

Easter 4C

A mother became over anxious because her daughter could not find a man to marry. One day the daughter 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 doesn't 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.

It seems from the first reading that the prime task of anyone called to the priestly ministry is the spreading of the gospel. St Paul says: 'faith comes through hearing'. Jesus says: 'the sheep that belong to me listen to my voice'. But is the voice of the Good Shepherd being drowned out with a host of worldly distractions. This especially applies to religious vocations.

Many moons ago in Ireland a religious vocation was considered to be a great blessing for the family. The saying went that if you had a pump in the yard and a priest in the family you had it made. But everyone was much more compliant in those days, perhaps too much so – very few would question the clergy. But in hindsight this tended to put the clergy on a pedestal, somewhat distant from the ordinary lives of the people. The Synodal church envisioned by Pope Francis is striving to bring about a change of culture in this regard. The biggest problem for the church today is how we engage with the secular culture so as to re-Christianise it.

The gospel which we teach today will more often than not be seen as counter cultural. But Jesus stated that people will be rejected because of their allegiance to Him. Archbishop

Nichols cautions clergy about watering down the difficult parts of the gospel and church teaching to make it more palatable to the modern mind thereby negating most of it. The preaching of the gospel is not about presenting people with a 'sugar coated' Jesus where we convenient leave out the inconvenient but imparting fundamental truths whether welcome or unwelcome which pertain to our eternal destiny. Clergy and laity need to examine their conscience in this regard and ask themselves are they listening to the voice of the world or that of the Good Shepherd.

Strange as it may seem, 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. Celibacy is not the cause of a vocation decline. Marriage is also on the decline. The cause is far more likely to do with the materialism, consumerism and especially individualism of our present day culture which leaves little room in the lives of many for things spiritual. Vocation shortage, marriage shortage, children shortage, baptism shortage are all interconnected. But this can change.

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.