



VOCATION GIFT AND MISSION

THE EPISCOPAL TEACHING SERIES
+ ARTHUR J. SERRATELLI, STD, SSL, DD
BISHOP OF PATERSON

To the priests who share with me the one priesthood and ministry of Jesus; to the deacons whose service builds up the Body of Christ; to my brothers and sisters who embrace the evangelical counsels in consecrated life; to all the faithful who are God's chosen: "To all of you, then, who are God's beloved...called to be saints, May God our Father and the Lord Jesus send grace and peace"

(Romans 1:7)

PART ONE
A BIBLICAL REFLECTION ON VOCATION

The Vocation to Discipleship

[1] “And passing along the Sea of Galilee. . .” (Mk 1:16). With these words, the evangelist Mark opens the earliest written narrative of vocation in the gospels. Jesus is beginning his public ministry. He announces the good news: “The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand” (Mk 1:15). Then he immediately issues a summons for others to become his disciples. “He saw Simon and his brother Andrew...James and his brother John” (Mk 1:16-19) and he called them from their work as fishermen to follow him.

[2] In the New Testament, the expression “to follow Jesus” is the term for discipleship and it is used only in the gospels. At the time of Jesus, students chose their teachers. Disciples selected the rabbi under whom they wished to be trained. But not here! Jesus sees. Jesus calls. The choice is his. To be a disciple of Jesus is essentially different from any other relationship. To follow Jesus is a lifelong journey. The Master always remains the Master. And the disciples are expected to give full allegiance and total obedience. “No servant can serve two masters” (Lk 16:13).

[3] Mark’s account of the call of the first disciples is brief, but rich in theology. Each word unravels something of the mystery of the Christian vocation. Before Jesus speaks, Mark notes, he saw the men whom he would choose. In the first biblical account of creation, the narrator tells us seven times that “God saw it was good”(Gen 1:1 - 2:1). In creating, God’s act of seeing communicates to his creatures the goodness he intends. As Jesus sees the first four disciples, his glance is divine. Already Mark has introduced him in his gospel as “the Son of God” (Mk 1:1). His look is creative. He is engendering within these men the very ability to respond to his call. As Paul teaches, “Even our ability to do good is God’s gift” (Philip 2:13).

[4] God's word is as powerful as his seeing. "And he said, 'Let there be light' and there was light" (Gen 1:3). God spoke and the heavens and earth tumbled from his fingertips. God's word creates what he speaks. "At the word of the Lord, the heavens were made" (Ps 33:6). His word is alive and dynamic (cf Is 55:10-11). And so when Jesus, the Son of God, addresses Peter and Andrew, James and John with the invitation "Follow me," his word reaches down into the depth of their being and creates the desire and the ability to be his disciples. Reflecting back on his encounter with the Risen Lord on the road to Damascus, the apostle Paul says of every Christian, "It is God who said, 'Let the light shine out of the darkness,' that has shone into our hearts to enlighten them with the knowledge of God's glory, the glory on the face of Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). The call to be a disciple and belong to Jesus is a divine gift.

[5] In summoning the first four disciples, Jesus promises them a new work. They are fishermen. He says, "I will make you fishers of men" (Mk 1:18). Their natural talents and aptitudes are not negated. In God's providence, their present work is already preparing them for the missionary task of apostleship. But this is yet to come—in the future. For now, Peter and the other three are being given the fundamental vocation of every Christian: to be a follower of Jesus.

[6] The call of the first disciples takes place while they are working. Peter and Andrew are casting a net into the sea. James and John are with their father Zebedee and other men mending the nets. This small detail reminds us of another vocation story from the Old Testament. The call of the prophet Elisha. One day Elisha is working in his father's fields. He is ploughing with a team of oxen. All of a sudden, there appears the gaunt figure of Elijah, the greatest miracle worker in Israel after Moses. Elijah summons the young man to leave his work and to become his disciple. And Elisha does. Likewise, these first disciples of Jesus leave their work to follow Jesus. He is the Prophet who is forming the New Israel.

[7] Mark's account of the call of the first four disciples contains a number of truths about vocation that the New Testament will repeat in other ways. First, the call to be a Christian is gift. As Jesus says at the Last Supper, "You have not chosen

me, no, I have chosen you” (Jn 15:16). In the entire Synoptic tradition, there is not a single instance of any individual successfully volunteering to be Jesus’ disciple (cf Lk 9:57-62). Even John confirms this fact (cf Jn 1:35-51).

