

HOMILY 3RD SUN OT YRB 2018

I think all of us are looking for our purpose in life, and this is a journey that lasts our whole lifetime. We need to keep looking to make sure we are on track. We have different purposes at different times in our lives. In finding our purpose we must remember that we have to have a purpose larger than ourselves. We will never be whole or find fulfillment until we find a purpose larger than ourselves. The second thing that we have to remember is that finding a purpose larger than ourselves is not limited to information, knowledge and reason. Finding our purpose is largely a matter of the heart, what you are drawn to.

Both of these points were illustrated in the Gospel reading today. First of all, Peter, Andrew, James and John were called to become fishers of men. They were all fishermen. My guess is that they were fishermen to make a living to support themselves and their family. To be good fishermen, they needed to know when and where to find the fish and how to catch them. I think Jesus saw these skills and that they could use them to become fishers of men. They would have to know how and when to find people open to conversion and how to bring them into the faith. The purpose of being fishers of fish was probably to make a living for themselves, being fishers of men was definitely a purpose bigger than themselves. I do not want to minimize the importance of earning a living, but sometimes our paid position gives us the support we need to find our purpose beyond ourselves. Secondly, Peter, Andrew, James and John dropped everything and followed Jesus immediately. They did not ask any questions, they did not take time to think about it. Becoming a disciple for them must have been a matter of the heart. Remember, they were giving up their livelihood, and James and John were abandoning their father Zebedee and the family business. I bet they took some flak for that from their family and friends. What are you thinking? It was a matter of the heart.

I want to talk today about vocations to the Diocesan priesthood. As a pastor, I have to always remember that this is not all about me; it is about serving God and his people. I could make this about me, but I have to consciously remember my purpose that is bigger than myself. And my decision to leave the practice of law and enter the priesthood was largely a matter of the heart. It did not necessarily make logical sense.

I want to talk about some of the misconceptions of the Diocesan priesthood. People frequently say to me: “Thank you for giving up your life for God and the Church.” I am giving up some things, like being married and having children, but I am not giving up my life. I am giving up different things than people called to be a spouse and parent, but I do not think it is a bigger sacrifice. To be a good spouse and parent takes a great deal of sacrifice and a commitment to a purpose larger than yourself. People also tell me that the priesthood must be a lonely life. It is not. I am surrounded by people whenever I want to be. Sometimes I need to be alone more than I am. We all get lonely at times; even spouses and parents are lonely at times. I live alone but so does 31 million people in the United States, so that is not unique. People also think Diocesan priests live a life of poverty. We do not take a vow of poverty, we can own property. I get a very small salary but have everything I need. I have never made less money in my life and I have never been happier. Catholic priests report more job satisfaction than any other occupation. People also think that priests have kind of an abnormal life. Other than being single and not having children, my life is pretty much the same as yours. I have close personal friends who are not priests that I do things with and get great support from, probably more so than married people because I do not have a spouse to depend upon. I am probably closer to my nieces and nephews than I would be if I had children, and I have 6,000 people who call me father. When I go on vacation I do not go with other priests, stay at a rectory and say Mass every

day. I stay at hotels, go sightseeing and have fun. The decision I made to enter the priesthood was not totally based upon knowledge, information, and reason. It was largely a matter of the heart, and there were people that could not quite understand why I would leave the practice of law for the priesthood. But my guess is the decision to marry and become a parent is not strictly based upon knowledge, information and reason. It is a matter of the heart.

My point is, the decision to become a diocesan priest is similar to any other decision we make to find our purpose in life. It is not an abnormal life of suffering and sacrifice, but a life that is joyful, fulfilling and whole. If we are going to increase the number of priests we have to bring our young single men back to church. I think the main thing that priests share in common is that we enjoy celebrating the Sacraments. Aside from that, you can use whatever gifts you have. However if you are not coming to church you would not realize that you enjoy celebrating the Sacraments and you are not considering the priesthood. I think God is still calling men to the priesthood they are just not answering the call. Hopefully men do not hear the call after they are married. Then it will be too late. Finally, parents have to encourage their sons to become priests. Parents have an incredible influence over their children in choosing a career. You suggest other careers for your children, do you suggest the priesthood? I would highly recommend it!