

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Monday, Third Week of Advent; Seminarians' Christmas Gathering

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Seminarians' Christmas Gathering

Cathedral of Mary Our Queen

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First, it's a blessing that, this year, we needed a bigger space in which to gather for this occasion. It means that the number of our seminarians has increased and for that I give thanks to God even as I recognize the prayers for priestly vocations arising from people throughout the A.O.B., thanks to the 'invisible monastery,' and the tireless work of our Office of Vocations led by Fr. Sorra and his team.

You, our seminarians, are, of course, our best advocates and ambassadors. When prospects consider entering the seminary, they may feel they understand something about what a priest does but priestly formation is a complete mystery to them. With apologies to Rudolph Bultmann, you can help "demythologize" seminary formation by sharing your experience. So too, as parents you can also play a role with parents of prospective seminarians, helping to address some of their questions and concerns. So, as I see it, the vocations dream team is well represented here this evening: bishops, priests, deacons, Vocations Office, seminarians, parents and siblings. If you want to consider a beautiful Christmas gift to the whole Archdiocese, I'd suggest, not a gift card from Amazon, but renewed determination to help all those called by God to the priesthood to answer that call affirmatively and generously!

Speaking of answering the call, this evening's Gospel reading from St. Matthew is "Exhibit A". For in this reading, we were made privy to call of St. Joseph and his response. Some authors refer to this passage as "St. Joseph's Annunciation" for it portrays how an angel communicated with Joseph in a dream. The angel told Joseph not to fear to take Mary as his wife, that the child of her womb was the Messiah conceived by the Holy Spirit. The angel asked Joseph to name the child Jesus,

meaning, one who will save the people from their sins. In naming the child Joseph is taking responsibility for the Child, the Savior, who came into the world not be a political or military leader but the One who would save us from sin, an enemy more potent than either Herod or Caesar.

I think we can agree, that was quite a dream! In confiding to Joseph the very heart of God's plan for the world's salvation, the angel asked Joseph to change his plans, to cooperate with God, to take on risks and responsibilities he could not have imagined. Running through Joseph's subconscious must have been a thousand objections, a thousand reasons why he was not the one, a thousand reasons why the plan set before him would not work. Yet, what does Matthew's Gospel say? It says that "Joseph awoke and did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him." And indeed Joseph is the first person in Matthew's Gospel to obey God's command.

It's not hard, is it, for us to see St. Joseph as a model for responding to our vocations in a faith-filled and generous way? It's not that all of us received our vocations in a dream but I'd submit we've all had vocational "angels" or "messengers". It might be parents, teachers, or friends who sense that God is calling us. It might be a parish priest who perceives God's call in us. It might be truly be an angel who delivers a heavenly nudge or simply the whispering voice of the Holy Spirit heard in prayer.

If all of us review our vocational history, we will see that, like Joseph, we see obstacles in the way. As we saw, the angel delivered to Joseph history's most astonishing message and Joseph must have wondered why he was chosen and what it could all mean. So too, as we discern our vocations or as we try to live our vocations, we are by turns astounded, astonished, and sometimes discouraged for any vocation worth the name always meets with obstacles. Yet, like Mary, Joseph had faith that, with God, all things are possible.

And this brings us to response of Joseph to the command of the angel, a response that could be characterized as the "obedience of faith". This is the same response we are called upon to make, every day. Yes, we look for all the signs of an authentic vocation and we look also for support in answering our calling. Yet, a vocation is always a leap into an unknown future - whether it's the vocation of Mary, Joseph, a married couple, a religious, or those of us who are called to be diocesan priests. It

requires us to trust deeply in the Lord, just as Mary did when she responded to the Angel Gabriel, "Be it done to me according to your word," and just as Joseph did when he awoke and did as the angel commanded. In our turn, we ask for the grace to say: "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done."

As we prepare to celebrate the feast of Christmas, in only one week, let us use these final days to prepare our hearts so that, amid all our concerns, we will receive the Lord as did Mary and Joseph and find in his saving will the peace the world cannot give.

May God bless us and keep us always in his love!