[8] Second, the call to discipleship is the call to intimacy. Elisha followed Elijah and became his servant (cf 1 Kg 19:12-21). But Jesus does not call us servants. He calls us friends (cf Jn 15:14). As God refuses to conceal his plans from his friend Abraham (cf Gen 18:17-19) and “does nothing without revealing his secrets to his servants the prophets” (Am 3:7), so too does Jesus open his heart to his disciples. At the beginning of his public ministry, he says, “To you is granted the secret of the kingdom of God” (Mk 4:11). At the end of his life, he says “I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father” (Jn 15:15). Discipleship is friendship with Jesus and continual dialogue.

[9] Third, accepting the Christian vocation is committing oneself to heroism and self-sacrifice for the good of others. Jesus sets the pattern of humble service in washing the feet of his disciples. He is the Master who serves the servant. And he tells his disciples, “I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you” (Jn 13:15). Our love of Jesus translates itself into humble deeds of charity for all of God’s children. And sacrifice, too. “No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends” (Jn 15:13).

[10] Fourth, in all the call stories, an immediate response is required. Jesus makes the demand of unconditional commitment (cf Mt 9:9; Lk 5:1-11; 9:57-61; Jn 1:35-51). In Old Testament times, Elisha consents to be a disciple of Elijah but only on the condition that he returns home to take leave of his family. Elijah agrees (cf 1 Kg 17:20-21). Not so with Jesus. He warns his would-be followers that they are not permitted to put any condition on their discipleship. He demands total and unreserved loyalty. Reversing the decision of Elijah, Jesus says, “Once the hand is laid on the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God” (Lk 9:62).

The Call to be Holy

[11] As the disciples journey with Jesus through Galilee, they learn that their call implies radical conversion. To be his disciple is to strive for holiness. Jesus not only teaches them about holiness but shows them the way to it. His whole life models the complete attachment to God that sanctifies one's life. Seated on the Mount of Beatitudes, Jesus challenges his disciples, "Be you therefore perfect even as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48). He explains that such perfection is achieved through obedience to God's will. "Not anyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but the person who does the will of my Father in heaven"(Mt 7:21). Prostrate on the ground in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus cries out to the Father, "Your will be done" (Mt 26:42). Then rising from the ground, he shows the disciples what perfect attachment to God means.

[12] Through his paschal mystery, Jesus makes possible what we could never achieve on our own. He gifts us with the very holiness of God. Through baptism, we become the sons and daughters of God. We are given a share in the divine nature and made holy. Through a deep, personal relationship with Jesus Christ, we are steadily transformed. By grace, we can live a holy life clothed in heartfelt compassion, in generosity and humility, in gentleness and patience because, as Paul says, we are "God's chosen ones" (Col 3:12).

[13] All disciples of Jesus are filled with the same grace. All have "the same vocation to perfection, possessing in common one salvation, one hope and one undivided charity" (*Lumen Gentium*, 32). In any state or walk of life, every Christian is called to the perfection of love (cf *Lumen Gentium*, 40). To be loved by God and to love him with our whole mind, heart and strength is to become one with him and to be divinized by him (cf St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II-II, q 23, a. 6). The call to be a disciple, therefore, is the call to be a saint. Nothing less! However, each Christian lives the call to holiness according to the particular mission he or she is given. Not all have the same task or work.

[14] Many of the New Testament letters begin with the very same idea that Mark places on the opening pages of his gospel. The Christian is called. They also indicate, as the gospels teach, that the Christian is called to holiness. Paul addresses

the Christians of Rome and those of Corinth as “called to be God’s holy people” (Rm 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2). Paul tells the Thessalonians that “God chose [them] from the beginning to be saved by the Spirit who makes us holy and by faith in the truth” (2 Th 2:13). God’s call is rooted in divine grace (cf 2 Tim 1:9). He chooses us even before we are born (cf Rm 9:1-8). He forms us into “a holy people, a royal priesthood” (1 Pt 2:9) who offer themselves with Christ in sacrifice (cf Rm 12:1).

The Vocation to Apostleship

[15] From among those called to be disciples, Jesus appoints twelve. They are to be his companions. They are to be sent to proclaim the message and to drive out devils (cf Mk 3:14). As companions of Jesus, the twelve have a special relationship that is constant and personal. In moments of quiet seclusion, Jesus reveals to them the truths of the gospel (cf Mk 4:1-34); the importance of prayer (cf Lk 11:1-13); the purpose of their mission (cf Mt 10:1-42); and the mystery of his own person (cf Lk 10: 21-22). They know him - his mind and his heart. This insures that they are his representatives when they are eventually sent on mission.

[16] In Rabbinic Judaism, a man who was sent either to proclaim religious truths or to deal with secular matters and who had authority to act was called שליח (*shaliach*). The man commissioned always represented the one sending him. He bore in his person the rights and dignity of the one who authorized him to act. In the Talmud, there is found a proverb the rabbis would often repeat to explain this role. “The one sent by a man is as the man himself” (*Berakot*, 5, 5).

