

VOCATIONS CROSS PROGRAM

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Prayer Service

Preparation

Before receiving the Vocations Cross, create a prayer space where the cross will be placed. In your prayer space include a Bible and candle, and perhaps a nice cloth and plant.

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Leader: Loving God, we give you thanks for those who teach and show us how to live. We ask you to bless your Church with people who will serve you as priests, brothers, sisters and deacons. May the vocation cross remind us how much your son Jesus loves us and that you are calling us to love others now and in the future. We ask this through Jesus with the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Sunday

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We pray for all those called to the consecrated life.

We all are called to do the Father's will by following Christ through to the grace of the Holy Spirit. But some are called to further their baptismal commitment in a consecrated life by living according to the evangelical vows of poverty, celibacy, and obedience. These men and women maintain a single-minded focus in living the life that Jesus embraced and present to Him the gift of their lives.

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Father, you call each one of us by name and ask us to follow you. Bless our church by raising up dedicated and generous leaders from our families and friends who will serve your people as Priest, Sisters and Brothers. Inspire us as we grow to know you and open our hearts to hear your call. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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A reading from the Old Testament

"I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the communities of the earth shall find a blessing in you."

Genesis 12:2-3

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A reading from the New Testament

Then Jesus approached and said to the disciples, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me, Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always until the end of the age."

Matthew 28: 18-20

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Suggested Closing Prayers:

Say one decade of the rosary for an increase in vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. Our Father, ten Hail Mary's, and Glory Be to the Father.

REFLECTION

WHAT IS A VOCATION IN THE FIRST PLACE?

“The only ones among you who will really be happy are those who have sought and found a way to serve”

Albert Schweitzer

Mankind’s Search for Happiness and Holiness

Is a vocation about happiness or holiness? Well, both. But I think that most young people are motivated by a desire for happiness, at least in the beginning of their search to know the will of God. All people desire happiness. They want to be fulfilled. This is a desire which God has placed deep within the heart. Yet one of the most common errors people make is to let their lives become consumed by a search for perfect happiness on this earth. It is not to be found here. The perfect happiness we all search for, that we yearn for in our hearts, is only to be found in heaven. This does not mean that we cannot enjoy some degree of happiness here on earth, just not the definitive happiness and fulfillment that we deeply desire

The Irish have a saying, “A bad start is a quick finish.” It is important to start the search for happiness with clear thinking. Having realistic expectation from the beginning about what this world can and cannot offer protects a person from supreme disappointment and despair in later years. As a priest friend of mine used to say in times of difficulty.” This is as good as it gets around these parts.”

I emphasize in this book that every vocation is about serving others. God made us for this reason. He desires that we love others more than ourselves and live selflessly. This is the secret to happiness. This is holiness. When a person learns how to serve others and makes this the consuming concern of his life, he is happy.

“I Think You Could Have a Vocation”

As a former vocation director and now seminary formator, it disturbs me to hear someone say about a young man, “I think John could have a vocation.” Of course he has a vocation! Everyone has a vocation. What they mean, of course, is that John could be called to be a priest or perhaps to join a religious order. But what that person should have said is, “I think John might be called to the vocation of priesthood or religious life.” It does a disservice to the person and to the Church to use incorrect language, as if only priesthood and religious or consecrated life are true vocations. Language is important, as it can either illuminate or obfuscate the truth. Clear teaching about the theology of vocation is critical.

I think most people; including most Catholics have a very vague idea about what a vocation is. They have heard the word mentioned at Mass, usually with reference to priests. They have seen “vocational schools” advertised, where people go to gain a skill to get a job, maybe as a nurse, computer technician, or mechanic. Many think that “vocation” does not apply to them, since they are already married and working. Some people simply have no idea. I am reminded of the conversation in Acts between St. Paul and some Christian disciples he had met in Ephesus. St. Paul asked, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” They answered him, “We have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit” (Acts 19:2) Likewise, I think many Catholics have never heard that there is such a thing as a vocation! Or if they have, many have never taken the idea seriously. This is a problem. So what is a vocation in the first place?

Christ-likeness is the only success recognized by God.

