

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

As a renowned preacher lay dying his colleague visited him but noticed he was quite a bit agitated. His colleague told him to take heart because when he goes before the Lord in judgement he can remind him of all those moving 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 priest spreads 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, 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.

In the distant past in catholic countries 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. There was a rather sharp response among the powers that be recently when the church of England questioned why there were such a growing number of food banks in a country as rich as this. Archbishop Nichols cautions priests or teachers in our schools about skimming over the uncomfortable parts of the gospel and church teaching in order to fit in with a secular agenda. 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 struggle at times to live up to the full message of the gospel.

All in all I would say it's not a bad time to be a priest. It can be very rewarding. I notice recently where the clergy are high up on the list when it comes to being happy in their work. Then, why the shortage? A Church of England minister referred to his ministry 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. In foregoing marriage we are not in any way downplaying the beauty of the married vocation. Yes the priesthood can be a struggle at times in this area but marriage is not always a bed of roses either. The cause of vocation shortage is far more likely to do with the materialism and consumerism embedded in our 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. I'm sure that's something to do with the vocation shortage as well.

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.