[17] As apostles (שליחים *shaliachim*), the Twelve share the very authority of Jesus. They speak in his name (cf Mk 6:6-13). Those who hear the apostles, hear Jesus himself (cf Mt 10:40). The apostles share in his deeds. Jesus multiplies the bread. It is the apostles who distribute it to the crowds (cf Mt 14:19).

[18] In Matthew’s gospel, after the selection of the twelve apostles, Jesus gives them their mission (cf Mt 10:5-15). The evangelist presents their mission in such a way that the distinction between the historical ministry of Jesus and the work of the apostles is lost. Their work is his work for the Church. They have special author-

ity for the good of the community (cf Mt 16:18; 18:18). They are the individuals mandated to form other disciples, “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:18).

[19] As chosen leaders, the apostles teach the gospel and form the community of faith nourished by the sacraments. After Pentecost, other individuals are called to collaborate with the Twelve. These individuals proclaim the gospel and lead the newly founded churches (cf 1 Cor 9:5; Eph 2:20; Rev 18:20).

The Vocation of Apostle as Grounded in Prayer

[20] All the synoptic gospels connect the vocation of the apostle to the prayer of Jesus. Luke is the most explicit. “Now it happened in those days that Jesus went to the mountain to pray; and he spent the whole night in prayer to God. When day came, he summoned his disciples and picked twelve out of them; he called them apostles” (Lk 6:12-13). For Luke, the choice of the Twelve is the fruit of Jesus’ prayer.

[21] Mark implicitly passes on the same truth. He tells us, “Jesus went up a mountain and called to him those he wanted...and he appointed twelve” (Mk 3:13). For Mark, the mountain bears theological significance. After the first miracle of the loaves, Jesus leaves the disciples and goes off to the hills to pray (cf Mk 6:46). After the first prediction of the passion, Jesus takes Peter, James and John to a high mountain. In dialogue with God, he is transfigured before them (cf Mk 9:2-8). The mountain is the place of deep prayer and special revelation. And so on a mountain, after praying, Jesus reveals God’s plan for the choice of the apostles.

[22] Matthew deliberately places the call of the apostles immediately after Jesus tells his disciples, “The harvest is rich, but laborers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send laborers to his harvest” (Mt 9:37). The evangelist is clear. The addition of the apostles to the work of Jesus is a direct result of prayer. The vocation to share in Christ’s mission for his Church always remains a gift from God. It comes as a response to intense prayer. For prayer opens us to the providence and the will of God.

PART TWO
A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON VOCATION

Vocation to Life in Christ

[23] Each of us is called by God. Before our birth, God sees us and loves us. He says to each of us what he said to the prophet Jeremiah. “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you” (Jer 1:4). Our life is gift. Our life springs from the generosity of the all-loving God who wishes to share his goodness with us. Our first vocation is to receive the gift of life from God and to acknowledge our origin and our destiny. We are created by God and for happiness with him. Our life is no accident, but a deliberate act of God who is love.

[24] God creates each of us as a unique reflection of himself. Christ himself is the image of the invisible God (ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ, Col 1:15). He is the human face of God and lets us see the image of who we are called to be. From before the world began, God chose us in Christ to be his adopted sons and daughters (cf Eph 1:4). Christ “fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22). We are called to life in Christ.

[25] The Old Testament prophets use the image of the vine to speak of God’s people as chosen. Jeremiah says, “I have planted you as a choice vine” (Jer 2:21). Israel is God’s people. She is his work. Isaiah sings of God’s great love for his people. They are his chosen vineyard (cf Is 5:1-7). Jesus deepens the use of this image of the vine. He uses it not simply to say that we are chosen, but to reveal the gift of divine life we now share.

[26] At the Last Supper in John’s gospel, Jesus speaks of himself as the true vine. He is the vine; we are the branches (cf Jn 15:1-5). Joined to Christ, we are joined to one another as branches of the one vine. And, since Jesus is the Son of God who is united with the Father and the Spirit as one God, we are now joined to God in whose life we share. Thus, the image of the vine reveals the nature of the Church. The Church is the mystery of communion. It is the sacrament of the life of the triune God that all members share. This concept of communion lies at the heart

of the Church's own self-understanding. In the Church, each member has the vocation of living a personal union with the Trinity. This begins on earth. It is directed to fulfillment in heaven (cf Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion*, May 28, 1992).