Monday

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Father, you call each one of us by name and ask us to follow you. Bless our church by raising up dedicated and generous leaders from our families and friends who will serve your people as Priest, Sisters and Brothers. Inspire us as we grow to know you and open our hearts to hear your call. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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A reading from the Old Testament

My son, forget not my teaching, keep in mind my commands; For many days, and years of life, and peace, they will bring you. Let not kindness and fidelity leave you; bind them around your neck; Then will you win favor and good esteem before God and man. Trust in the Lord with all your heart; on your own intelligence rely not; In all your ways be mindful of Him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes. Honor the Lord with your wealth, with first fruits of all your produce; Then will your barns be filled with grain, with new wine your vats will overflow. The discipline of the Lord, my son, disdain not; spurn not his reproof; For whom the Lord loves he reproveth, and He chastises the son he favors.

Proverbs 3:1-12

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A reading from the New Testament

“And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the nether world shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; And whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Matthew 16: 18-19

Suggested Closing Prayers:

Say one decade of the rosary for an increase in vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. Our Father, ten Hail Mary's, and Glory Be to the Father.

REFLECTION

What is a Vocation in the First Place

Our Primary Vocation is Holiness

Happiness is doing the will of God. Interestingly, that could also be the definition of holiness. The primary and universal vocation of every person in the world is to the holy – to become like Jesus Christ. Christ-likeness is the only success recognized by God. Or, as St. Bonaventure said: “If you learn everything except Christ, you learn nothing. If you learn nothing except Christ, you learn everything.” Interestingly, the people who take holiness seriously are also the people who experience the most happiness here in this life. Why? Because our holiness is preparing us for the supreme happiness of heaven, the true destiny for which we were made, not some glimmer of happiness which we might experience here. Holiness directly leads to fulfillment of human flourishing, and the entire concept of vocation encompasses both.

The first vocation of every baptized person is to become a saint. While that may seem daunting, the good news is that this vocation does not require any discernment. The Church and Sacred Scripture both tell us clearly and definitively that holiness is everyone’s primary vocation.

The Church on earth is endowed already with sanctity that is real though imperfect. In her members, perfect holiness is something yet to be acquired. Strengthened by so many and such great means of salvation, all the faithful, whatever their condition or state – though each in his own way - are called by the Lord so that perfection of sanctity by which the Father himself is perfect.

Discerning and accepting one’s vocation is like building a pyramid. It must be constructed from the bottom up. A man will not be able to know and accept his secondary or particular vocation – marriage or priesthood, for example – until he has been seriously striving towards his primary vocation of holiness. Some have tried to do it in reverse, and almost always have failed.

Our Particular (or Secondary) Vocation: Four Options for a Catholic Man

What I am referring to as our secondary vocation is the sense in which we usually hear the word vocations used. The secondary vocation refers to the particular state in life in which we are called to fulfill our primary vocation of holiness. This particular vocation normally will have the following characteristics:

It has been pre-determined or pre-destined by God
It involves a permanent commitment
It involves sacrificing oneself to serve God and others
It is recognized by the Church as a vocation
Its purpose is to help other people to get to heaven
For a Catholic man in the Roman Rite (which is the majority of Catholics in the world), there are basically four options:

Holy Marriage
Holy Orders
Religious Life
Generous Single Life in Christ

Every Catholic man and woman is called by God to at least one of these states in life. I say “at least” because some states in life can overlap; for instance, most permanent deacons are married. In some Eastern rites of the Catholic Church, priests can be married, However for a Catholic man in the Roman rite whom God is calling to become a diocesan priest, there is ordinarily only one particular state in life: holy orders and a life of cheerful celibacy.

Tuesday

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We pray for the bishops and the cardinals.

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Father, you call each one of us by name and ask us to follow you. Bless our church by raising up dedicated and generous leaders from our families and friends who will serve your people as Priest, Sisters and Brothers. Inspire us as we grow to know you and open our hearts to hear your call. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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A reading from the Old Testament

But you should also look among all the people for able and God-fearing men, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain, and set them as officers over groups of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens.

Exodus 18:21

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A reading from the New Testament

Keep watch over yourselves and over the whole flock of which the holy Spirit has appointed you overseers, in which you tend the church of God that he acquired with his own blood.

Acts 20:28

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Suggested Closing Prayers:

Say one decade of the rosary for an increase in vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. Our Father, ten Hail Mary's, and Glory Be to the Father.

REFLECTION

The Ordinary Vocation: Holy Marriage

The majority of men, statistically speaking, are called to the “ordinary” vocation of marriage. I call it “ordinary” not because it is inferior to other vocations, but because it is the most common vocation. In God’s plan for the propagation of our race and the building up of the Church, most men (and obviously most women as well) are called to marriage. However, despite the fact that marriage is the most common vocation, it must be discerned and not just assumed.

