

Sermon for 6.8.17

Today is vocation Sunday. Each year the Archbishop asks us to set aside a Sunday usually at the beginning of August, to focus specifically on awareness and openness to the call to ordained ministry. Vocation Sunday is not however just aimed at those who themselves feel called but also at those who might discern in others a call to ministry.

In particular, we would like to encourage suitable persons who feel to take a further step towards ordained ministry to attend the Seekers' Day on 2 September 2017.

Now seekers day is a day when those who feel a sense of calling, gather together with diocesan ministry leaders to explore further their perceived call.

There is always some debate about what the sense of call actually is. Is it something that really happens? Is it a call from God, and if so, how does it present itself - or is it simply a mind thing, when one's own thoughts say to go this way or that.

From my own experience I would say that God's call to ordained ministry is a reality and it presented itself to me in the form of an inner feeling that led me in a specific direction towards God's love for God and for God's people.

For me that call was, and still is, a deep gentle feeling, that has persisted and sustained me throughout my entire ordained life.

I believe that we are all called by God through our baptism and that we are all members of the royal priesthood. The ordained ministry is a concentrated formal expression of this call for the purpose of servant leadership.

Now this seems all fairly simple and straight forward, but there is no doubt that the call can be greatly disturbing and is met by many of us with resistance. I know when I first felt the call I suggested to God that he had it all wrong – that it was Mary down the road who he meant to call and not me.

Now the reasons we do resist are many and varied. For example, ordained ministry may not fit with our lifestyle, it may not be the path of life that we envisaged for ourselves. Or we may simply may not have the confidence to answer the call.

The Old Testament reading today about Jacob at Penial gives hope. This passage can be understood as a metaphor of the wrestle with God that people may go through when they resist God's call. Jacob, however, it is helpful to remember, does prevail.

The gospel reading today about the feeding of the 5000 also is relevant. Jesus invites the disciples to “give them something to eat”. They respond “we have nothing...” This invitation and response mirrors God’s call to us to serve despite our lack of confidence in what we have at hand.

The gospel passage also speaks about trust in God and the necessity to depend upon God’s provision.

The church structure does understand the issue of resistance, and there is a process that helps the seeker test their call in different ways over a period of years. The beautiful words from Jeremiah in today’s sentence calms the turbulence of our resistance *For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*

From my experience I would share with you that I believe that ordained ministry is definitely a vocation different to any other and into which you are called by God.

It is a way of life that needs constant prayer and relationship with God and other people.

It is a way of life in which confidence of who you are in Christ is imperative - for you can then share that confidence with others. It is filled with many challenges and blessings and asks of you and your family all that you have spiritually, emotionally and physically.

For myself and Paul it has been wonderful and fulfilling, for God has provided for us, I believe, the best parish in the Diocese.

If you feel any leading that you identify as a call by God to explore the ordained life please talk to myself or Fr Robert, Deb, Rick or Judy.

The Lord be with you.

Christ, whose insistent call disturbs our settled lives: give us discernment to hear your word, grace to relinquish our tasks, and courage to follow empty-handed wherever you may lead, so that the voice of your gospel may reach to the ends of the earth. Amen. *Or*