Vocation in the Church as Communion

[27] The Church herself as the sacrament of communion is the icon of God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Therefore, the vocation of every member of the Church in some way reflects the mystery of the Trinity. Paul says as much when he tells the Corinthians, "There are many gifts, but it is always the same Spirit; there are many different forms of serving, but it is always the same Lord. There are many forms of activity, but in everybody it is the same God who is at work in them all" (1 Cor 12:4-6).

[28] The Father is the source of life. From him, both the Son and the Holy Spirit proceed in an eternal gift of giving and receiving, loving and being loved. Each vocation shares in this dynamic of life that is the Trinity. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is given us from above...from the Father of all light" (Jas 1:17).

[29] And, just as the Son "came not to be served but to serve and give his life as ransom for many" (Mt 20:28), each vocation is a service (*διακονία*). Each vocation images the servanthood of Jesus, for no servant is greater than his master. Jesus who stooped to wash the feet of his disciples has set the example for all to follow in their relationship with each other (cf Jn 13:1-16).

[30] To each Christian is given "the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Ac 2:38). The Spirit manifests in each his divine creativity. He enables the individual with special talents and charisms. As the Spirit of love, he is the source of unity who directs all activity for the common good (cf 1 Cor 12:8; Eph 4:23).

[31] God has a dream for each of us, a way we can image his goodness to others. That dream is our own particular vocation. As Pope John Paul II said, “Vocation is a divine invitation to self-realization according to God’s image, and is unique, singular, unrepeatable, precisely because this image is inexhaustible” (*Letter to the North American Congress on Vocations*, April 12, 2002).

[32] From the Church as the mystery of communion, every vocation takes its meaning and dignity. The different members of the human body are many, yet they work together and form one body. So too the members of the Church (cf 1 Cor 12:12-30). The gifts are diverse; yet, they complement each other. Not all are called to do the same work. Not all have the same particular mission or vocation in life. Yet everyone’s vocation is ordered to the good of the whole Church. Each person is unique. Each person exists in communion. Every vocation exists for communion.

[33] Each of us must grow in our own awareness of what it means to be called to life and called to a specific mission or service for others. Certain gifts and talents equip individuals for an active role in the temporal order. This is the primary and fundamental duty of the laity. Other gifts and charisms equip individuals to give their life for the guidance of God’s people, for the growth of the Church in holiness and for her mission in the world. These individuals belong to the ordained ministry or to the consecrated life. As members of God’s holy people, we are called to live out our own unique vocation for the welfare of others (cf *Lumen Gentium*, 7).



PART THREE
VOCATION AT THE SERVICE OF THE CHURCH

Church as Hierarchy

[34] When the Risen Lord mandates the apostles to go into the whole world and preach the gospel (cf Mt 28:19-20), he sets the Church on her missionary journey through the centuries. The Church strives to embrace the whole of humanity. As St. Augustine teaches, the Church is the ark which alone saves from the flood (cf *Sermo*, 96, 7, 9). The Church is the universal sacrament of salvation (cf *Ad Gentes*, 1). Her mission is to make all God's children share in the communion of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

[35] As the Body of Christ, the Church herself is an organic communion. Her essential structure is neither amorphous nor democratic. Christ himself has given to the Church an ordering of one member to the other, not in the sense of power, but in the service of charity. As Paul teaches, "to some his gift was that they should be apostles; to some prophets; to some evangelists; to some, pastors and teachers; to knit God's holy people together for the work of service to build up the Body of Christ" (Eph 4:11-12).

[36] According to the oldest New Testament account of the Resurrection, the Risen Lord appears first to Peter and the Twelve (cf 1 Cor 15:1-8). He takes those who had failed in discipleship and makes them the very foundation of the Church. He establishes the apostles as the bearers of his forgiveness. "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them" (Jn 20:22). He pours out on them the gift of the Holy Spirit so that they can be witnesses to his resurrection (cf Lk 24:46-47). He gives them the command to build his Church (cf Mt 28; 16-20; Mk 16:9-20). Thus, he fulfills the promise he had made at Caesarea Philippi (cf Mt 16:16-19) when he places Peter as the Shepherd of the universal Church (cf Jn 21:1-17).

[37] The apostles clearly understand their leadership role in the Church. The

apostles teach with doctrinal authority and others are faithful to their teaching (cf Acts 2:42). They administer the temporal goods of the community (cf Acts 4:34-37). They watch over the newly formed churches and confirm them in the faith (cf Act 8: 4-17). They take care of the works of charity for the poor (cf Acts 4:35).

