strict spiritual rule of life that included going to Mass and the frequent reception of the Eucharist.

In the aftermath of the Rennes bombings, on March 8, 1943, Marcel's sister, Maria Maddalena, died from injuries that she sustained during the attack. When the Germans later occupied France, Marcel was enlisted to serve. His original inten-



tion was to flee, but remembered that if he did so, those he left back home would be arrested. He was reluctant but agreed to serve: "I'm leaving as a missionary in the service of my companions." It was on March 19, 1943 when he left for the service, leaving his family and his fiancée, and bringing with him his cross as a scout and his badge as a young Catholic worker.

After three months or so of missing his family and missing Mass, Marcel became seriously depressed. He later found a room where Mass was offered on Sundays. This helped change his disposition. He found time to attend Masses for his compatriots, animate the liturgies, comment on the readings, direct a choir, organize a football team, put together a theater group, coordinate visits to the sick and distribute medicines. Such intense activity cannot go unnoticed and the Gestapo arrested Marcel along with eleven other friends on April 19, 1944, on the charge of being "too much of a Catholic" and so was seen as a threat to the Nazi regime. They were sent to a concentration camp on October 7, with Marcel ending up in the concentration camp in Mauthausen. Brutally treated, undernourished, forced to exhausting work made impossible by the cold and humidity, prisoners in the concentration camp suffered from gangrene, diarrhea, ulcers, and tuberculosis.

On March 19, 1945, Marcel died after contracting tuberculosis and a mix of other ailments. He was buried in a mass grave outside the walls of the camp and his remains were never recovered.

Colonel Thibideux, who saw thousands die in the camps, witnessed that of Marcel's and talked about it with emotion: "Marcel had the look of a saint." He also testified for the beatification proceedings: "If I, a non-believer, who saw thousands of prisoners die, was struck by Marcel's gaze, it is because there was something extraordinary about him. For me it was a revelation: his gaze expressed a profound conviction that led to happiness. It was an act of faith and hope for a better life. I have never seen anywhere, next to every dying person (and I have seen thousands of them), a gaze like his. For the first time in the face of a deportee I saw an imprint that was not only that of despair."

Marcel died exactly two years after he left France. The last time he had seen Marguerite was at the train station, when she told him he was going to be a martyr. He told her that he would never be good enough for that. St. John Paul II disagreed, and declared him a martyr for the faith on October 4, 1987. The pope said that like Christ, Marcel "loved until the end, and his entire life became the Eucharist."

Blessed Marcel Callo is a bright and shining example of a committed young layman, who rightfully falls within the number of martyrs of Nazism. He could have easily avoided all the sufferings he was made to go through if only he had not proven to be "too much of a Catholic." But he endured all these because, as he himself had stated: "Christ is a friend who does not leave you even an instant and who knows how to support you, with him you can bear everything ...."

How many of us readily give up our faith when times are hard? How many put the blame on God or on others when we are simply getting what we deserve because of our carelessness or selfishness? How many of us are quick to make promises to God when things are going well in our lives, but easily break those same promises if they happen to be a hindrance to having a good time? May the example of Blessed Marcel Callo inspire us to choose the joy of the Lord over the despair of evil. ■

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# Seeking God's Face

## The Benedictine Monastic Vocation



By Fr. ISAAC KALINA, OSB

We as Benedictines of Valyermo, are trying to carry on a monastic tradition that stems from a 3rd century Christian movement out in the Egyptian desert, when ordinary people like Antony, Pachomius, Basil, Paula, Jerome and Eustochia fled city-life for the solitude of Palestine, Egypt and Cappadocia almost simultaneously. A couple centuries later, a brother and sister team, Scholastica and Benedict, found it necessary to bring the desert tradition into our neighborhoods. He wrote a Rule for his monasteries at Monte Cassino in Italy, foreseeing that it could be lived anywhere.

### St Benedict's Rule

Monte Cassino was destroyed by the Lombards in 577 and lay in ruins for close to 300 years until the middle of the 8th century.

