

4th Sunday of Easter – A – Good Shepherd Sunday (Vocations)

LESSON: God Works through Messengers (re: Vocation Sunday)

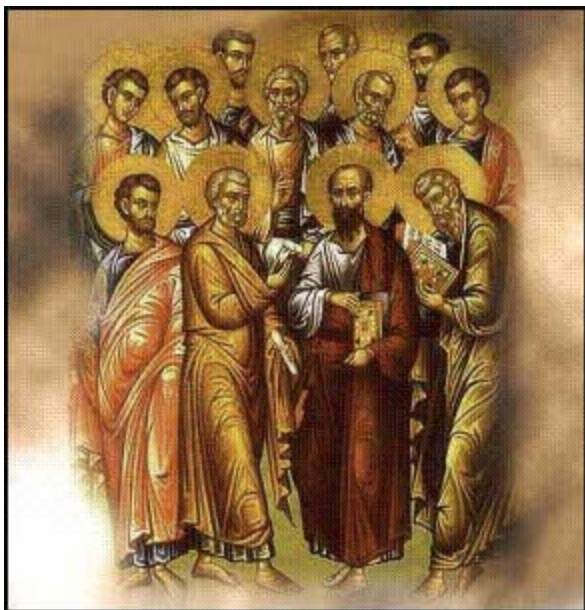
Three thousand people became followers of Christ in **one** day, as the result of **one sermon** given by St Peter.

That's what the Acts of the Apostles records in today's First Reading.

- ✍ After the Apostles received the Holy Spirit in the Upper Room, they went to the Temple to give thanks, and the presence of the Holy Spirit attracted **crowds** of awestruck pilgrims.
- ✍ Peter stands up and addresses them.
- ✍ He tells them about Christ. And "they were **cut to the heart.**"
- ✍ These were the same crowds who had **rejected** Jesus just a few weeks earlier.
- ✍ But now the mere mention of his name "cuts them to the heart."
- ✍ **Hearing** the truth about Christ made them want to **follow** Christ.
- ✍ But they didn't know how. And so they asked, "**What are we to do?**"
- ✍ Peter explains that they need to **repent** and be **baptized**. They need to decide to give up their **self-centered** ways, **follow** Christ's teachings, and **receive** the sacraments worthily.



We are all so familiar with this scene that we can easily **overlook** the most important thing.



The grace of God **didn't reach** those three thousand people **directly**.

It reached them, inspired them, changed them, and renewed their very lives, **through the mediation of the Apostles, through** the preaching, witnessing, and ministry of Christ's chosen messengers.

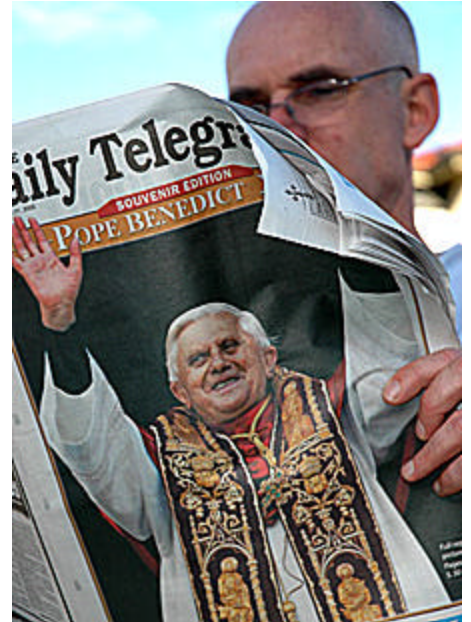
- ✍ Despite the well-intentioned thoughts of many Christians, Christianity is **not** just about "**me and Jesus.**" Christianity is about the whole **family** of Jesus.
- ✍ It is about His **Church, through which** Jesus has **chosen** to make himself known and loved by sinners who need his grace.

God works most often through His messengers.

ILLUSTRATION: Battling the "Dictatorship of Relativism"

This is not **easy** for us to accept nowadays. It is **countercultural**.

This week, Pope Benedict XVI will make his first pastoral visit to the United States since his election as Pope three years ago. Just before he was elected, Joseph Ratzinger (now Benedict XVI) gave a homily in St Peter's Basilica in which he warned the world against what he called the "**dictatorship of relativism**."



- ✍ Relativism is a **world view** that's all around us.
- ✍ It basically says that everyone's **personal** ideas about what is true or false, right or wrong are **equally valid**, as if there were **no objective** truth or right at all.
- ✍ We have **all** been affected by this view.
- ✍ Just think about how easily we agree with the statement, "No one should **force their values** on anyone else."
- ✍ It sounds fair on the **surface**, but in actual **fact**, we are all **eager to enforce vigorously** our value of **justice** on the **kidnapper** who comes to steal our children and sell them on the human trafficking markets.
- ✍ Relativism is **comfortable**, but it is a short-lived, destructive and false comfort.