[38] Immediately after the Ascension of Christ, Peter exercises a leadership role over the others. He initiates the choice of Matthias to replace Judas (cf Acts 1:15-22). He gives the first public sermon that leads to the conversion of three thousand (cf Acts 2:14-41). Peter makes pastoral visits to the churches established in Judea, Galilee and Samaria (cf Acts 9:31-32). He makes the decision to receive the first pagan into the Church without imposing on him the rules of Judaism (cf Acts 10). Peter presides over the Council of Jerusalem (cf Acts 15:5-21). And he is so well-recognized as the leader of the entire Church that, after his own conversion and mission from the Risen Lord, Paul confers with Peter (cf Gal 1:18).

[39] Furthermore, the apostles recognized their responsibility to hand on through the ages the Church as willed by Christ. And so, as St. Irenaeus attests, they appointed successors to their role so that the apostolic tradition would be preserved (cf *Adversus Haereses*, III, 2, 2:3, 1). Through the laying on of hands, the apostles shared the gift of the Holy Spirit for leadership in the Church (cf 1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6-7). From the very beginning, the Church has enjoyed the gift of a hierarchical structure.

Diversity of Vocations in the Church

I The Laity

[40] The Spirit, poured out on the Church in the time of the apostles, still guides her and makes her grow. The Spirit graces the Church with hierarchical and charismatic gifts. With the rich diversity of vocations, he leads the Church in the way of truth and unites her members in love. The Spirit makes the Church grow in holiness and in works of charity (cf *Lumen Gentium*, 60).

[41] The faithful who are not in Holy Orders or who do not belong to a religious state sanctioned by the Church are laypeople. Through Baptism and Confirmation,

each layperson shares in the very mission of Christ. These sacraments do not take the layperson out of the world. No. These sacraments consecrate the layperson to change the world. The Church has an authentic secular side. This belongs to her mission. It is rooted in the mystery of the Incarnation (cf Pope Paul VI, *Talk to the Members of Secular Institutes*, Feb. 2, 1972). The Word entered our world and “dwelt among us (Jn 1:14). The laity fulfilled their Christian vocation in the world. They are Christ’s instruments for the renewal of the whole temporal order (cf *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 5).

[42] The secular character of the role of the laity is deeply theological. It distinguishes them from those who are ordained or who are in the consecrated state. But it does not diminish them. God has handed over the world into our hands so we can share in his work of renewing all things in Christ. By sanctifying themselves in marriage or in a life of celibacy, by raising a family or by living a profession, in all the works of human society, laypeople are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (cf Mt 5:13-16). As Pope Pius XII once taught, the faithful find themselves on the front lines of the Church’s life. They, therefore, need to have a clear understanding of their dignity and their mission (cf Pius XII, *Discourse to the New Cardinals*, Feb. 20, 1946). Through Baptism, each layperson does not simply belong to the Church, but becomes the Church (cf *Christifideles Laici*, 1-16).

[43] Those who choose to marry embrace the call of God to love one another and to cooperate with him in the sacred work of procreation. Genesis teaches, “Male and female, he created them” (Gen 1:27). It is part of God’s original design that man and woman find fulfillment in each other. In fact, He blessed them and told them to increase and multiply. God created man and woman *together* and willed each *for* the other (cf *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 371).

[44] Conjugal love joins the spouses and makes them one flesh (cf Gen 2:24). But conjugal love does not end with the spouses. God has gifted man and woman with sexuality so that they can share love, be united intimately one with another and cooperate with God in the wonder of procreation. Conjugal love is ordered to the good of the spouses and to the gift of new life - the life of another person whose value and dignity come from the Creator.

[45] In the total gift of self that a husband and wife make to each other, they open themselves to God's design and stand ready to welcome the mystery of new life (cf *Familiaris Consortio*, 14). As baptized members of the Church, that complete self-giving in the married state becomes a sacrament of the total gift of Christ to his Church. Just as Christ loves the Church and never stops loving us even when we fail, so too husband and wife are joined to each other in an indissoluble bond of love.

[46] They mirror for others the undying love of God for us in Christ. They challenge us to live a life of communion with each other. Spouses remind the Church of "what happened on the Cross; they are... witnesses to the salvation in which the sacrament makes them sharers" (*Familiaris Consortio*, 13).

[47] When spouses love one another completely and exclusively and cooperate with God's design for new life, they fulfill their vocation. They form strong and stable families. They contribute to the good of society, for a sound society is built on stability in the family. In a very real sense, "the future of humanity passes by way of the family" (*Familiaris Consortio*, 86).

II *The Consecrated Life*

[48] In 3rd century A.D., St. Anthony of Egypt withdrew to the desert and became the founder of the eremitical life. A century later, St. Pachomius substituted the coenobitical for the eremitical life. Thus the Church found herself enriched by individuals who, whether alone or in community, devoted their life to growth in holiness. These are the origins of all those different communities and individuals who live the consecrated life.

