

Homily for the 4th Sunday of Easter

Last week, we were blessed to have Fr. Brian Wayne, vocations director of the Diocese of Harrisburg, with us for Masses. I was so happy that quite a few of you went to talk to him during our little receptions in the social hall. It was also nice for me to have a weekend off from preaching and listen to someone else! Then yesterday I looked at my calendar and saw that this weekend we're celebrating the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. First the Vocation's Director, and now a World Day of Prayer! Hmmm, do you think God is trying to get our attention?

Now, when you hear the word "vocation" – you might think of different things. Many of you might think of priests and consecrated religious – as in, "We need to pray for more vocations". Some of you might think of an occupation or a career, as in what I want to be when I get older. But broadly speaking, from a faith perspective, a vocation is simply a calling from God to follow His Son, Jesus in a particular way. In other words, God created us out of love. And so, our life is our gift from Him. What we do with our lives – that's our gift to God in return. Our vocation is that gift of our lives, our response to God, following His voice. Jesus in our Gospel today puts it this way: "the sheep hear his voice, as the shepherd calls his own sheep by name ...he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice." So, the voice of the Lord calls to each of us, and we follow Him.

All of us, by virtue of our baptism, are called to holiness. This means that God desires for all of us to be with Him in heaven. And since anyone who's in heaven is a saint, we're all called to be saints. That is our common vocation. But how we live out those lives of saints in the making, that will be as unique as are each of us from the other. And yet, the Church has outlined that there are common paths we will tread. We call these the married life, the religious life, and the priesthood. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches: "The vocation of the laity (married or single) consists in seeking the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will." In other words, as we hear in Colossians 3:17: "Whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus." That means all that you do as a husband or wife, as a mother or father, in your job, at home, in the grocery store, when no one's looking – do that for God. That is how you sanctify, or make holy, your life – that is how you become a saint – by doing what God wants you to do and doing what you do as an act of love for Him, who loves you. This is how God leads us to heaven – we trust Him to really lead us throughout our lives, doing what He calls us to do out of love for Him.

At the same time, the Catechism also teaches that "Priestly and religious vocations are dedicated to the service of the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation." In other words, priests and consecrated religious are meant to be servants to God's people. People like Sr. Rosanne and myself are here to help you on your journey to heaven, and to help you live out your vocations.

Many of you just see me as a priest on the weekend, and you may just think all I do is celebrate Mass. But then when you see me in the grocery store, you think – “Father goes grocery shopping too?!” In conjunction with this, I got a question from a young person from our parish several weeks back – “What do priests do when they’re not at Mass?” And so I thought if anyone from our parish has a vocation to serve as a priest, I’d better share some of what I do. Here’s my calendar from last week and next week – weekday Mass (there’s Mass again!); visiting the sick at home and in the hospital; teaching the men and women of RCIA, who are seeking to become Catholic; serving on the Abbottstown – East Berlin Food Pantry board; meeting with an Eagle Scout preparing for his project here at IHM; gathering with the Knights of Columbus where I serve as their chaplain; serving on the Priest Personnel Committee, which assists Bishop Gainer in transferring priests to their new assignments; meeting with the Diocesan Evangelization Committee; hearing Confessions; celebrating Confirmations and first Holy Communion; gathering with new parishioners at the coffee and donuts; meeting with the Buildings and Grounds Committee of our parish; attending Delone School Board meetings, visiting the residents of a local nursing home and celebrating Mass for them, serving as a spiritual director, and blessing someone’s new vehicle. And so much more! Being a priest is not an easy life, but it is a beautiful life, and is tremendously fulfilling. I feel so blessed that God has called me to this vocation. And I know all of you will be blessed by serving Him too in whatever vocation He has called you to. God bless you.