Christianity is **exactly contrary** to relativism.

- ✍ The Christian knows that God created us with an objective **purpose**, and that original sin **separated** us from that purpose, and that Christ came to **reconnect** us.
 - ✍ The Christian knows that **some** beliefs and behaviors are **damaging** to human nature, just as poison is damaging to the human body. (Remember the "poison ice cream homily – will you tell someone that they are eating poison ice cream, or will you not want to "impose" your will on them – despite the fact that what they are doing will **kill** them.
 - ✍ The Christian knows that **other** beliefs and behaviors, like the Ten Commandments, are **beneficial** to human nature, just as nutritious food is beneficial for the human body.



Christians know these things because **Christ's message of salvation** has reached their minds and their hearts.

- ✍ We have **received** that message from the Church Christ established in his Apostles.
- ✍ And that Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, has made sure to **protect** Christ's message from **distortion for two thousand years**, and to send out **messengers** who have **made it known** in every generation and in every corner of the globe.

The dictatorship of relativism is no match for the messengers of Christ.

PERSONAL EXAMPLE: My own Vocation Story

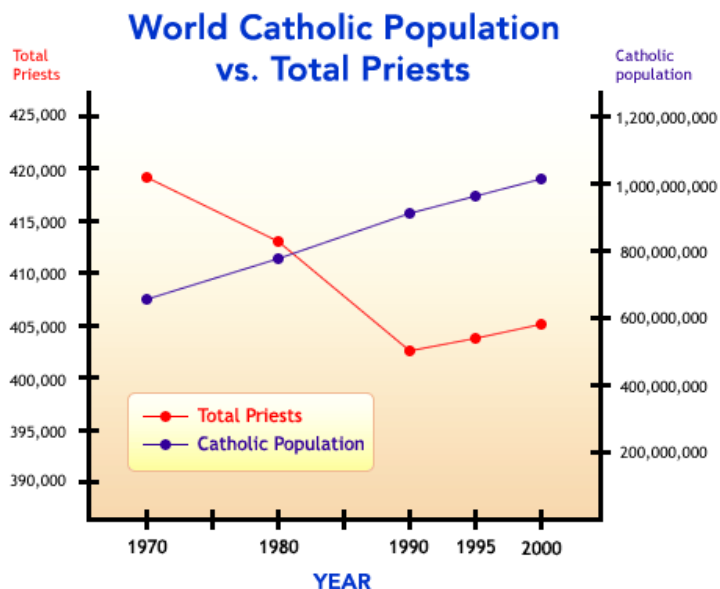
All of us are God's messengers.

- ✍ We have **all** received the Holy Spirit, first at **baptism**, and then more abundantly at **confirmation**.
- ✍ This gift is meant both to help us in our **personal** relationship with God - the most important relationship of our life - but also to help us **be better messengers**, better **ambassadors** for Christ in this fallen, suffering world.



Even so, God does call **some** of his children to be messengers in an even **fuller** sense.

- ✍ **Every** Christian is a soldier (as the older idea of Confirmation reminded us), but God sets **some** Christians apart to be **officers** and **special agents**.



- ✍ These are the **vocations** to the priesthood, religious and consecrated life, and full-time missionary life.
- ✍ Without these vocations, the **supply lines** for the rest of the army break down, and the soldiers on the battlefield can't fulfill their mission.
- ✍ We've certainly experienced the difficulty of not having enough priest in our own parish as, for the past 10 months, I've been the only priest in 2 counties!
- ✍ Our Church in the United States is suffering from a **serious** shortage of women and men responding to God's call to serve Him as priests and

consecrated religious.

- ✍ Notice that I said a lack of people **responding**. There is **no lack** of God **calling**, but a lack of people responding **to that call**.

