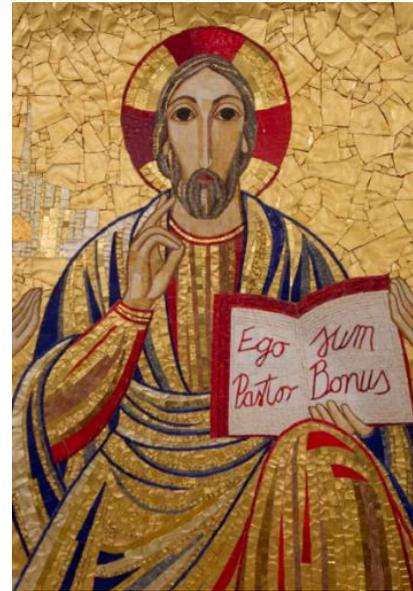


SAMPLE HOMILY FOR VOCATION SUNDAY

Dear friends.

The fourth Sunday of Easter each year is known as 'Good Shepherd Sunday' or 'World Day of Prayer for Vocations'. On that Sunday, the Gospel is always taken from the beautiful tenth chapter of St. John's Gospel where Jesus identifies himself as the Good Shepherd who cares for his sheep, gathers them and lays down his life for them.

This year, to mark Vocations Sunday, Pope Francis has given the Church a message to reflect on where he links the vocation of every Christian to the unique vocation of St Joseph, patron of the Church. He does so in this year dedicated to St Joseph and following the publication of his earlier letter *Patris Corde... With a father's heart*, urging all Christians to be inspired by the example and spirit of St Joseph in this year dedicated to his honour.



Here I would like to connect three points that the Holy Father makes in his message on this Good Shepherd Sunday to a vocation to the priesthood. This is not to exclude all other vocations but to affirm the necessity of priestly vocations for the future of the Church and the role of priests to help believers discover their own vocation, to respond to it and live it faithfully.

The first feature from the life of St Joseph is the part that dreams played in his life. As Francis reminds us from the Scriptures, 'Joseph's dreams led him into experiences he would never have imagined. The first of these up-ended his betrothal, but made him the father of the Messiah; the second caused him to flee to Egypt, but saved the life of his family. After the third, which foretold his return to his native land, a fourth dream made him change plans once again, bringing him 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'.

All of us have dreams. We dream of a happy and fulfilled life. We imagine how that happiness and fulfilment can come about. But God also has dreams for us. And although His dreams are also for our happiness and fulfilment, God's dreams for us do not always correspond our own. God's dreams for us are far more exciting, ambitious, daring and yes, even dangerous. We see this in the case of Joseph. God asked Joseph to let go of his own dreams for himself and to 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'.

The second 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 concern and safety. For this reason, St Joseph is known as the protector of the Church and the protector of vocations. For everyone discerning a call to the priesthood, Joseph grounds our calling and desire in service. Priesthood is not about power or prestige. It is about humble service of God and his people. Such dedication requires sacrifice and commitment but comes with the reward of deep fulfilment. So, if we experience a fear of what we

are being asked to give up, think instead of the joy of serving, what 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).

The third and final 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 bad. Joseph is a righteous man who was faithful to everyday holiness. He is the faithful father who honours his word to his wife and what God was asking of him.

Sometimes we don't know what the future holds. We don't have a clear blueprint of how our journey will unfold. But if we are faithful to God in daily and simple ways then the journey will take care of itself. He will lead us to where He wants us to be. This comes about by being faithful to the little things which comes before faithfulness to things that are bigger. In the concluding words of Pope Francis, '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 is reassuring those he is calling to the priesthood and religious life:

'Do not be afraid: these words the Lord also addresses to you, dear sister, and to you, dear brother, whenever you feel that, even amid uncertainty and hesitation, you can no longer delay your desire to give your life to him'.

On this Vocations Sunday may the whole Church affirm the vocations of priests and religious and may those he is calling to follow this path, respond to his call with generosity and trust. May we know God's dream for our lives; may we become humble servants of God and his people and be faithful to the Lord and the little ways he calls us to grow in love.

'God our Father, we trust in your loving kindness. Bless our diocese of Ferns with many priestly and religious vocations. Give the men and women you call the light to understand your gift and the love to walk always in the footsteps of your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.'

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