

4 Easter B SML 2018
JN 10:11-18

Our Blessed Lord's Discourse on the Good Shepherd, from which this morning's Gospel is taken, was preached on the heels of the story of the man born blind. The blind man was certainly one of God's beloved sheep, yet the Pharisees treated him more like they were hired workers than they were good and faithful shepherds who would risk their lives for their sheep. The "pharisaical hired worker" mentality was cultural. But good and faithful shepherds who would have risked their lives for their sheep were counter-cultural.

The Church has traditionally named today Good Shepherd Sunday and has devoted the prayers, fruits and intentions of these Masses to pray for an increase in vocations to the priesthood and religious life. This intention has been at the forefront of the hundreds of prayers offered by St. Mary of the Lakes families who have participated in our Pray for Vocations up and running for about two years now, and up and running most recently in the school. So when we pray for vocations, for what or for whom are we praying?

PAUSE

Christianity in modern America is, in large part, innocuous. It tends to be easy, upbeat, convenient, and compatible. It does not require self-sacrifice, discipline, humility, an otherworldly outlook, a zeal for souls, a fear as well as love of God. There is little guilt and no punishment, and the payoff in heaven is virtually certain. The faith has been overwhelmed by the culture, producing what is rightly called cultural Christianity.¹

Faith is fine when we are healthy, but elusive when we are sick. Faith is not needed when we are fulfilled, content and satisfied, but is it ever needed when we are frustrated, worried, anxious and preoccupied! Hope moves us to trust that God will keep His promises: not assuring us bliss, comfort, ease and perfection, - but love, care, mercy and life.

I speak of faith and hope for many reasons, but the main reason is every one of us needs faith and hope, because when everything seems dark, cold and damp, and spring is not springing, in such times we need a genuine, convincing talk on faith and hope. And every priest, who should be a man of faith and hope, should be equipped to give a genuine, convincing talk on faith and hope. This is the kind of priest we are praying for when we pray for vocations, a man of faith and hope.

¹ Thomas Reaves, First Things, rpt in Called to Be Holy, p. 118.

Otherwise, you'll have priests who are cultural. And what you want are priests who are counter-cultural.

Think of the analogy of a hurricane. In the midst of turbulence, destruction and the overwhelming force of the storm, there is the "eye of the hurricane," a time of peace, calm and serenity. For the believer, the eye of the hurricane is their faith and their hope.

In the midst of the storm, winds of unpredictability, setback, crisis, tragedy, or just the plain daily grind that can be overwhelming, is the harbor of inner peace, calm and serenity provided by faith and hope.

A priest, whose vocation is rooted in faith and hope, is the one to help build the eye of the hurricane when the weather is clement, so as to rely on the eye of the hurricane when the storms of life come. This is the kind of priest we are praying for when we pray for vocations. Otherwise, you'll have priests who are cultural. And what you want are priests who are counter-cultural.

One of the choices for a Mass of Christian Burial is one of the most powerful scriptures from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans:

What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or the sword? . . . No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor power, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (8:35-39)

Life changes. Life always changes; but one thing that is consistent is Jesus Christ:

1. Who is the same yesterday, today and forever.
Hebrews 13:8
2. the way, the truth and the life
3. our shepherd
4. our leader
5. our ideal
6. our comforter.
7. He is the beginning and the end,
8. the Alpha and the Omega,
9. the mediator between heaven and earth
10. true God and true man!

It is the priest who needs to be as consistent as Christ, who belongs to Christ, and whose faith and hope will show us

Christ, for the Church clearly teaches the priest is an “alter Christus,” another Christ. So when one sees a priest, he should make people think of Christ. This is the kind of priest we are praying for when we pray for vocations. Otherwise, you’ll have priests who are cultural. And what you want are priests who are counter-cultural.

I read a great book on priesthood, entitled Called to be Holy by His Eminence Timothy Cardinal Dolan, who wrote:

A major part of the priest’s spiritual stewardship is human and personal development in qualities such as reliability, courtesy, promptness, and the fostering of genuine friendships so essential for a fruitful life.

Academic rigor plays a part as well, through consistent study and research, ongoing reading and theological refinement. Also a priest should nurture a zeal toward his daily work and his duties in life. Priests should do what they’re supposed to do, and put in an honest day’s work.
p.19, 87

This is the kind of priest we are praying for when we pray for vocations. Otherwise, you’ll have a priest who is cultural. And what you want is a priest who is counter-cultural.

Dolan also warns against priests and bishops who are so afraid of losing popularity and unsettling people that they turn into fluffy, least-common denominator Christian ministers. This

is not the kind of priest we are praying for when we pray for vocations. Because, as a result of least common denominator Christian ministers. So I'll repeat what I quoted earlier:

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Priests who model the Good Shepherd are counter cultural.

1. To a society of violence and revenge, priests stand for peace and forgiveness;
2. To a world satiated with sex, priests are modest and chaste;
3. To a society frantic to spend, own and hoard, priests model simplicity and sharing;
4. To a country that blames the poor, priests urge care and justice.
5. To a world that divinizes the will, and holds that true happiness comes only when you have the license to do what you want, when you want, with whom and to whom you want, how you want, and where you want; and that any restraint to a higher authority is unjust, oppressive and to be defied;

6. To a society that urges us to keep all options open, not to be tied down, to always be ready to move on to something more attractive, to place conditions on all promises, to protect our own interests above all else, to move up and make more, and to demand rights and resist restrictions

Priests take the vow of obedience and the vow of celibacy.

That's counter-cultural!

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