

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS 2010

Homily given by Fr. Dennis Koliński, SJC

St. Peter's Church in Volo

25 April 2010

God has a plan for each of us, a plan by which he means to sanctify us, a plan which he has designated as our own personal road to heaven. This is our vocation, our calling. For many, it is marriage. But for other select souls it is the priesthood or religious life.

“Jesus said, ‘My sheep hear my voice ... and they follow me.’”¹ The problem is that so many today don't hear His voice, and some that do hear His voice refuse to follow Him because the passing enticements of the world are too attractive. This is at the root of our present-day vocation crisis and why the Church has observed a World Day of Prayer for Vocations on the Fourth Sunday of Easter for the last 47 years. People often don't hear God's voice calling them because all of the noise in the world around them has drown it out. There are those, who perhaps don't turn off the music because they are afraid of silence and what they might hear in the depths of their soul.

He speaks to us in the silence of our hearts, but when a person constantly surrounds himself with the noise of television, radio and I-Pods, he won't hear that voice. There is no shortage of people being called by God. It's just that so many of them aren't listening or aren't able to hear for all of the noise.

It used to be that many Catholics at some time in their life at least considered a vocation to the priesthood or religious life. Today, it isn't even on the radar screen because it doesn't seem very attractive. They don't see a vocation to the priesthood and consecrated life as desirable. They don't see that it is a special gift from God that He has designed for those select souls He has called to these special states of life, a gift that will bring them happiness and fulfillment, not only in the life to come but also in this life.

But this unique call, in turn, “requires a free response on the part of men and women; a positive response which always presupposes acceptance of and identification with the plan that God has for everyone.”² “The one who is “called” voluntarily leaves everything and submits himself to the teaching of the divine Master; hence a fruitful dialogue between God and man begins, a mysterious encounter between the love of the Lord who calls and the freedom of man who responds in love, hearing the words of Jesus echoing in his soul, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.”^{3,4} “Attracted by [God], from the very first centuries of Christianity, many men and women have left families, possessions, material riches and all that is humanly desirable in order to follow Christ generously and live the Gospel without compromise, which had become for them a school of deeply rooted holiness.”⁵

Although the priesthood and the consecrated life are both special calls to sanctity undertaken by renunciation of the normal ways of the world, there are fundamental differences between the two. The priesthood is a sacrament in which a man's soul is reconfigured to Christ, so that he becomes an instrument through which Christ works to sanctify others. He becomes a channel by which Christ bestows His life-giving grace on others, primarily through the sacraments. He becomes a shepherd for the flock to keep

them from going astray. A man does not become a priest for his own good but solely for the good of others. Sure, it is his duty to strive for personal holiness, but nonetheless, his primary purpose is not to sanctify himself, but to sanctify others.

Consecrated religious, on the other hand, are persons, who give themselves as a total and unqualified gift to God in a radical manner through the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in imitation of Christ, the poor, chaste and obedient. The religious becomes a sign of contradiction to the world by pointing to the ultimate goal. In renouncing the world, he already begins here on earth to live the life of heaven where there are no possessions, where people are no longer given in marriage and where there is perfect obedience, that is, total conformity with the will of God. In seeking personal sanctification, he offers himself up as a sacrifice for the world, so that it too may be saved. "To imitate Christ, chaste, poor and obedient, and to identify with him: this is the ideal of the consecrated life, a witness to the absolute primacy of God in human life and history."⁶

Throughout the history of Christianity, the Holy Spirit has raised up many different forms of consecrated life to serve the many needs of the Church and the world. Dating to the very dawn of Christianity, monastic life was among the earliest forms of consecrated life in which monks separated themselves from the world, so that through a balance of the interior life and work, they could offer themselves in unceasing praise to God. In later centuries, the Holy Spirit raised up new forms of consecrated life devoted to the service of the Church in apostolic and missionary work. The first among these were the mendicant orders, like the Dominicans and Franciscans, who are called friars. There are canons regular, like the Norbertines and yours truly. And there are clerics regular; the most commonly known to you being the Jesuits. There are institutes of contemplative life, which through a hidden life of constant prayer, sustains the Church and a world constantly teetering on the brink of self-annihilation. Some think that they live useless and unproductive lives, but if not for their constant intercession before the throne of God in contemplative prayer, we would have all perished long ago. There are secular institutes, societies of apostolic life, consecrated virgins, hermits and consecrated widows and widowers. Because the Holy Spirit is always attuned to the needs of the Church and the world, He is constantly raising up new communities, and in our modern age, even new forms of consecrated life that have never even existed before, such as *Opus Dei*.

Sometimes, Catholics confuse the priesthood and consecrated life thinking them two expressions of one vocation within the Church. But they are two very different and separate vocations evidenced by the fact that diocesan priests do not live the consecrated life as we do. At the same time, consecrated life does not immediately imply priesthood for there are many religious men and women, who in living the consecrated life, have a vocation that is complete within itself. There are some brothers within the Canons Regular of St. John Cantius, for instance, who will always be only religious brothers. It doesn't mean that they are flunkies because they can't make it through the seminary but merely that they feel called only to the consecrated life. Fr. Anthony and I, on the other hand, each have two distinct parallel vocations, joined within one person, but neither of which is dependent upon the other: the vocation to the religious life and the vocation to the priesthood.

Over the last few decades, we have had a serious vocation crisis that was due in large part to the mass defections from the priesthood and religious orders, which began in

the 1960s. But over the last several years, there has been a rise in the number of seminarians, as well as in certain religious orders. In fact, there has also been an enormous increase in the creation of new communities, such as the Canons Regular of St. John Cantius. God continues to call many men and women. He never ceases to inspire people to offer themselves up by a radical living out of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience as “‘signs of contradiction’ for the world, whose thinking is often inspired by materialism, self-centeredness and individualism.”⁷ He never ceases to call men to the priesthood to become radical witnesses to the world as other Christs to heal their spiritual wounds and lead them to heaven through the sacraments.

But we also have to pray to God for vocations; implore Him to send us men and women, who will willingly choose to reject the world for the sake of something far greater; “to imitate Christ, chaste, poor and obedient, and to identify with him.”⁸

So many people see this short sojourn on earth as the final goal and never truly think of what God’s plan for them is. That’s why we have a vocations crisis. God is left out of the picture. And when He is left out of the picture you trudge through life without even considering that He may have a much better way for you to reach heaven. Our life on earth is only a short prelude to our ultimate goal, which is to reach heaven where will spend all eternity. Our vocation is the means by which God has determined that we will best achieve that goal. And it is also the means by which we have the possibility of achieving the greatest degree of happiness in this life and in the next.

We have many young people in our parish and I’m certain that God is calling some of them to the priesthood and consecrated life. That’s why I’m asking all of you, my young parishioners, to keep an open and uncluttered heart, so that when He calls, you will hear Him. And at the same time, I want to ask that the rest of you never cease praying for them, so that when they do hear His voice, they will follow Him with a generous heart.

¹ John 10:27.

² Benedict XVI, “Message of the Holy Father for the 46th World Day of Prayer for Vocations,” 3 May 2009.

³ John 15:16.

⁴ Benedict XVI, “Message.”

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Benedict XVI, “Message of the Holy Father for the 47th World Day of Prayer for Vocations,” 25 April 2010.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.