Priests and sisters and religious brothers are not "created," they are called and formed. This was certainly the case in my own vocation:

- ✍ As a small boy, probably like every Catholic boy, I thought about being a priest. I can remember thinking, as I sat in church on Sunday, “when I’m a priest, I’m going to go that way around the altar.”
- ✍ The idea of priesthood kept coming up in my life
- ✍ But when the “rubber hit the road” and I was faced with making a decision, I ran the other way!
- ✍ At the end of high school, I decided on regular college instead of seminary.
- ✍ All through college I would go through what I called my “I want to be a priest phase.” I’d think about it for a week or so, then decide I was crazy to even think about it – that God had the wrong person. That I wasn’t the right man for the job.
- ✍ So I dated, joined a fraternity, lived a fairly normal college lifestyle.
- ✍ For a time, I even stopped going to Mass – until I met Fr. Gill
- ✍ During my senior year, I was working in a nursing home – and part of my senior project was bringing the local priest, Fr. Gill, into the nursing home to celebrate Mass for the residents.
- ✍ One day after Mass, Fr. Gill asked me, “You’re Catholic aren’t you?” How did he know?! I never told him that! “Yes, Father – but how’d you know?” “You knew all the answers at Mass.” Ok, he had me there.
- ✍ Then he asked me a simple, but profound question which “cut to my heart” (much like the words of Peter to the people of Jerusalem in today’s 1st reading: “Why don’t you go to church?”
- ✍ I had no answer.
- ✍ So I began attending Mass again, the idea of priesthood grew stronger, and I decided that, despite the fact that I was **convinced** God had the wrong man, I’d apply – never expecting to be accepted – I was!
- ✍ Then I had to talk all those psychological tests to make sure I wasn’t crazy: well, somehow I passed.
- ✍ OK, I’ll go, but I’ll never like it. I did!
- ✍ But all along this entire journey, there was one constant in making me think about priesthood, people kept asking me, “Did you ever think of being a priest?” My answer was always, “Please, don’t ask me that question...”
- ✍ But it was the constant reminder from others that really kept the priesthood in the front of my mind.
- ✍ Now, I’m SO glad I listened to God and to the voices of his people encouraging me – I don’t think that I could be happier than I am as a priest!



APPLICATION: Three Ways to Promote Vocations

Certainly, not all of us are called to be priests and religious – we may have a **great** need for priests and religious sisters, but we also need good, solid, Catholic families. But all of us **are** called to **encourage** these vocations.

Let me suggest to you **three ways** that we can all foster vocations:



- ✍ First, we can **pray for God to call many more** young men and women to these special vocations. Actually, Jesus **commanded** us to do this – “Pray to the harvest master, that he may send labors into his harvest.”
- ✍ Second, we can pray for those **whom God is calling** – that they be given the **courage** to accept the invitation. This is **especially** important in today's world, which laughs so loudly at lives dedicated entirely to God and neighbor.
- ✍ Thirdly, we can **encourage** young people to **give God the first shot at their hearts**. **Ask** them if they have ever considered a vocation. **Suggest** that they go on a retreat at a seminary or a religious house to give God a chance to speak to them.

God works through messengers. If he is calling **you** to be a special messenger (and I'm convinced He IS calling some of our young men and women), **do not be afraid!** It is a WONDERFUL life!

Parents, let me address you for a moment... in the bulletin this week I recounted a story Bishop Dattilo always used to tell.

- ✍ He was celebrating Mass in a parish and two brothers were the altar servers.
- ✍ He looked at the boys' mother and said, “Wouldn't it be wonderful if one of your sons became a priest?”
- ✍ “Over my dead body!” was the mother's response.
- ✍ Other people say, “Oh, he's too handsome,” or “he's too smart to become a priest.”
- ✍ If you don't want your priests to be smart or handsome, does that mean we want our priests to be ugly and dumb?!



Parents, encourage your children.

- ✍ It is a wonderful gift to offer your daughter or son to the Church that they serve Christ and his people.

- ✍ Don't worry, they that they'll unhappy! They'll find great joy and satisfaction – and many challenges as well.
- ✍ You may forego grandchildren or **your** dreams – but the reward for that sacrifice will be great, both here on earth, as well as in heaven.

Today, as the Church celebrates Good Shepherd Sunday and recalls the **great need** we have for vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life,

- ✍ PLEASE, let's not forget our young people.
- ✍ They are faced with great challenges, first in hearing God's voice calling them, then in responding to that call.
- ✍ Today – and EVERY day, let's join our prayers to those of the **whole Church**, asking God to send out **more messengers** through whom he can work,
- ✍ that, like St. Peter, many will hear the saving message of Christ, be “stuck to the heart,”
- ✍ and, through the example and words of new priests and religious brothers and sisters, and the work of the Holy Spirit, they will repent, be baptized, and come to know that “the Lord is our shepherd, there is nothing we shall want.”

Please, pray for vocations.

- ✍ Pray for those whom God is now calling.
- ✍ Encourage young men and women who have the right qualities to consider a vocation.
- ✍ Our need is great!

Will we respond to that need with generosity? Or will I, once again, be the only priest in 2 counties, because no one responded to the Lord's call?