I find fascinating that the two “vocation” sacraments, marriage and priesthood, are so unique among the seven sacraments for a variety of reasons. How is marriage unique?

Marriage is the only sacrament that involves two souls, the soul of a man and the soul of a woman. These two souls are joined together in the sacrament by Jesus in the marriage bond.

Marriage is the only sacrament that does not come through the ministry of a priest. The bride and groom give this sacrament to one another (through Christ) when they express their valid, matrimonial consent. The priest is present only as the official witness of the Church.

Marriage is an enduring sacrament, but only until the death of one of the spouses. The death of either spouse breaks the marriage bond and ends the sacrament of marriage.

Consider this story told by Pope John Paul II.

Last century there was a talented professor in France named Frederick Oznam. He taught at the Sorbonne, and he was eloquent and capable. Frederick Oznam was the founder of the Conference of Charity, which later became the St. Vincent de Paul Society, the Catholic organization which cared for the poor. His friend was the famous writer, Lacordaire, who said: “He is so gifted. He is so good. He will become a priest. He will become a great bishop, this fellow!” No. Frederick Oznam met a nice girl and they got married. Lacordaire was disappointed and he said, “Poor Oznam! He too has fallen into the trap of marriage!” Two years later, Lacordaire came to Rome, and he was received by Pope Pius IX. The Holy Father said to Lacordaire: “Come, come, Father. I have always heard that Jesus established seven sacraments. Now you come along and change everything. You tell me that he established six sacraments and a trap! No, Father, marriage is not a trap, it is a great sacrament.”

Marriage indeed is a great sacrament. We are told in scripture that the love of a husband and wife for each other is a sign of Christ's love for his bride, the Church.

Many young men move instinctively towards marriage as if it is the only possibility. This is a mistake. God is asking that every young man seriously consider and pray about all the possible vocations. Marriage must be prayerfully and carefully discerned over time, like every other vocation. Some men simply reason, "Well, I'm attracted to girls, so I must be called to marriage." Being attracted to females is an indication that a man is normal and healthy, but it does not necessarily indicate a call from God to marriage. In fact, if a man is seriously considering priesthood, his vocation director will want to confirm that he has a normal healthy attraction to marriage and family. If he does not, he cannot really properly discern or choose priesthood.

Marriage is a wonderful vocation and the one to which most men are called by God. But it must be discerned, not just assumed.

Wednesday

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Father, you call each one of us by name and ask us to follow you. Bless our church by raising up dedicated and generous leaders from our families and friends who will serve your people as Priest, Sisters and Brothers. Inspire us as we grow to know you and open our hearts to hear your call. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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A reading from the Old Testament

The Lord has sworn and will not waiver: "Like Melchizedek, you are a priest forever."

Psalm 110:4

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A reading from the New Testament

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, "Take and eat; this is my body. "Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying,"Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins."

Matthew 26:26-28

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Suggested Closing Prayers:

Say one decade of the rosary for an increase in vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. Our Father, ten Hail Mary's, and Glory Be to the Father.

REFLECTION

An Extraordinary and Unique Vocation

Holy Orders

Since this is a book discerning diocesan priesthood, I will obviously spend more time describing Holy Orders than the other particular vocations. In the first chapter, I described what priests do. In the second chapter, I described what priests are. Therefore I will treat the vocation of priesthood here only briefly.

The sacrament of Holy Orders, the sacrament by which a man becomes a priest, is an extraordinary vocation. I call it “extraordinary” not because it is better than marriage but because it is less common. Like Marriage, Holy Orders is unique among the seven sacraments for several reasons.

Priesthood is a sacrament that endures forever. It does not end with death. It makes a permanent indelible mark on the soul that can never be erased or ended. A priest still has the mark of a priest on his soul when he is in heaven.

Holy Orders is the only sacrament that has more than one degree. The three degrees are deacon, priest, and bishop.

Jesus established the sacrament of Holy Orders at the Last Supper when he first celebrated the Eucharist. He told his disciples, “Do this in memory of me” (Luke 22:19). And the Apostles in the early Church laid hands on men before sending them out to preach the Gospel. Holy Orders is the sacrament for bringing the sacraments to the world.