The Holy Rule found its way into monasteries all over Europe and later throughout the New World. At first, through the efforts of Charlemagne, this Rule became the Rule of Choice for western monasteries from the 9th Century onwards. Then medieval monasteries followed the Rule of Benedict adapting it to different climates, places and cultures. They kept the tradition of community life with prayer, study, lectio, work and silence. Some monasteries were founded as centers of evangelization as there was no parish/parochial system yet; others carried on as places of education before universities or hospitals were established, becoming centers for the Arts, Liturgy, Chant, the making of manuscripts, architecture, medicine, farming, animal husbandry and all manner of commerce and trade. Many monasteries were there first, so to speak... before cities and a lot of things like freedom and ownership.

Monasteries exist in this world of ours today, in the midst of struggle, turmoil, chaos, Pope after Pope, side by side with wars and rumors of wars, in the middle of shifting empires, quarreling kingdoms, barbarian invasions and all the rest...as busy places of prayer and holy work, as islands of refuge and peaceful serenity, as quiet corners for students and scholars alike, as schools of the Lord's service. It's for the Lord's service we're all here, this is why we came here, this is what we're called to, this is why we say "yes." Not for anything or anybody else!

If God had no part whatsoever in any of this, I'd say we would all be out of our minds! What were you and I thinking? Nothing makes sense in this world without God! And, nothing in this world would make sense without this monastery; nothing would make any sense whatsoever without the loving service we give back as Gift here



in this place. Nothing would really matter here in this world or even in the next, if not for the Lord Who made all things, if not for the Lord Whom all our loving service is meant to adore!

## Community life like a marriage

Like everyone else, we go through periods where we're excited about God and prayer, and times when we are not! But no matter how we feel, we still go together to pray and sing with each other 5 times a day! This is a wonderful privilege! We learn to see it as part of what we do, this is our purpose. It's not an obligation or terrible burden or something to be dreaded... to live a life that is beautiful because it is faithful!

Community life is like a marriage; and why it's not a sacrament, I'll never understand! It should be! We live, pray, eat, work, sleep, forgive and look at the same brothers most of the time, every day, all day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. I'd call that a marriage! And, that's why it's so very important to learn humility, to learn how to treat brothers and sisters in a way that is supportive, encouraging, not picky, irritable, always critical and complaining. This is demanding work, and it's the small details of monastic living and loving day in and day out that people in the world do not see!

We've had brothers here from all kinds of backgrounds and different cultures; ages, levels of psychological growth and social maturity; one time the youngest among us was 19 while the eldest was 100 with at least 6 other monks over the age of 85! And, yes, it can be easy and simple to take offense, get hurt or feel unappreciated, to be cynical or thoughtless, especially when we're all living in such close proximity to one another, under the same roof. And, believe it or not...quite a bit of the work we do and the tools we employ here in the monastery has to involve the practice of loving and forgiving each other, which is the fundamental key to every relationship under the sun. If we really give ourselves over totally to this "sacramental" kind of life, if we don't insist on distracting ourselves with more 'important' things, then God can and will mold us into saints.

God Himself doesn't seek to dominate us; he will rule when His kingdom comes, but will rule through love, understanding and forgiveness which are all part of the life of any Catholic and all Christians! This is the hard work of all sacramental relationships, the instruments of Holy Matrimony, of the Consecrated Life... this is living toward God because of Love and for Love! This is what monks do all day long when they're not in church at the Work of God! Forgiveness is the most important responsibility we have toward our brothers and sisters; it's the best way to show that we belong to Christ.

### The Liturgical Year

The Church year runs the entire spectrum of human experience, from anticipation to joy, fear, anger, sorrow, death, then joy again... gives us an opportunity to reflect on God's presence every moment of our day. We come together as a church to comfort and strengthen each other! We encourage each other through another funeral; we witness each other in faith at another wedding or baptism or First Holy Communion. And, the Church calendar mimics the rhythm of human life from start to finish. In a strange, but mystical way, the church year reflects the circle of life with all its own ups and downs, everything ordinary and extraordinary.

