

Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time
November 11 & 12, 2023

Sr. Lynn Abdelnour, CSJ
All Saints Parish

Vocation Awareness Reflection

Hello Everyone, it is wonderful to be able to share with you this weekend. I along with Sister Betty Giarrusso and Sister Pat McNally celebrate with all of you from Utica NY every week. I am here today to talk to you about Vocations. This past week we celebrate National Vocation Awareness Week. It is an annual week-long celebration of the Catholic Church in the United States dedicated to promoting vocations. First, what does the word vocation mean – as defined by the dictionary it is a strong feeling of suitability for a particular career or occupation. As followers of Jesus, we would say that a vocation is a way of life that regards a particular worth or requiring great dedication.

Who has a vocation? Well, when I was growing up, I learned that priest and nuns have vocations. But as I grew in my understanding of our religion, it became evident that we all have a vocation. Some of us chose to be a priest or nun, others chose marriage and all the options that married life gives, and still others chose single life. Within these different areas we chose to be doctors, nurses, teachers, etc. All are the definition of vocations. All are how we chose to live this life that our God gifted us. All require us to have a way of life that regards a particular worth or requires great dedication.

Now, the million-dollar question! How do we know what we are called to do and how do we know it is truly God's plan for us. Here is what I believe to be true. In the first reading we heard about the importance of wisdom. The Jewish people defined wisdom as understanding how the world and society works and how it helps people cope with the complexities of everyday life. They believed that wisdom did not depend on Divine revelation but relies on practical human experiences. The Jewish religion strived to merge its secular beliefs with the beliefs of their Torah. The Torah, shows how God wants the Jewish Community to live. Today this is still true, for all of us. We, as people of faith striving to merge our everyday experiences while being faithful to the teachings of Jesus. I believe that when we merge our life experiences with our faith beliefs what develops is a vocation.

Today's Gospel readings talks about 10 attendants and their plight to meet the bridal party and how some prepared for the journey and others chose a short cut. I think Jesus' message is guiding us to not just act but to act with a purpose. To prepare for what is to come. Jesus often taught using parables. A Parable is a simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson. Parables were the way Jesus chose to help all of us understand what we cannot see with our eyes, but are able to feel with the eyes of our hearts. A way to help everyone understand how to prepare for our entrance into heaven. We are all on a lifelong journey moving always toward our God. This parable helps us to understand the importance of being prepared when our time comes to go home.

What does this have to do with Vocations? The Gospel tells us to be prepared. The Jewish tradition tells us the importance of wisdom merged with our faith teachings. Vocation is defined as a strong feeling of suitability for a particular career or occupation, Jesus teaches us to move always with purpose and meaning. Merge all this together and we have a map, a blueprint we might say to how we are called to discover our life journey; what God's plan is for each of us individually. We are all called to discover our particular worth. We are called to do this through the wisdom we acquire through our human experiences. Throughout this life God calls us to use our wisdom as a guide just as the Jewish people believe that wisdom merged with the teachings of their Torah is their life guide. The Torah guides the Jewish community to their individual truths. We as Catholics believe that our wisdom, combined with our Gospel values guide us to our true life calling. We all have a particular career or occupation that we feel called toward. Father Fred chose Priesthood. I chose Religious life. Or more accurately, Religious life chose me.

During the celebration of Catholic Black History month and Native American Heritage Month we read and learn about many people who have gone before us and whose contributions have made a difference in the church and society in which we live today. The true story of "becoming American" must include the black Catholics who launched a movement for acceptance within their own Church, and within the country, the same can be said for our Native American sisters and brothers.

The vocations they/we choose are not always easy and most of the time we are asked to abandon our current ways of life. But the benefits of following our values and beliefs are worth the sacrifices. If we have learned anything from the Black or Native American Communities, we learn that following the wisdom of our ancestors, values of our Spirit guide and teachings of our elders does make a difference.

I often have friends ask me how I knew I wanted to be a Sister of St. Joseph. I did not. Being a Sister of St. Joseph was never on my radar. I always thought I would be married, the mother of 10 children, living on a cattle/horse farm. Before anyone asks, I am a strong advocate for adoption. This life I now live, was God's idea. How did I know this was truly what God wanted? I followed the signs God left along the way. I often ask my friends how they knew that they wanted to marry their spouse. Often the answer is, I not sure I just knew. The same question can be asked of teachers, nurses, doctors, trash collectors, truck drivers etc. How do we know? We know because we follow a set of signs. We trust our feelings. Where do we get these signs or feelings from...the Holy Spirit.

Now having said all of this I would not be telling the truth if I did not say, it would delight me to have someone call and say I think I would like to be a Sister of St. Joseph. I am the Candidate Director for our community and can attest to the fact that living Religious life is truly and honor and privilege. Although I came to this life kicking and screaming, I am so incredibly happy God was so vigilant. The opportunities to touch the lives of others is the most rewarding experience. I originally thought that God was mistaken and had the wrong person, but God made it very obvious that Religious Life was what I was called too. Being in Syracuse I feel I must also

include the Sisters of St. Francis who have served the Syracuse area for many years. I am sure they would be just as happy to hear from you. Just tell them I sent you.

Sister Joan Chittister, in her book *Seeking the God Who Is Seeking You* writes: about the importance of seeking more out of life. If you find yourself asking “Is that all there is?” or feeling that life is not profound enough for you to spend a lifetime on, or whatever life’s present circumstances, good as they may be, you feel something is still missing, then maybe just maybe you may want to look deeper into the Priesthood, Religious life, the Decadent or another number of ministries within the Church.

These concerns, these issues, need a lot of good information, a lot of serious thought. A friend once asked me if I just knocked on the door and said I am here and want to live with you. Not exactly, those of us thinking that God may be calling us to something more, need the opportunity to talk to someone who has been there, who has lived a religious life, who can answer some important but very difficult questions.”

That is why I am here today. To start the thought process on “am I looking for more?” To help remove doubts that anyone may have about how God is calling us all to live, know this, it is the desire to seek God’s will that is important. We may not always get it right the first time, we may need a few do – overs but I believe it is the desire to seek God’s plan that is important. Now if I have gotten this all wrong and I really was meant to be that mother of 10, I picture meeting God at the end of this time on earth and God giving me a big hug, saying well not the way I would have done it but thanks for giving it your best.

If I leave you with any one message today about vocations, God’s love or our purpose on earth. I hope it is that we are called to always strive to live God's dream for our lives; and to be faithful to all the little ways God calls us to grow in love.

Amen!