[49] The vocation to the consecrated life witnesses to the Church as a sacrament of communion in a unique and singular way. As Christ himself is the very icon of God, the visible image of the invisible God, the religious is an icon of the Church, the Body of Christ, where all members share in God's life. The evangelical counsels themselves are at the service of religious life as an icon of communion (cf *Vita Consecrata*, 21).

[50] The materialism of our society divides the haves from the have-nots. But the poverty of those in consecrated life makes us see our dependence on God. Today's hedonism and the constant search for instant gratification alienate one person from another. But the chastity of the religious points to an unselfish love that embraces others and already witnesses to the presence of the eschatological times. The rugged individualism of this century separates individuals. But the obedience of the religious to the will of God reminds others of the absolute priority of God.

[51] Those living the evangelical counsels support a spirituality of true communion for the entire Church. Their witness encourages all the faithful to see one another in the profound unity of the Mystical Body. For it is in light of this great mystery, not only that we see others as our brothers and sisters, but in this great mystery, we are made one with each other by being one with God.

[52] Consecrated persons image the mystery of the Church as a communion of divine life, not simply by living under the same roof or even working in the apostolates. Not at all. Rather, it is by living a life of communion within their respective communities, caring for one another, sharing common prayer, daily Eucharist and a common table - all consecrated by the evangelical counsels (cf *Vita Consecrata*, 41-42).

[53] The consecrated life is a life of intense prayer. Religious strive to live an interior life of deep communion with God - the soul speaking and listening, resting and contemplating the divine presence within. This is the source and strength of religious commitment and fidelity. When those in consecrated life live such a life of communion with God, the Church grows interiorly and exteriorly. In fact, the consecrated life is "a precious and necessary gift for the present and future of the People of God, since it is an intimate part of her life, her holiness and her mission" (*Vita Consecrata*, 3).

[54] Pope Benedict XVI said, "Consecrated persons live in their own time, but their hearts reach out beyond time and they witness to their contemporaries, often absorbed in the things of the world, that their true destiny is God himself" (*Address to the Men and Women Religious of Secular Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life of the Diocese of Rome*, December 10, 2005). In fact, in our time when there is

a great absence of God, those living the consecrated life make God's grace and life present before us. Consecrated life is truly an icon of the very mystery of God.

III *The Ordained*

[55] Along with the laity and those in consecrated life, the ordained are a gift to the Church. All the members of the Church participate in the priesthood of Christ. The entire Church is "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people set apart" (*Preface for Sundays in Ordinary Time I*). Nonetheless, those who are ordained have a share in Christ's priesthood that differs from the priesthood of the laity, not simply in degree, but in essence. The priest is a leader. He continues the role of the Good Shepherd who builds up and sanctifies the Church. The priest is called and sent for the very same reason that the Father sent his only Son - for the salvation of all. His entire ministry is ordered to the good of all the faithful as well as the entire world.

[56] In our day, the Church wisely teaches the intrinsic suitability of celibacy as a grace that enriches the priesthood. Celibacy is a way of loving which does not seek to possess for self, but to be set free for God. By embracing celibacy, the priest wishes to have the heart of Christ who embraces all. By living a celibate life, priests "adhere to Christ more easily with an undivided heart, they dedicate themselves more freely in him and through him to the service of God and men [and they] give, moreover, a living sign of the world to come, by a faith and charity already made present, in which the children of the resurrection neither marry nor take wives" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 16).

[57] Through the laying on of hands and the gift of the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of Holy Orders, the priest is configured to Christ the High Priest. He stands before the community of the faithful *in persona Christi* (cf *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 2). The priest is ordained as a co-worker with the bishop and shares in the authority proper to the fulfillment of the apostolic mission given the Church. The priest's authority does not come from below. He is not delegated by the faithful. Nor does he assume this role on his own. Every priest is chosen. He receives his call from God himself, just as Aaron did (cf Heb 5:4).

[58] Like every other member of the Church, the priest is a servant of the Word. But, by the grace of ordination, he is a teacher of the Word. Priests have as their first responsibility the preaching of the Word. For it is the Word of God that forms God's people into a community of faith. St. Augustine says, "[The Apostles] preached the word of truth and produced churches" (*Commentary on Ps 44*, 23). By their ordination, deacons, too, are given a special share in the preaching of the gospel. Because of the authority given in Holy Orders, preaching has a salvific function. It leads to faith and opens the heart to the gift of salvation (cf Rm 10:14-15). At times, others may be better public speakers than an individual priest or deacon. However, their role in the Church's ministry of the Word is not the same.

