

Reflections

by the
Most Reverend Thomas J. Murphy



Hearing the Call to a Vocation

So often in the past, the word "vocation" would be used to describe the response given by a young man or woman to become a religious woman, a brother or a priest. As such, the word took on a very restricted meaning. However, more and more today, the whole idea and reality of vocation within the Catholic Church applies to every baptized person who responds to the call of God through the life of grace we are asked to lead as Christians, whether married or single, priest or nun, male or female. All Christians are called to a vocation, a vocation of holiness and grace. As such, we share in the life and priesthood of Jesus Christ who continues His presence in the Church today.

However, within the Church community, there are those individuals who respond to a particular religious vocation by becoming a religious woman, a brother, or a priest. Such individuals are asked to exercise a unique leadership role within the Christian community by the witness they offer through their lives and the full-time commitment they share with the Christian community in lives of service to God and people. These people are also asked to make a commitment of celibacy and obedience, in addition to the vow of poverty as members of religious communities.

It is no secret today that far less people are responding to the religious vocation of being a nun, a brother or a priest. Many causes for this decline are listed. Many opinions are shared regarding this situation by those within and outside the Church today. The full impact of this decline is being felt in our own diocese where parish communities once staffed by a full complement of sisters and priests now find themselves ministered to by a neighboring parish. That neighboring parish in turn has far less religious women, brothers and priests than it once did.

How does the Christian community respond to this reality? We might well shake our heads and hope that events will change. We could also take the defeatist attitude and give up. But there is another option I would like to share with you. I believe today, more than any other time in history, we must emphasize the vocation to religious life and priesthood as a valid and powerful option for young people. I believe we must go out and challenge young people to consider this option in a prayerful and reflective way. I believe, at the same time, that we cannot minimize standards or expectations of young people who might consider a vocation to religious life and priesthood. We must appeal to young people with good moral character, competent intellectual ability, good physical health, the desire to develop a spiritual life, the ability to relate to people, and the willingness to share one's life as a servant to God and the Church as a religious man or woman or priest.

Where are such young people today? I believe they are in every one of our parish communities. I believe many are waiting to be asked to respond to a religious vocation. Furthermore, the climate which encourages such vocations is the example and witness given by religious women and priests today in addition to the all essential element of a family experience of love and faith that is part of the young person's daily experience.

Continued on next page

Hearing the Call to a Vocation

I realize full well the questions raised today regarding the law of celibacy and the concern over the ability to make such a commitment to religious life and priesthood. However, I also have faith in a Church which asks such gifts from people today as well as faith in the grace of God that is offered to those in religious life and priesthood. I most of all have faith in young people today and the generosity which characterizes so many of them which might prompt a consideration of looking into the possibilities of a vocation to religious life and priesthood.

Beginning next Sunday and for the entire week of October 14th to 20th, we will be celebrating Church Vocations Week, a time when the entire Christian community is asked to pray for vocations to the priesthood and religious life, a time when young people are asked to consider a vocation to religious life and priesthood.

Where are vocations today? I believe they are within us, all around us, and among us. Let our prayers storm the heavens to recognize them. Let young people experience the Church in a faith-filled way today that might prompt them to respond to the Lord's invitation!

+++++

This column is being written as I prepare to go to the Bishop's meeting to meet Pope John Paul II and to have the privilege of concelebrating Mass with him and the other bishops of the nation. This will appear after I return but I hope to offer some reflections on the experience of hearing our Holy Father and sharing with you my own reaction to his visit to our country ... Already the reports on his visit to Ireland are overwhelming. The Holy Father is calling people to faith and calling young people in a special way to a life of dedication and commitment. Let us pray through our prayers and sacrifices that his message will find a welcome audience among us here in the United States ...

This past week promised to be a great experience in our Diocese as we welcomed Fr. Illig and listened to his call for evangelization, a call to invite people into the Church who may have left it or have never been a part of it ...

The weekend at Ashland for the meeting with ministers to the Native Americans was very good and proved to be a good experience for all in attendance. Afterwards, it was a long journey up to Cottonwood north of Havre, but the faith and dedication of the people made it all worthwhile.

This week I plan to be in Billings with Confirmation scheduled at Little Flower on Wednesday with other Confirmation celebrations later in the week at Colstrip, Wibaux, Baker and Ekalaka. It will be good to visit these communities again ... And finally, once again, may I call all of us to the awareness that October is the month of the Holy Rosary. The Rosary is a relevant and important form of prayer in the Church today. May all our prayers address the needs we have as individuals, families and as a Diocese. May our prayers also give thanks to God for his many blessings. May God bless each of you.