

Easter 4 A
(Vocations Sunday)

A mother became over anxious because her daughter could not find a man to marry. One day she mentioned to her mother that a certain man had eyes for her. The mother asked: "what religion is he?" The daughter replied "I'm afraid he does not go to any church". The mother said "it would be difficult for you to be married to a man who does not go to church. Why don't you teach him about our faith?" The daughter agreed and started teaching him about the Catholic Faith. Finally, when it seemed they were becoming a serious item, the girl came home one day very downhearted, and the worried mother asked her what had happened. She replied "I think I taught him too much - he now wants to become a priest.

The prime task of anyone called to the priestly ministry is the spreading of the gospel in order to elicit a response of faith 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 a great blessing. 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 our 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 who among us, hasn't failed to live up to the Gospel at one time or another. At times we all struggle a bit.

All in all I would say there's never been a better 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. It may be for Church of England clergy but not for the catholic priest. 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, in 2008 there were only 13. That might have something to do with the vocation shortage as well.

The shrinkage of vocations is mostly felt in the developed world. Vocations are thriving in places like India and Poland and many part of Asia. In Poland as we speak there are 1500 men training to be priests. There's been a slight increase here and today vocations Sunday we are reminded to keep on praying for them.

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.