

31st Sunday of the Year A - 2017

Here are some pretty harsh words: “I will send a curse upon you and of your blessing I will make a curse. You have turned aside from the way, and have caused many to falter by your instruction; you have made void the covenant of Levi, says the LORD of hosts. I, therefore, have made you contemptible.” Those are words of a curse issued against the priests in the Old Testament for not having been faithful to their responsibilities.

Yes, the truth back then and the truth even in recent times is that some priests have been unfaithful to their vocation. Hearing such words as in today’s first reading can cause any priest to engage in a serious examination of conscience to make sure that he has been and will continue to be faithful. Jesus in the gospel likewise exhorts the religious leaders to be faithful to their calling and to ensure that they do not seek anything for themselves.

Hearing these words some might wonder about priesthood. Would anyone be attracted to the vocation to priesthood. Is anyone worthy of such a calling? Would anyone want to be priest since priests are often subjects of great scrutiny?

Well, the simple answer is that the Church requires priests. Parishes need pastors. There can be no Church without priests because the Church is fundamentally a Eucharistic community. Without the Eucharist, the body and blood of Christ, there is no Church.

So, I’m going to tell you a secret. God is calling men to priesthood. The difficulty is two-fold. Men are not responding to that invitation and/or others are not encouraging them to respond to that call. So, God is inviting. Here’s secret #2, no future priest will come from a rectory of today. The future priests of the Church must come from the families of the Church. The family is the origin of the priests of today and will be the origin of the priests of tomorrow.

So often today men are not being encouraged to consider priesthood. In fact, when was the last time in your life that you said to someone: “I think you would be a great priest?” So often, if a young man says to another I am thinking about the priesthood, they receive no encouragement. In fact, here are some of the responses that they do get.

Be a priest...you’re way too good-looking for that! Makes it sound like ugliness is a requirement for the priesthood.

Be a priest....you’re way too smart for that. Makes it sound as if being dumb is a requirement for the priesthood.

Be a priest....there are way too many sacrifices in being a priest. Give me a break! What vocation does not involve sacrifices? The sacrifices of priesthood are different from the sacrifices of other vocations.

Be a priest...Go to a real college first, then decide later about the seminary. Seminaries are real colleges. The seminary is a place for a man to discern whether or not God is calling him to priesthood. It's an ideal environment because the seminarians are encouraged to discern actively what God is calling them to do. Would you say to someone who wants to be a lawyer something like: Well, why don't you go to vet school first, then decide whether you want to be a lawyer. The seminary is a place to find out what God is calling the person to be.

Be a priest....You're way too young for that! Frankly, I don't know how to respond to that statement. At what age is one supposed to start thinking about one's vocation?

Unfortunately, those who wish to become priests do not receive much encouragement. In fact, not only do they not receive much encouragement, they actually received discouragement to consider this call to serve God as a priest.

Sometimes God's invitation needs a human voice, your human voice not only to encourage but also to actively invite others to consider this vocation. Your voice may be God's voice of invitation.

Whom should you invite? Start with your own family. Your sons, grandsons, nephews, uncles, brothers-in-law. You could invite your boyfriend. He may be a lousy boy friend, but could become an excellent priest.

Priests come from the people of God to serve the people of God. We do not come from heaven, even if we sometimes pretend we do. We do not emerge from the earth as you might see in some sci-fi movie. Priests definitely do not come from the rectories of today.

People sometimes ask me: "Msgr, what are you doing about the shortage of priests?" Well, I invite, I encourage. So, I'll turn the question around: "What are you going to do about the shortage of priests?"