

April 25, 2021

4th Sunday of Easter

Acts 4:8-12

Ps 118:1, 8-9, 21-23, 26, 28, 29

1 Jn 3:1-2

Jn 10:11-18

CALLED TO SERVE!

Every time a family invites me for a table fellowship with them, I always take the opportunity to extend the invitation to the young members of the family to consider the vocation to the priesthood and religious life (consecrated life.) Most of the time, the parents would answer me by saying: **“No, Father! He is too handsome to become a priest!”** or **“No, Father! We are poor. We cannot afford!”**

What is the response trying to insinuate? There are two things that come to my mind whenever I hear such a response.

- **First**, it tries to imply that priesthood and religious life (consecrated life) are for the ugly/unattractive people. This allusion is not true. There are priests and religious who are handsome and beautiful. **Remember the Hollywood actress who became a Benedictine nun?** Her name is Dolores Hart who was the leading lady of Elvis Presley in the movie Loving You (1957). She made ten movies in five years and then decided to answer God’s call, leaving the limelight.
- **Second**, it tries to insinuate that priesthood and religious life (consecrated life) are for the rich or the wealthy. This insinuation is also not true. Yes, there are priests and religious that came from very rich families. But there are also priests and religious who rose from poverty.

Let me share with you my own story to shed some light with regard to the vocations to the priesthood and religious life (consecrated life.)

I am the eldest of the four (4) children of my parents. I came from a poor family in the Philippines. My father did not have a stable job. Nonetheless, he helped my mother in cooking rice cakes to sell in our neighborhood. Through God’s grace, I, together with my siblings, was able to go to school. In spite of our poverty, I saw from my parents the willingness to serve, not only the family, but our community as well without asking for anything in return. It was pure service that they demonstrated, devoid of the desire to be recognized. It was their example of service, when I was growing up, that inspired me to be a servant. Thus, when I was interviewed to enter the seminary, I told the Vocation Director: **“I want to serve and not to be served.”** (alluding to the words of the Lord Jesus in Mt 20:28)

I entered the La Salette seminary at the age of sixteen (16) in 1989. I went through seminary formation for eleven (11) years, taking up AB Philosophy and Theology. Going through the seminary formation was not a ‘walk in the park.’ There were ‘ups and downs, blessings and challenges’ in my seminary journey. Through God’s grace and mercy, on **May 01, 1996**, I passed the evaluation and took my first vows as a La Salette religious. And on **February 23, 2002**, through God’s mercy, I was ordained to the priesthood.

Are you wondering why I am sharing with you my vocation story? I am sharing with you my vocation story simply because today is the **World Day of Prayer for Vocations. Vocations to what?** Vocations to the priesthood and religious life (consecrated life) respectively. Aside from the **World Day of Prayer for Vocations**, today is also **Good Shepherd Sunday**. This **Good Shepherd Sunday** is deeply rooted in the gospel proclaimed wherein the Lord Jesus said: **“I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”**

Let me continue my vocation story. Being the eldest, helping my parents and siblings was always on my mind. But **how can I help them when I am inside the seminary?** I would say that the Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd, took care of my family. We did not become rich materially. Nonetheless, the family was happy and grateful for all the blessings received. Indeed, the Good Shepherd is true to his promise that he will take care of his flock.

The Good Shepherd, who called me to this vocation as a religious priest, was the one who sustained, enlightened, strengthened and healed me when my parents passed away. My father died on June 19, 1998, and, after ten (10) months, my mother followed on April 09, 1999. It was so painful. I was dreaming of them accompanying me at the altar for my perpetual profession and ordination, but it did not happen. God had another plan for them and accepted it with my whole heart.

The Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is unceasing in guiding me in my journey. He never stopped sending me people who demonstrated true Catholic Christian service. He is always there to remind me of my vocation ‘to serve and not to be served.’ He gives me strength when I am weak; guidance in making decisions; comfort when in distress; and joy in the midst of sorrow. The Good Shepherd is real for me. I am sure he is with you too!

As we celebrate with the Universal Church the **Word Day of Prayer for Vocations**, I would like to invite you all to do two things:

- **First**, please include the priests and religious in your daily prayers. We are human like you – some of us are struggling, others are troubled; some are sick, others are dying; some are persecuted, others were already killed for the faith. Pray for us that we may always deepen our personal relationship with the Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd, so we can be real stewards of the Gospel.
- **Second**, please be active promoters of vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Start it with your kids or grandkids. Plant the seeds of vocation in them. Nurture it. Show them the beauty of serving the Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd. Pray for them to open their hearts and souls to the call of the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ!

God bless us all!