

HOMILY 3rd SUN OT YRA 2020

At this time I would like to ask all of the single boys and men to stand. Look around. These are all of the potential future priests we have in the congregation today. Ok, you can sit down. In the Gospel reading today we heard about Jesus calling the first four apostles, Peter, Andrew, James and John. So today I want to talk about my experience of the diocesan priesthood. Diocesan priests are primarily pastors of parishes. We are tied to diocese and are assigned within the diocese. If I wanted to leave the diocese I would have to be released from Detroit and be accepted into another diocese. We call this incardination. There are no free agents; diocesan priest must also be tied to a diocese. The other types of priests are order priests and have a particular charism, like Jesuits teach and Franciscans work with the poor, and generally live in community. I am not going to talk more about them today.

Notice the type of men that Jesus called to be the first apostles. He went into a fishing village and called fishermen. He called the ordinary Joe. There is no particular “priest type.” I was in seminary with doctors, lawyers, tool and dye makers, truck drivers, accountants, teachers. They were all ordained and are all good priests. You can use whatever charisms you have and you tailor your priesthood to use them. Two of my charisms are encouragement and healing. That is why I spend a lot of time doing pastoral counseling, spiritual direction, and anointing of the sick. Music is one of my charisms, but I am not an accomplished musician, but Heather is so I count on her. Wisdom is one of my charisms so I can take academic and intellectual information and tell people how it applies to their lives. That helps me in my preaching and presenting, but I am not a gifted preacher. The person with the charism of preaching is the person where you say: “I did not agree with him but he is a good speaker. I am also not a teacher and we have a school that I have to oversee, so I have a very experienced principle and a faculty of certified teachers and a Director of Religious education that know how to teach. I do not like administration, finance or accounting. That is why I have a great bookkeeper and some great people on my Finance Council to advise me. Whatever your charisms are, you can use them in the diocesan priesthood.

Diocesan priests are called to celibacy, and I think many people are called to the single life. I think we put far too much pressure on young people to get married and have children. Many people are more satisfied as single people and can put all of that energy they would put into a marriage and children and do other great things. Many people do not discover this until they are divorced. I have never regretted not getting married and having children. I have some really close friends. My sister is 12 years younger than me and she was 3 years old when my father died, so we have a special relationship. I am closer to my nieces and nephews than I would be if I had my own children and 6,000 people call me father. Aside from not dating, my life is pretty normal. I vacation with friends and stay at hotels and go sightseeing like normal people. The vast majority of my friends are lay people not priests and nuns. It is not a terrible lonely life. I am with people a lot and enjoy my time alone.

We collect a very small salary, but are provided with all the material things that we need including a nice place to live. And we have great job security. I worked as an attorney at one of the largest law firms in Michigan with great earning potential and it became very clear to me that I did not care about the money. I will never be rich but I am very much fulfilled in the priesthood. I have never made less money in my life and I have never been happier.

We think of the call to the priesthood as being some kind of mystical experience, but it is not. You do not hear voices, see visions or get struck by lightning. At least that was not my experience. Decisions in our lives take courage and strength. To follow Jesus in the priesthood you have to step out into the unknown, but once you enter seminary you have 6 years to decide if that is what you want. You step into the unknown what you get married or have children, but once you start you do not have 6 years to decide if that is what you want. You cannot give those children back. I am really happy and fulfilled being a priest, and most priests would tell you that as well. I cannot imagine doing anything else. It is not a life of terrible suffering and sacrifice. It is fabulous.