

Witness to the truth: Come Follow Me

A message from Most Rev. David M. O'Connell, C.M.

We read these words in the Gospel of St. John: "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you. I have appointed you to go and produce fruit that will last, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give it to you (John 15:16)." That is a profound thought for anyone considering a vocation to the priesthood or religious life in the Catholic Church today. It is God who chooses us for his purposes. As a seminarian many years ago I remember reading in Thomas Merton's great book "No Man is an Island," that "for each one of us, there is only one thing necessary: to fulfill our own destiny, according to God's will: to be what God wants us to be." He wrote: "Discovering vocation does not mean scrambling toward some prize just beyond my reach but accepting the treasure of true self I already possess. Vocation does not come from a voice "out there" calling me to be something I am not. It comes from a voice "in here" calling me to be the person I was born to be, to fulfill the original selfhood given me at birth by God."

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI once wrote: "Each of you has a personal vocation which God has given you for your own joy and sanctity. When a person is conquered by the fire of His gaze, no sacrifice seems too great to follow Him and give Him the best of ourselves. This is what the saints have always done, spreading the light of the Lord ... and transforming the world into a welcoming home for everyone."

On Sunday, May 11, the Catholic Church will celebrate the annual "World Day of Prayer for Vocations." Pope Francis reminds us: "No vocation is born of itself or lives for itself. A vocation flows from the heart of God and blossoms in the good soil of faithful people, in the experience of fraternal love." The theme of this year's celebration is "Vocations: Witness to the Truth." That "witness" is the responsibility of every Catholic, every Christian responding to the Lord Jesus Christ who proclaims "I am the Truth" but it is a special obligation for those who are considering Christ's call to "produce fruit that will last" in the priesthood or religious life.

Here in the Diocese of Trenton, I promote religious vocations every chance I get and everywhere I go. There has not been one parish I have visited in four years where some young man has not said, "I have thought about or am thinking about the priesthood." Young women are not as enthusiastic about religious life as religious sisters but I think that is only because they have not had the benefit so many of us have had growing up with religious sisters so visible all around us. Potential vocations to both the priesthood and religious life ARE THERE but, as so many young people have said to me, "No one ever asked me before." Well, the time has come for all of us --- priests, sisters, brothers, moms and dads, teachers, peers --- to be "vocation directors" and to ask our young people about devoting their lives to God through vocations in the Church. The challenges are many, no doubt, but, in the end, the benefits are "out of this world!"

As a Diocese, then, please join me in praying for vocations to the priesthood and religious life on May 11, "Mother's Day." Perhaps, we could place this intention in the hands of Our Blessed Mother, Mary, Queen of the Assumption, patron of our Diocese, that like her, young people might respond to God's call to "produce fruit that will last."

Most Reverend David M. O'Connell, C.M.

Bishop of Trenton

(Please share this message with anyone you think might be discerning a vocation.)