[59] Priests are the ministers of the Sacraments. Consecrated as true priests of the New Testament, they participate in the mission of the bishop who enjoys the fullness of the Sacrament of Orders. Along with deacons who are ordained to serve the people of God, they work in union with the bishop who is the principal dispenser of the mysteries of God (cf *Christus Dominus*, 15). Priests share in the ministry of the bishop. Together with him, they are humbled by the task God gives them: to be his collaborators in the work of sanctification.

[60] All holiness comes from God. But he chooses to use human instruments in his work. This is the dynamic of the Incarnation. Christ's own priesthood is the consequence of this great mystery. Each priest shares in it in a unique way. Through the sacramental ministry of the priest, God makes his people holy and draws them into a deeper communion with himself.

[61] At the heart of the priest's ministry is the Eucharist. For "the Eucharist is the source and the summit of the Christian's life" (*Lumen Gentium*, 11). As Thomas Aquinas taught, the Eucharist completes the spiritual life. It is the summit to which all the other sacraments are ordered (cf *Summa Theologiae* III, q 73 a. 3 a). Every day the priest has the privilege of offering the Eucharist. His celebration of the Eucharist makes present the sacrifice of the Cross on the altar. It continues the work of our redemption. In every Eucharistic celebration, the Church is made present in the unity of believers who form the one Body of Christ (*Lumen Gentium* 3). The ordained priesthood is, thus, essential and necessary for the very existence of the Church. No priest. No Eucharist. No Church.

[62] Christ himself has set up within the Church different offices to serve the good of the whole body in the attainment of salvation (cf Paul VI, *Ad pascendum*, August 15, 1972). To assist with priests and bishops in the work of building up the Church, deacons have a special role. The Second Vatican Council summarized the ministry of deacons in the threefold “service of the liturgy, the word and of charity” (cf *Lumen Gentium*, 29).

[63] As the very word διακονια (service) indicates, the spirit of service characterizes both the activity and the interior disposition of the deacon. An ancient third-century text places before the deacon the image of Jesus’ washing the feet of his apostles as the example for their ministry. “If the Lord did this,” it says, “then you deacons should not hesitate to do it for the sick and infirm, since you are workers of the truth, who have put on Christ” (*Didascalia Apostolorum* XVI, 36).

[64] Deacons help the Church grow through their role in liturgy and in the apostolate. Works of charity are essential for the ministry of deacon as they were when the first seven deacons were chosen to take care of the physical needs of the Greek-speaking widows of the primitive community (cf Acts 6:1-6). However, as ordained ministers in the Church, their work can never be reduced to simple social service.

[65] As a sharing in the one priesthood of Christ, diaconal ministry has its point of departure and arrival in the Eucharist (cf *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Diaconorum Permanentium*, 9). The deacon’s entire way of acting and thinking is grounded in the very mystery of the Eucharist that makes present Jesus’ oblation of self for others. For deacons strive to carry out what Jesus stated about his mission: “The Son of Man has not come to be served but to serve--to give his life in ransom for many” (cf Mk 10:45; Mt 20:28).



PART FOUR
VOCATION IN OUR OWN DAY

Awareness of the Unique Role of the Each Member of the Church

[66] From birth, each person has a vocation. Every vocation is a sacred gift. We are called to life and called to love. In the depth of our being, God places the gift of our vocation to be discovered, cherished and to be lived in an attitude of thankfulness to God and service to others. Today, there is a need for all members of the Church to recognize the uniqueness of their own vocation.

[67] Lay people are called to work in the world. Husbands and wives give witness to the love Christ has for his Church. Mothers and fathers who co-operate with God in inviting others to the banquet of life show the world the abundance of God's generosity and the value of life itself. Those who embrace a celibate life and work in the world witness the transforming power of grace. Professional and non-professionals, learned and simple, laypeople imprint on human society the image of divine *agape*.

[68] By the total offering of their life to God, religious make visible the grace and love of Christ. Each of us needs to encourage those suited for the religious life to embrace freely and generously the call to the consecrated life so that the Church grow in holiness. Deacons share in the Church's ministry of teaching, sanctifying and shepherding God's people. Their work enriches the life of the Church. It is a gift of service to each of us. The priesthood is constitutive of the Church herself. Where there are priests, there is the Eucharist. There the mystery of the Church is present. Fostering vocations to the priesthood and the diaconate is necessary for the very life of the Church.

