

From the Pastor's Desktop

A Scripture Reflection on God's Call from the Pastor

For the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

January 15, 2023



Dear Parishioners of St. Elizabeth,

Years ago a woman at my previous parish told me about her grandson's decision to enter seminary. I had known the young man as a student some years before at one of our parish schools. Now he graduated with a bachelor's degree. The only son of his parents, he has a sister. Sharing her feelings, the grandmother asked me to pray for her family. She was echoing the sentiments of her daughter---the young man's mother---who was both happy and sad about her son's decision.

His mother, too, spoke to me a few times about her son's decision to enter seminary. The family, active in parish life, is delighted about the young man's decision. At the same time, they are aware of the implications: they cannot keep him for themselves. They have to set him free and let him go where he is needed. They have to get used to a different set of expectations about him in the future, something at once joyful and heartbreaking. Having heard the call, he is now rearranging the family ties in relation to Christ. He has dared to follow Jesus.

Isn't it true that God continues to call us in our present world? His son Jesus Christ keeps challenging us to follow him and become his disciples. In the Old Testament, God calls Adam and Eve into life for a glorious state of love and grace. We are familiar with the call of Abraham, Moses, David, and the prophets.

The first reading from the second servant song of Isaiah exemplifies vocation when God calls the servant nation of Israel, their sufferings in Babylonian exile notwithstanding. The servant could also be an individual, called, anointed from the womb, and sent out to be "a light to the nations." This individual is often interpreted as referring to Jesus, the future Messiah.

The theme of vocation is demonstrated in the life of Paul who is "called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God." The Church in Corinth too is "called to be holy" because they "have been sanctified in Christ Jesus."

John the Baptist's vocation is to fulfill a specific mission: to prepare the way of the Lord and point him out as "the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." He recognizes Jesus as anointed by the Spirit and testifies that "he is the Son of God."

In the 21st century, in the technology-based, sports-and-entertainment driven, consumer-oriented world of ours, Jesus desperately needs us to heed his call. Much of the world is still in need of food, shelter, clothing, education, and health. Millions are without the basic blessings of safety, security, stability, hope, and peace. There is more sadness in the world than joy. There is abundance of wealth, but it does not reach those in abject poverty. Pope Francis has been speaking out persuasively about this situation.

Vocation galvanizes us to address these needs. We need more young men and women responding to service in the Church as deacons, priests, and nuns. We need to do more to inspire, promote, nourish, and cherish vocations.

In the larger sense though, vocation is universal, challenging every woman, man, and child to respond to the Baptismal call to be holy and to follow Jesus. It's the call to forget self and serve others, as Jesus did. This call, as Pope Francis has rightly said, is extended to all communities, organizations, religions, and even to atheists. Governments and nations are anointed and missioned to make this world a better place. In this new year of 2023, guided by the Christmas star, we need to sow the seeds of vocation for recreating a world filled with God's blessings for all.

Let's hope and long for vocations. Let's pray for more women and men to generously consider serving God and his people through religious life and priesthood. Vocations do not often happen without the context, a context in which individuals are introduced to faith in the family and through friends. If the context of faith and service, as we understand it in the Catholic tradition, are introduced to young people, there is a chance of vocation being considered as a wonderful way of being human, religious, Christian, and Catholic.

Your Friend and Pastor,
Fr. Charles Puthota