

Homily 4th Sunday Easter - Vocations Sunday - Year B 2024

Today, called 'Good Shepherd Sunday', is also the 'World Day of Prayer for Vocations'. Pope Francis has asked us to reflect on the links between the vocation of every Christian with the vocation of St Joseph, patron of the Church. He reminds us that *'Joseph's dreams led him into experiences he would never have imagined: his betrothal that made him the father of the Messiah; his flight to Egypt that saved the life of his family; his return to his native land and bringing the family to Nazareth, the place where Jesus would begin his preaching of the Kingdom of God. Amid all these upheavals, he found the courage to follow God's will'*.

We all dream of having a happy and fulfilled life and how that happiness and fulfilment might come about but God also has dreams for us. And although God's dreams are also for our happiness and fulfilment, God's dreams for us do not always correspond with ours. Often, God's dreams for us can be far more exciting, ambitious, daring and even dangerous as shown in Joseph's story.

God asked Joseph to let go of his own dreams and make his entire life a gift to his wife and adopted son. In the words of Pope Francis: *'May St Joseph help everyone, especially young people who are discerning, to make God's dreams for them come true. May he inspire in them the courage to say "yes" to the Lord who always surprises and never disappoints'*. An important aspect of Joseph's vocation is **service**. He serves Mary and Jesus in God's name and he protects them. His life was dedicated to their well-being and safety. For this reason, St Joseph is known as the protector of the Church and the protector of vocations.

For anyone discerning a call to the priesthood, Joseph grounds the call and desire in **service**. Priesthood is not about power or prestige, it's about humble service of God and his people. Such dedication requires sacrifice and commitment but comes with the reward of deep fulfilment. All vocations, priestly or otherwise, are grounded in service.

In the call to the priesthood, we may fear what we are being asked to give up. Why not think instead of the joy of what serving the Lord will give us and how he never leaves us lacking in anything when we respond generously to his call. Like St Joseph, concern for others is a sign of a true vocation and is testimony of a life touched by God. *'Every true vocation is born of the gift of oneself, which is the fruit of mature sacrifice. The priesthood and consecrated life likewise require this kind of maturity'* (*Patris Corde*, 7). Another link between a priestly vocation and the witness of St Joseph is his **fidelity**. Love is persistent. It requires us to be faithful in good times and in bad. Joseph is a righteous man who was faithful to everyday holiness. He is the faithful father who honours his word to his wife.

By being faithful to God in daily and simple ways, like St Joseph, we will find that the journey will take care of itself. Jesus will lead us to where He wants us to be. Pope Francis adds that *'this fidelity is the secret of your joy'*. And so, as God asks Joseph not to be afraid (cf. Matt. 1:20), so the Lord reassures those he calls to the priesthood and religious life: *'Do not be afraid are also words the Lord addresses to you. Although you may feel uncertain and hesitant, do not delay your desire to give your life to Jesus'*. On this Vocations Sunday may the whole Church affirm the vocations of priests and religious and may those he calls to follow this path, respond to his call with generosity and trust. *'God our Father, grant us trust in your loving kindness.'* (Fr Billy Swan adapted)

"There's a fine line between a long, drawn-out sermon and a hostage situation."

A newly-ordained pastor, in his first days was attempting to console the widow of an eccentric man who had just died. Standing before the open casket, the nervous young pastor said, *"I realise this must be a very hard blow for you, Mrs. Svenson. Just try to remember that what we see before us is only the husk, the shell of your dear husband – the nut has gone to heaven!"*