In my own life, I was given so many blessings, concrete examples of people who had been faithful to God their entire lives! And, so many loved ones, saints, like my own parents and grandparents, to inspire me to continue on in this life, believing as they did in a Faith which they had passed on to me since the day I was born. It was the examples of their holy lives, their faithfulness that had a great impact on my life. These holy lives which I was a witness to, I can remember them with a grateful heart and pray for them all! At the end of the liturgical year, we're invited to approach the spiritual life, to reflect on who and what has ushered us to this moment. We meditate on those who have gone before us and look forward to Jesus making everything new.

I remember as a child sitting in a church pew with my Dad on a weeknight during a 40 Hours Devotion or a Parish Mission. I

remember everybody in the congregation singing with one voice. The whole liturgical year, which has been passed down to us by tradition, which never ceases, is the heartbeat of the Christian life. Around and around we go. From Advent to Christmas to Lent to Easter to Pentecost, we anticipate the Second Coming of Christ. It all fits together so beautifully and is one of the things that I love about being part of the Catholic Church. Daily living with the Liturgy is what being a Benedictine monk is all about, going deeper and letting ourselves be brought to a more wonderful way of living-out the faith day in and day out, in our respective/individual walks in life, wherever our station in life may be.

The liturgical year is that temporal structure within which the Church celebrates the mysteries of Christ! The calendar is the tool that kindles the hearts of Catholics so that they will remember God's marvelous plan of salvation. God has consistently brought countless thousands closer to Himself through the Rule of Benedict...Look at the Holy Abbots of Cluny whose Feast we remembered during the month of May. From the year 909 to 1156 all the abbots of this monastery for two and a half centuries were canonized saints. Abbot Hugh of Cluny succeeded Odilo at the age of 25 and was Abbot of his monastery for 62 years! Peter the Venerable was Abbot for 34 years. Then, L'Abbazia di Cava. All the abbots of this place from the year 1011 to 1295-almost three centuries-have been officially declared either beati/sancti. Imagine! Three hundred years of holy abbots at Valyermo or two hundred years of just holy monks with faith the size of mustard seeds... this entire desert would burst into flame! ■



**FR. ISAAC KALINA, OSB**

Is a native Californian who became a Benedictine monk at St. Andrew's Abbey in Valyermo in 1984. He has worn many hats: Prior, Subprior, Kitchenmaster, Youth Director, Asst. Novicemaster, Vocation Director & Junior master. Fr. Isaac holds a Master's in Addictions Counseling.

# Two Weeks in a Convent

## Finding my Life's Purpose



Photo by Daughters of Holy Mary of the Heart of Jesus

By LAUREN TORRES

**M**y name is Lauren Torres and I come from a family of five. I am the oldest of three and the only daughter. Being the eldest, I have the responsibility of babysitting my brothers and being a “role model,” which was a big thing for me growing up. My Latino parents gave us a Catholic upbringing and raised us the best they could in their faith. I blindly believed in what I was told to believe until I entered high school. During my high school days, I started to question and challenge some of what I was taught as a kid. This deeply affected how I identified myself in the Catholic Church. I felt very disconnected and lost when it came to my faith. A few weeks after my high school graduation in June, I felt very lost and had no sense of direction. I felt incomplete and living my life on autopilot.

Towards the end of June, I was invited to a pre-vocational meeting, where I scrutinized the Bible and wrote down how I felt. With every excerpt that I read I would have the same feelings; asking God to save me from this numb feeling I felt in life. It was as if I was stunned and there was no more growth, everything I did weighed me down and every step I’d take towards my future was so difficult. Everyone around me was growing in

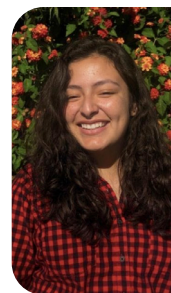
their faith and I was going nowhere.

