

Easter 4B ***(Vocations Sunday)***

As a renowned preacher lay dying his colleague visited him but noticed he was quite troubled in spirit. His colleague told him to take heart because when he goes before the Lord in judgement he can remind him of all those riveting sermons he gave. The dying preacher looked at him and said "if the Lord doesn't mention them, I certainly won't be reminding him".

The prime task of anyone called to the priestly ministry is the spreading of the gospel in order to elicit a response of faith, first from ourselves and then from the listeners. St Paul says: 'faith comes through hearing'. So also do vocations. The early apostles, after they were called by Jesus, they left all and followed Him. But is His voice today being drowned out by a host of worldly distractions. I am of the opinion it is.

Many moons ago in Ireland a religious vocation was considered an honour. The saying went that if one had 'a pump in the yard and a priest in the family' you had it all. In order to achieve this honour a lot of young men were leaned on a bit to join the ministry. One priest who later left the ministry told me that his mother should have been ordained, not him. However, we can't blame them too much in those far off days - the catholic faith was in their bones.

Today it's a bit different. The message of the gospel which we preach today will often go against the grain. Some people even take it out on the messenger. There was a rumpus recently when the churches questioned why there were such a growing number of food banks in a country as rich as this. Archbishop Nichols cautions ministers of the Word about skimming over the difficult parts of the gospel and church teaching for their own convenience. The gospel contains fundamental truths which pertain to our eternal destiny. Just like everyone else we priests have a duty to apply the message to ourselves first, before

giving it out to others. And, if we're honest with ourselves we all have had occasional lapses in living out the gospel.

All in all I would say it's a good time to be a priest. Working in the vineyard of the Lord as a committed priest or consecrated person is rewarding. I notice recently where the clergy have the highest job satisfaction among all the professions. Then, why the shortage? A Church of England minister referred to his job recently as a career. Now, that's the danger – looking on it as a career. And celibacy is not the cause of the vocation shortage. The cause is far more likely to do with the materialism and consumerism of our present day culture which leaves little room in the lives of many for things spiritual.

Vocation shortage, marriage shortage, children shortage – they are all interconnected. I notice from our baptism register that in 1958 there were over 100 baptisms at St Vincent's but in 2008 there were fewer than 20. That might have something to do with the vocation shortage.

The shrinkage of vocations is mostly felt in the developed world. Vocations are thriving in places like Poland and many part of Asia. In Poland there are 1500 men in training for the Priesthood at present which is incredible. There's been a slight increase here but nothing to write home about. Today, vocations Sunday, we are reminded to keep on praying for them.

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| <p>For anyone who answers the call to ministry, Jesus promises a hundredfold in this life and eternal happiness in the next. The call of the Good Shepherd does not disappoint.</p> |
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