Priestly ordination is not just an initiation, like joining a club or a fraternity. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit which permits the exercise of a sacred power (*sacra potestas*) which comes from Jesus Christ himself through his Church. A priest has a sacred power to offer the sacrifice of Christ and to forgive sins in the sacraments.

Priesthood is not just being a preacher and a minister, though Priests certainly do preach and minister to God’s people. It is the administering of a sacred power.

Thursday

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Father, you call each one of us by name and ask us to follow you. Bless our church by raising up dedicated and generous leaders from our families and friends who will serve your people as Priest, Sisters and Brothers. Inspire us as we grow to know you and open our hearts to hear your call. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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A reading from the Old Testament

You must be able to distinguish between what is sacred and what is profane, between what is clean and what is unclean; You must teach the Israelites all the laws that the Lord has given them through Moses.

Leviticus 10: 1 0-11

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A reading from the New Testament

So the Twelve called together the community of the disciples and said, "It is not right for us to neglect the word of God to serve at table. Brothers, select from among you seven reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom, whom we shall appoint to this task, whereas we shall devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

Acts 6:2-4

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Suggested Closing Prayers:

Say one decade of the rosary for an increase in vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. Our Father, ten Hail Mary's, and Glory Be to the Father.

REFLECTION

Does It Really Matter to God if I Get married or Become a Priest?

Yes. It does.

As a young man, before I became a priest, I was once attending Mass in another city. I was very surprised (and happy) when the priest began to give a homily about vocations. He started out by saying how happy he was to be a priest and he said several other edifying things about the life of priesthood and the other vocations. Then he made this statement: "I don't think God cares which vocation we choose. I think God loves us and says to us, 'You choose. You will please me if you decide to get married, be a sister or brother, or become a priest. It doesn't matter to me, I will still love you.'" I wanted to stand up in the church and yell, "No! Don't tell these people that. That's not true!"

It is certainly true that God loves us infinitely and will continue to love us no matter which vocation we choose. But it is false that the vocation upon which we ultimately decide does not matter to God. He has made us for a specific vocation (state in life) and it matters very much how we respond to that call. If we say no that call, God will not abandon us or stop loving us. In his loving-kindness, he will go to Plan B or Plan C for those of us who are especially hard-headed. But it is an error to think that Plan B or Plan C is just as good as Plan A! To use a common analogy, a round peg is created for a round hole. If one tries to force a square peg into a round hole, one experience difficulties.

St. Ignatius Loyola writes that every man should try to enter discernment with a holy indifference. He should not go to prayer, desperately trying to convince God that he really should get married! Many people try to discern in this way. This is why St. Augustine once said that, "the pious soul prays not to inform God but to be conformed to his will"

Once again, every vocation is a mystery. As already mentioned, there are some circumstances in which a man will be called to both priesthood and marriage, as in the case of a married Eastern Rite Catholic priest. I know of several men who have gone on to become priests after the deaths of their wives. But for most men who are discerning priesthood in the Latin Rite, God is calling to one or the other. And it matters to God which one the man chooses!

Friday

We pray for consecrated women. Consecrated women commit themselves to Christ and to service in the Church by vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

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Father, you call each one of us by name and ask us to follow you. Bless our church by raising up dedicated and generous leaders from our families and friends who will serve your people as Priest, Sisters and Brothers. Inspire us as we grow to know you and open our hearts to hear your call. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

A reading from the Old Testament

God replied, "I am who am." Then He added, "This is what you shall tell the Israelites: I AM sent Me to you."

Exodus 3: 14

A reading from the New Testament

No man can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other or be attentive one and despise the other. You cannot give yourself to God and money. I warn you, then: do not worry about your livelihood, what you are to eat or drink or use for clothing. Is not life more than food? Is not the body more valuable than clothes?

Look at the birds in the sky. They do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you more important than they? Which of you by worrying can add a moment to his life-span? As for clothes, why be concerned? Learn a lesson from the way the wild flowers grow. They do not work; they do not spin. Yet I assure you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was arrayed like one of these. If God can clothe in such splendor the grass of the field, which blooms today and is thrown on the fire tomorrow, will He not provide much more for you, Oh weak in faith! Stop worrying then, over questions like, "What are we to eat, or what are we to drink, or what are we to wear?" The unbelievers are always running after these things. Your heavenly Father knows all that you need. Seek first His kingship over you, His way of holiness, and all these things will be given you besides. Enough then, of worrying about tomorrow. Let tomorrow take care of itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Matt 6: 24 - 34

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Suggested Closing Prayers:

Say one decade of the rosary for an increase in vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. Our Father, ten Hail Mary's, and Glory Be to the Father.