The Need to Foster Priesthood and Religious Life

[69] The world presents a particular challenge to those who are called to the consecrated life, diaconate and priesthood. Secular culture devalues religion and promotes a materialism that suffocates the thirst for the transcendent. The strong

individualism that is part of our times blinds the young from seeing their life as related to others. The insistence of each person's right to be autonomous and choose their own values turns morality into personal preference. Propaganda urging the unbridled satisfaction of one's desires enslaves individuals and prevents them from achieving true freedom. Authentic freedom actually comes with self-denial and allows individuals to embrace the good and to choose God's will for them. Religious pluralism tolerates any belief. It can easily lead to the denial of objective truth, divine revelation and the mystery of the Church as God's instrument of salvation. Such attitudes make it difficult for many to appreciate the vocation to priesthood, diaconate and the consecrated state.

The Ways to Create a Vocation Culture

[70] It is, therefore, imperative for each member of the Church to work at creating a space for those who are called to hear the voice of God. The family has a primary place in this work. Good families are the seed-bed of vocations. Peter and Andrew were brothers, as were Cosmas and Damien. Monica and Augustine were mother and son; Benedict and Scholastica were brother and sister. And both parents of the Little Flower, Louis and Zélie Martin, have been declared venerable.

[71] Parents are called to educate their children "in such a way that each one may fully perform his or her role according to the vocation received from God."(*Familiaris Consortio*, 53). Parents do more than simply provide catechetical instruction. They introduce their children into full participation in the Church. Every family open to the mystery of the Church becomes a source of missionary dynamism that promotes vocations.

[72] Teachers, educators, catechists, and all those involved in youth work and campus ministry continue the work of the family in fostering vocations. They help the young embrace and live the values of the Kingdom of God and thus open them to a vocation rooted in transcendence.

[73] There are many practical ways of fostering a vocation culture. Awareness of the value of every vocation in the Church. Open dialogue within local parishes and schools and families on the importance of priests and religious. Good example.

Direct invitation to those who show the signs of a vocation to the priesthood or religious life, especially by priests and religious themselves. Pastoral charity requires that priests and religious take an active role in finding others to replace them. For priestly and religious vocations to flourish, the members of the Church need to believe in their heart of hearts that there are eternal values which are important enough for their son to give his life to the priesthood and their daughter or son to espouse in Consecrated Life.

[74] Since every vocation comes from God, promoting vocations will never be a matter of a program, but ultimately the fruit of intense prayer. At the center of that prayer will always be the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the birthplace for all vocations. Where Mass is celebrated daily and with great devotion, and where the mystery of the altar continues in Eucharistic Adoration, vocations flourish.

[75] As we seek to renew a culture friendly to vocations, we are actually recommitting ourselves to the Church's mission of evangelization. Every vocation is for the growth of the Church. As members of the one Body of Christ, each of us need to support one another in the vocation God gives us. We need to live lives of unselfishness and of respect for life itself. We need to live the gospel, be closely united with Christ in our lives and have a profound love for his Church. It is the joy that comes from an authentic Catholic life that opens others to vocation, not as an arduous task, but as a gift from God.

[76] All of us are responsible to work continuously and with great prayer to create a vocation culture. And, as the Church, we grow together when each of us receives and embraces our own particular vocation from God as gift and mission.



Through the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Lord,
may we always rely “on the power of God who has saved us and
called us to be holy” (2 Tim 1:9).

Given at the Pastoral Center
of the Church of Paterson
Vocation Sunday, May 7, 2006

+ Arthur J. Serratelli

Most Rev. Arthur J. Serratelli, STD, SSL, DD
Bishop of Paterson

Sister Mary Edward Spohrer SCC

Sr. Mary Edward Spohrer, SCC
Chancellor

PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

Father, in the fullness of time,
you sent your Son,
born of the Virgin Mary to be our Savior.
He preached the good news of our salvation,
healed the sick and cast out evil.
Now as crucified and risen Lord,
he pours out on us the Holy Spirit of adoption,
making us your sons and daughters.
Through the Church, he calls us to accept the gospel
and to share in your own divine life.
Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life for all people.

In your mercy, you do not abandon us.
In every age,
you raise up men and women
to offer their lives for the sake of the gospel
and the work of the Church.
We beg you, therefore,
grant to this local Church of Paterson
an increase of vocations
to the priesthood and the religious life.
Give us courageous and faithful men
to serve as worthy priests.
Bless us with generous and zealous
men and women willing to seek holiness
in consecrated life.

May we rejoice in an abundance
of vocations from our families
so that we may yield a rich harvest of good works
for your honor and glory.
We ask this in the name of Jesus who lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, forever and ever.

Notes



2006 +ARTHUR J. SERRATELLI, STD. SSL, DD

DIOCESE OF PATERSON
777 VALLEY ROAD
CLIFTON, NEW JERSEY 07013 USA
973-777-8818

www.patersondiocese.org