

Fourth Sunday of Easter, A – May 7, 2017 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – 5pm Vigil, 8:30 & 11am Sunday Masses – 850 words

This Fourth Sunday of Easter is always Good Shepherd Sunday, with a selection from the gospel about the Good Shepherd, and also the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. Christ tells us that his sheep hear his voice: on this day, then, we pray that those members of Christ's flock who are called to the priesthood or consecrated life may hear his voice and respond with their lives. Thus we pray every Sunday in our General Intercessions here at St. Paul's, but today we join with the entire Church in this urgent prayer.

Indeed, there is an urgency. In terms of priestly vocations, here in the Diocese of Birmingham we are in high crisis mode. If it were not for the help of priests from foreign countries, we would have to start combining or closing parishes. Fortunately we have been able to avert such a disaster so far. But we must have more men from our local parishes enter the seminary – and the sooner, the better. The Lord has not ceased to call; but many have ceased to hear his voice. Some, I fear, have heard, but have not answered – or have even answered no. In terms of vocations to the convent, well, I'm afraid we just don't often talk about those, so great is the need for priests. But there is a need for women who dedicate their lives to Christ for the service of the Church also!

We recently hosted the confirmation retreat for the eighth graders of St. Rose Academy here. As I was speaking about some of the consequences of the sacrament of confirmation – among which are responding to one's vocation in the Church – I asked the students who in their class they thought might be called to the priesthood. Without any hesitation they immediately pointed to a couple of the boys. Then I asked who they thought might be called to the convent. They immediately pointed out two or three girls. There was a great deal of unanimity. It was obvious to these young people who among their peers might have a special calling. And Sister Vincent Marie, their teacher, rightly chimed in pointing out that it is not always who we think, either, who has a call. I wonder, if we undertook this exercise now, to which of our single people here present we might point as having a possible call?

There is a parish in St. Paul, Minnesota, that over the years has been very effective at fostering vocations. It is called St. Agnes. Under the guidance of their long-time pastor, the late Msgr. Richard Schuler – may he rest in peace – 38 men from that parish have been ordained priests, and a couple of them, bishops. I do not have their statistics for religious sisters, but there have been many of them also. Would that the Lord would grant us this grace here at St. Paul's! Part of their secret has been to say a particular prayer at each Sunday Mass. After the gospel and before the homily, all kneel and recite the following prayer, week in and week out:

Let us ask God to give worthy priests, brothers, and sisters to his holy Church.

O God, we earnestly beseech thee to bless this (arch)diocese with many priests, brothers, and sisters, who will love thee with their whole strength and gladly spend their entire lives to serve thy Church and to make thee known and loved.

Bless our families, bless our children. Choose from our homes those who are needed for thy work.

Mary, Queen of the clergy, pray for us! Pray for our priests and religious. Obtain for us many more.

It is recited back and forth between the priest and the people. I love the line, "Choose from our homes those who are needed for thy work"! I know that so many of you here are open to giving your children to the Lord for a life in his service, if he calls them. What a wonderful prayer for us all to say!

At St. Agnes there have been "first Masses" celebrated every year for many years now, by the priests ordained from that parish. We will be blessed to have soon-to-be-Father Brad Jantz

celebrate his first Mass here on Sunday, June 25 at 11am. Let us be sure to pray for Deacon Brad as he prepares for ordination in just over a month's time. Let us pray for our seminarian Justin Ward also, and for all of the seminarians of the diocese. May many more join their number, and may several of them come from our parish. We have been blessed with some vocations from St. Paul's down through the years, but I think we have many more to give. When I look out each Sunday I see young men whom I think the Lord is calling. Do you see them? Say something to them. Do you see a young lady who might be called to the convent? Say something! Don't just pray, but also say! Lend your voice to the Good Shepherd, and pray for the person to hear.