REFLECTION

The council Fathers go to great lengths to emphasize that holiness is the essential, primordial vocation of every person. This baptismal vocation to become like Jesus is far more important than any of the secondary or particular vocations, because holiness will be our state for all eternity in Heaven. No one goes to heaven unless and until they are holy. The holiness of heaven is characterized by, first and foremost, charity, but also by the Evangelical Counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. No one in heaven cares about any worldly things; everyone in heaven is pure in body and soul; and everyone in heaven is humbly obedient to the living God.

Once this is established, the Council Fathers begin to speak of the particular vocations. They outline three possibilities for a Catholic man, moving from the most perfect life to the least perfect life. You will notice there are two options under the lay vocation:

Consecrated religious life

Priesthood

Lay vocation

Marriage

Single life

Saturday

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Father, you call each one of us by name and ask us to follow you. Bless our church by raising up dedicated and generous leaders from our families and friends who will serve your people as Priest, Sisters and Brothers. Inspire us as we grow to know you and open our hearts to hear your call. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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A reading from the Old Testament

So I will allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak to her heart. I will espouse you to me forever; I will espouse you in right and in justice, in love and in mercy; I will espouse you in fidelity, and you shall know the Lord

Hosea 2: 16, 21-22

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A reading from the New Testament

All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among according to each one's need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their home. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Acts 2:44-47

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Suggested Closing Prayers:

Say one decade of the rosary for an increase in vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. Our Father, ten Hail Mary's, and Glory Be to the Father.

REFLECTION

“What will you do with your life? What are your plans? Have you ever thought of committing your existence totally to Christ? Do you think that there can be anything greater than to bring Jesus to people and people to Jesus”

Pope John Paul II

Seek and you will Find....and Flourish

The discernment of your correct God-predetermined vocation is the most important decision that you will make in your entire life. It may seem easier or less frightening to make your own plans or to decide your own vocation. But the truth is that the most peaceful place in the world for you is in the perfect will of God. To get there involves a diligent search.

Jesus said, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and the one that knocks, the door will be opened” (Mathew 7:7-12).

No one can force you to search for your vocation. It must be your free decision to search, to discover, and to respond. If you choose to search, I promise you that you will find your particular vocation, though it may not be easy. If you choose not to search, you are not likely to find it.

I believe one of the problems in the Church today is that many people are in the wrong vocation. Many people have grown up unaware that they have a vocation, much less that they should be asking God to reveal it to them. And there are many unhappy, unfulfilled, dissatisfied people. As a general rule, people flourish in their correct vocation! Flourishing does not just mean they are happy. It means they are steadily growing in holiness, they are fulfilled, and they are becoming the person God wants them to be.

Seeking Help from your Vocations Director

The Church realizes that discernment of diocesan priesthood is difficult. For this reason, every bishop appoints a vocations director. Normally it is a priest who is an expert in discernment and can assist men in this archdiocese through this arduous process. In a word, the vocation director helps you discover and respond appropriately to God's plan regarding your vocation. He is trained to guide a man through the ups and downs of discernment, to help him overcome the fears and to avoid the pitfalls.

Discerning a vocation to diocesan priesthood should never be done alone. Whatever stage of discernment you might be in, I encourage you to go to your archdiocesan website, find your vocation director, and contact him now. The discernment of your correct God-predetermined vocation is the most important decision you will ever make in your entire life!

“The greatest suffering in the human heart is resistance to the will of God”

St. Catherine of Siena

Dear God, I want to want what you want.

Even if I don't want it right now;

Even if I am afraid right now,

I want to want it

Help me to want to be what you want me to be.

Amen

Thank you for praying for vocations this month.

Please continue to pray for

God's abundant blessings upon

His Church and for an increase in faith

within each of His children.

May God bless' you.

Sources used herein include: "Parish Vocation Cross Program" from National Vocations Conference; An Invitation to Follow Jesus, Rev. Ramel R. Davila M.M.; Catechism of the Catholic Church; The Catholic Encyclopedia, Robert C. Broderick; Catholic Source Book, Rev. Peter Klein, ed.; I Will give you Shepherds," Catholic News Publishing Co. "To Save a Thousand Souls." Fr. Brett A. Brannen.