My catechist announced that the Daughters of Holy Mary of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Ohio extended an invitation to some girls here in California to do an experience. At first, leaving to stay at a convent seemed like a scary idea even though I’d be surrounded by other girls who were doing this experience as well. Nevertheless, I rejected the invitation. As I was about to leave home, I had one last push from a friend of mine to go. I saw how much she had grown in her faith and I admired her strong faith. As a result, I signed up and a week later I got a call confirming my spot to go to Ohio.

The weeks leading up to this trip I brushed it off thinking it was only two weeks, but I had this fear of spending this time in a quiet environment with only the Lord and myself. I am so used to how loud things are here at home. The moment I arrived at the convent, I immediately felt this feeling of regret, but soon after felt this peace from being there. Every day I experienced so many emotions and all the sisters there lived their lives so happily, rejoicing because they felt so fulfilled with the call God had given them. We had adorations quite often in the Chapel and in those moments, I could feel as if it was just me and God. It was a love I couldn’t experience anywhere else. No man, friend,

or family member can love me as God can and no matter how hard I tried, I could not wrap my head around the idea of how immense God’s love is.

During those two weeks I was finally able to establish my own path in my faith. For so long, church was just a weekly task that had to be completed, and everything I heard in church just came in one ear and out the other. No words can accurately describe how happy I was in the convent. I understand I need lots of growth in my faith. I can’t say my life has completely flipped and I am nowhere near close to living in the image of God. But one thing I can concretely say is this path towards my faith is just starting. I have a vocation either to the consecrated life or marriage. Regardless of what that may be, this experience has shown me how powerful it is to wait for the will of God in my life. I understood everything I will ever need will come from God. ■



LAUREN TORRES

Is a first-year college student majoring in Kinesiology. She intends to pursue a career in the medical field. Lauren is discerning God’s plan in her life.



# Where are You, O Lord?

## A Firewall of Faith for an Uncertain Future and Fate



Photo by Photo by Drew Beamer

By DR. BRUCE L. THIESSEN, PH.D.

Where was our Heavenly Father when all hell broke loose? That is a question likely on the minds of even the most steadfast of believers, as the torrential “reign” of COVID-19 gripped the world, mercilessly leaving in its wake, a million corpses, and counting; terrified citizens, and the looming threat of worldwide recession, or even Depression.

...Mental wounds still screaming  
Driving me insane  
I'm going off the rails on a crazy train  
I'm going off the rails on a crazy train...  
Crazy Train, Ozzy Osborne

Heavy metal rocker, Ozzy Osborne, may not be the ideal rock n “role” model or the best candidate, to redirect this “crazy train” back to the station. Nevertheless, the words to Crazy Train have never been more relevant. Many people across the world feel like they have been financially, psychologically, and spiritual derailed.

*A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing; Our helper He, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing...*

Martin Luther, 1529

Where was the mighty fortress we claim

is all-powerful? How can we claim our God as “a bulwark never failing? Where is our helper “amid the flood of mortal ills?”

*where are you,  
why are you hiding your face from me  
where are you, why won't you  
reveal yourself, reveal yourself to me*

**Reveal Yourself to Me**

Dr BLT © 2020

I can't explain why the most vulnerable among us (namely the elderly, and the medically compromised) were the most dramatically impacted by the Covid-19 virus. I have studied just enough theology and philosophy to be rendered a danger, so who am I to solve that fundamental riddle?

Maybe sitting around blaming God, and reflecting too long on the big philosophical questions, amounts to being a part of the problem, rather than part of the solution. I say that not to dismiss or invalidate any tormenting question you may have been struggling with concerning the existence and/or nature of God.

But it is important to observe the way God has typically acted, and, in some cases, refrained from acting, in order to fulfill his grand purpose of redeeming the

world. Certainly there are multiple records of divine intervention and miracles. But the story of Job alone, reminds us that sometimes God allows bad things to happen to good people, in order to accomplish his redemptive mission.

