

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Quo Vadis Mass

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Quo Vadis Mass, Archdiocese of Baltimore

Mount St. Mary's Seminary, Emmitsburg

July 22, 2018

You may not believe this, but it wasn't too long ago that I sat in the very pews where you are sitting. Well, it was almost fifty years ago! But that's not very long when you think of how old the earth is! Anyway, it's really good you're here and I thank you for your presence.

Today's Scripture readings talk about our need first for Jesus, as our good and loving Shepherd and second, for shepherds, for priests who are like Jesus and who continue the work that Jesus began over 2,000 years ago.

God's people are looking for priests, for shepherds who are good men, who will connect with their problems and broken dreams, with their anxieties, with their search for inner meaning.

Whether they know it or not, they're looking for priests who will connect them to Jesus!

It was a long time ago, when I sat where you're sitting that I began meeting some magnificent shepherds, some really wonderful priests who influenced my life and encouraged me to discern and accept a priestly vocation. I'd like to tell you about two of them and I'd like you to think about what the Lord may be asking of you.

Bishop William G. Curlin

By now you have met Father Steven Roth, the Director of Vocations for the Archdiocese of Baltimore. Over the years, I've worked with a lot of very good vocation directors but I can tell you that he's the best in the business. So pay a lot of attention to what he says and to how he lives his vocation!

When I was a seminarian, my vocation director was priest named Monsignor William Curlin.

Monsignor Curlin actually had two jobs: he was pastor of an inner-city parish and he was also the director of vocations.

I remember the first time I had an appointment with Monsignor Curlin. I thought I'd be sitting in an office in his rectory, but I was wrong. It was a rolling appointment. He took me along on his visits to the sick. We must have visited five hospitals and then we dropped off food at a housing project, looked in on family that had recently lost a loved one, stopped off at the chancery so he could get his mail, and finally we got something to eat ... I was starved.

Long before there were Zipcars, Monsignor Curlin was zipping all around town, serving in one day more people than I ever thought possible.

He was especially attentive to the sick and to the poor, so much so that Mother Teresa made him her American spiritual director.

When he'd give talks and retreats, he often spoke of people whom he held in his arms as they were dying. When I landed in the hospital as a young priest and heard his voice in hallway, I got pretty scared. "Here we go, I thought, I'm going to end up as a retreat story!"

Eventually, Monsignor Curlin became the Bishop of Charlotte. It didn't change him a bit, and we stayed in close touch.

He still loved the poor and the sick and he got a lot of people to work with him, and in the process helped them along the way of holiness.

Bishop Curlin died just before Christmas, I was with him just as he was with so many others. I pray for him and to him every day, and I ask God to send us shepherds like he was!

Monsignor Art Valenzano

The second shepherd, the second really good priest I'd like to tell you about is

Monsignor Arthur Valenzano, Monsignor Art, as he was known by almost everybody.

Some of you may have met him when he was pastor of St. John's in Westminster or when he was rector of the Basilica of the Assumption in Baltimore.

When I first came from Connecticut to the Archdiocese of Baltimore six years ago, I sort of wondered what I was getting myself into. Walking up the long front steps of my residence, I wondered what was on the other side of those iron doors that seem to bar the entrance.

In God's grace, what was on the other side was a very friendly priest, a spec older than me, with a wonderful smile and an endearing manner. Almost instantly I felt right at home.

When I arrived, Monsignor Valenzano was watching the Orioles on T.V. with two of his old priest friends he called "the usual suspects."

I found out that he was an avid Orioles fan (Monsignor Art, we need help!!) but also that he loved golf – watching it on T.V. and playing it.

And within the first few minutes, I discovered he had a great sense of humor, with more than a touch of mischief in it. By the end of the day, I also learned that he was battling leukemia.

In the next few years, I would see this good priest undergo all kinds of treatments, receive good reports from his doctors only to be followed by bad reports. Through it all, he was a magnificent pastor – people came from all over the place to attend his Masses at the basilica.

People would tell me that somehow, every day at Mass, he said just the right thing to help them with a problem or to get them through a difficult day. Many of his fellow patients from Johns Hopkins and many of his caregivers would show up to Mass and both patients and healthcare professionals would tell me about the impact of Monsignor Art's ministry and example on their lives.

In the midst of his sufferings, Monsignor Art never complained, and when things happened in the parish that would make the best of us impatient, Monsignor Art

would smile and handle it like the good and experienced priest that he was.

Pretty soon, I learned that he was a font of really good advice but more than that he became a very close friend and brother priest.

In the morning, on his way to the basilica, he'd stop in the little chapel where I was praying. If the Orioles lost the night before, he'd say, "The boys came in second last night!"

It was in his last few weeks of life that I found out what a truly great priest he was.

He was no longer able to offer Mass publicly, so we offered in his little sitting room. As he held the host in his hands, I saw in him the picture of priestly holiness, a priest who had given himself totally to the Lord and to others.

That was the true secret of Monsignor Art's joy.

At his funeral, I took three words out of the Our Father and applied them to him: "Art in heaven!"

What Jesus Wants of You

During these Quo Vadis days, I hope you'll discover one thing more deeply - I hope you'll discover how deeply and completely Jesus loves you.

If we really believe that the Lord loves us more than anyone else, if we really trust in the Lord's love for us and believe in his love with all our hearts, then we will be ready to do whatever he might ask of us.

And some of you he may just ask to become shepherds, priests after his own heart.

At any rate, I not only hope so, I pray that it may be so, in fact I pray for this every day, morning, noon, and night.

Through Jeremiah the prophet, the Lord said, "I will give you shepherds."

I pray that the Lord will send us those shepherds in great young people like you, shepherds who will be like Bishop Curlin or Monsignor Art.

May God bless you and keep you in his love!

Also see:

Praise Jesus for Monsignor Valenzano

A tribute to Monsignor Art Valenzano

Georgie's Story: Choosing life when the prognosis is death

Archbishop Lori's remarks at Bishop Curlin's funeral Mass