In many cases, God uses human hands, human minds, and the human spirit to accomplish his redemptive purpose. To put my spin onto an historic proclamation uttered by JFK, “Ask not what God can do for you. Ask what you can do for God.” When you have devoted yourself to God's work, as his humble servant, you will know God's fullest and richest blessing. If you are a doctor, a nurse, or part of a medical team in another capacity, God may use your healing hands as His, and he may use your being to express his compassion. If you are a scientist, you may be channeling the very mind of God with your efforts to prevent, treat, and ultimately eradicate and/ or cure the illness. The question of why God allows suffering (especially on a scale so grand one is hard-pressed to find a relevant historic precedent), is actually a very old one. Anyone that offers a quick, formulaic, trite answer, has likely managed, thus far, to escape personal tragedy of any significant magnitude.

As a psychologist with a keen appre-

ciation for the therapeutic value of music and a singer/ songwriter, I turn to music a lot. There are answers to be found in music that are deeper than the simplistic, condescending trite answers that are often offered with the best of intentions. In Message in a Bottle, the band, The Police, tell a story of a man feeling isolated, abandoned, and desperate for answers on a beach. He writes the simple message S.O.S., and tosses it into the billowing sea waves, in hopes some sage will pick it up and rescue him with “the answer.” Instead of those expectations being fulfilled, he received a hundred million bottles, each containing the same cry for help—S.O.S.

So his “answer” is that he is not alone in his sorrow and despair. When you begin to look at tragic events through the eyes of empathy and compassion, and you commit to being God’s instrument for the delivery of that empathy and compassion, God’s acts of mercy and his miracles will begin to dramatically unfold before you.

*Six Feet Apart or Six Feet Under:  
Loving One Another while keeping our distance.  
Six feet apart or six feet under oh  
Lord, how did it come to this  
when we’re apart, how can we love one  
another? six feet apart or six feet under*

**Six Feet Apart or Six Feet Under**  
Dr BLT © 2020

In my profession, being obsessed with cleanliness was, and is, considered a symptom of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. But in the new reality, these behaviors are rewarded as never before. Moreover, people who went out of their way to put distance between themselves and others, due to fear and anxiety, were diagnosed with Social Anxiety and Panic Disorder. They were thought to be afraid of intimacy. Now such behaviors are welcomed, and recommended by medical experts. I was going to say welcomed “with open arms,” but even our language may have to change to adapt to our new reality. God too may seem distant to you right now. But as Bette Miller said, in a song, “God is watching us from a distance.” He wants to get closer, and we need to allow that space between God and us to shrink. His arms are open, and ready to receive all who will place their trust in him.

We need God now, perhaps more than

ever before. He wants to be allowed into our communities to restore a sense of community and unity. He wants to be invited into our lives to heal the anguish of this dreadful and deadly pandemic. He wants to ease our stress; comfort the grieving; alleviate our panic; and replace our depression and despair with hope. He wants to heal the body, the mind and the emotions. He feels the grief of those that have lost loved ones. Let Him in, and let him perform a miracle. It has been said, “Be careful what you wish for.” Little did we all know what we were in for when we welcomed in the New Year, 2020.

*tomorrow is coming  
I think so, but I don’t really know if you’re  
there, and I’m there  
let’s make this a future to behold...*

Dr BLT © 2020

So what happens now? Will we ever recover? Where do we go from here? What treasures can we salvage from the colossal devastation of this pandemic? I can’t say, for certain, but I do know a pretty good place to begin. Here is his invitation:

*If my people who are called by My name will  
humble themselves, and pray and seek My  
face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I  
will hear from heaven, and will forgive their  
sin and heal their land.*

2 Chronicles 7:14

Here is his promise to those that wait upon him:

*But those who wait on the LORD Shall renew  
their strength; They shall mount up with  
wings like eagles,  
They shall run and not be weary,  
They shall walk and not faint.*

Isaiah 40:31

Those that grow impatient are tempted to replace faith with fear, panic, and doubt. But faith is the only firewall at our disposal, and what a firewall it is! What an impenetrable fortress it can be! Without faith, there can be no resurrection from the merciless virus that took the world by storm in 2020. It threatens to destroy our way of life and our future. But

*“greater is he that is in us that he that is in  
the world.”*

1 John 4:4.

As the song goes...

*Because he lives, I can face tomorrow be-  
cause he lives all fear is gone Because I know  
he holds the future  
And life is worth the living just because he  
lives*

Bill and Gloria Gaither

I’m going to leave you with this final prayer:

*Lord, we mourn over the countless lives that  
have been lost. At times we wonder where  
you are in the storms of life.*

*We look into the eye of the storm, and can-  
not see your face, or feel your grace. We feel  
alone, isolated, abandoned, and betrayed,  
like only a son felt on the cross.*

*But when we allow your light to shine into  
our darkened corners, and when we relin-  
quish our fears and begin to look through  
the eyes of faith, are eyes begin to open up to*

*your miraculous work, your miraculous  
might and your boundless glory.*

*And when we begin to stand on your prom-  
ises, and when we earnestly seek your face,*

*And when we witness people coming to-  
gether to help those in need, and when we  
demonstrate the outpouring of support,  
prayer and compassion, we begin to notice  
that you are indeed with us. God, be our  
comfort, dry our tears, restore our hope, heal  
our bodies, remove our every fear, and repair  
our broken spirits. In Jesus name, Amen ■*

- To download a free copy of Dr. Thiessen’s song “Quarantined Queen” in support of the elderly victims of Covid-19, please visit: [http://www.reverbnation.com/open\\_graph/song/31650009](http://www.reverbnation.com/open_graph/song/31650009)



**DR. BRUCE L. THIESSEN, Ph.D.**

Known by patients as Dr. B.L.T. is a Christ-centered psychologist, and a singer/songwriter. He presently works as a clinical psychologist for the California Department of Corrections.

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USA



## Vocation Promoters' Workshop

"I will Lower the Nets" (Lk. 5:5)

The Rogate Center, a vocation ministry of the Rogationist Fathers in Van Nuys, California, will host a workshop for lay, religious, and diocesan vocation promoters this fall. Due to the global pandemic, the date will be confirmed later.

The workshop is open to all those interested in vocation ministry, such as catechists, teachers, parents, young adults, and religious and diocesan leaders. The Rogationist Fathers would like to encourage and offer support to vocation promoters by reflecting on the current state of vocations and offering initiatives to foster a culture of vocations in their parishes, schools, and communities.

This three-day event will feature distinguished religious speakers and lay leaders working on vocations in the Church of North America. For more information on this event, please send an email to: [rogate.center@rcj.org](mailto:rogate.center@rcj.org) or [afiorenza@rcj.org](mailto:afiorenza@rcj.org)



USA



## "The Class of 2020:

Survey of Ordinands to the Priesthood"

The Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops published the results of the "The Ordination Class Survey," on the occasion of the 57th World Day of Prayer for Vocations.

The report prepared by CARA, Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, "presents findings from a national survey of seminarians scheduled for ordination to the priesthood in 2020." The report's major findings highlight data collected from a total of 347 ordinands completed the survey and who answered questions related to their vocational discernment, work experience, race/ethnicity, culture, and age.

To read the report, please visit the USCCB website or copy the following link into your browser:

<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/ordination-class/index.cfm>



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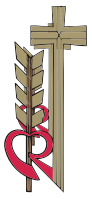
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Aveni Foundation is committed to expediting the development of gene-targeted therapies for metastatic cancer. Fr. Joseph Aveni was a Rogationist priest who experienced significant clinical benefit from this therapy. His cause of canonization is ongoing.

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*“There is  
nothing better  
than doing  
God’s will  
because He is  
our Father.”*

*Fr. Joseph Aveni*

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