

Archbishop Lori's Homily - Vocations Discernment Retreat

*Vocations Discernment Retreat
All Saints Convent, Catonsville
Jan. 6, 2018*

Introductory Words at the Beginning of Mass:

Let me begin with a warm word of thanks to the All Saints Sisters who welcome us so warmly to their convent, who pray continually for us and for vocations to the priesthood, (and who also make sure that we're well fed while we're here!) We thank you, Sisters, even as we offer our prayers for you and your community.

I always look forward to this discernment retreat...my greetings to our retreatants. I have met most of you many times before - at Quo Vadis retreats, or at "Come and See" events, or simply in visits to parishes. I look forward to meeting with all of you later today and with you I pray that the Holy Spirit will open your heart to Jesus and his will for your life.

The Homily:

When we think about the priesthood, we automatically think about the sacraments. All of us know what a sacrament is, but it's good for us to be reminded. They are signs, given by Christ to Church, signs that show us what God wants to do for us and in us. They show us how God wants to touch our souls and to redeem our lives. What's more, these signs are the very means by which God does just that, by which God accomplishes his saving work within us; in a word, the sacraments, in the power of the Holy Spirit, do in us and in the Church what they show us that they are going to do.

Administering or celebrating the sacraments is at the heart of the priesthood. A priest is ordained to preach the Word of God, to awaken faith in Jesus Christ in the hearts of many people, to instruct them in the faith of the Church, and then to baptize, celebrate the Eucharist, hear confessions, anoint the sick, and witness

marriages. In this way the priest brings the truth and love of Jesus to people and he brings the people he serves to Jesus and to his Father. Let me now put a name and a face on this mystery. When I was a very young person, maybe in the third or fourth grade, a wonderful young priest, Fr. Regal, was assigned to my home parish in Indiana. Everyone noticed how beautifully he preached about Jesus, how devoutly he celebrated the Mass and the sacraments, and how lovingly he attended to the sick and the dying. I'll never forget watching him baptize my cousin nor will I ever forget seeing him anoint my grandmother in the hospital. Everything he said and did spoke to us of Jesus - even when he'd play a little basketball with us on the playground. This made a deep impression on me and planted the seeds of my priestly vocation.

I thought about Father Regal as I reflected on today's Scripture readings which lead us into the Church's sacramental life, and thus to the priestly vocation which you are actively discerning. Specifically, the readings pertain to the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist.

The reading from the Gospel of Mark tells about Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River. As the Gospel opens, John the Baptist is preaching about Jesus. Instead of trying to hold on to his followers or proclaiming himself the Messiah, John the Baptist does what every good priest must do: he points to Jesus. "One mightier than I is coming after me," he says. Every priest must proclaim Jesus with the humility and love of John the Baptist.

John's baptism of repentance was but sign of the baptism Jesus came to bring, namely, a baptism of "water and the Holy Spirit" - that is - the sacrament of Baptism. And in today's Gospel we stand at the very origin of this sacrament: Jesus asks John to baptize him. God's Son submits to a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. This is not because Jesus committed sins but because he loves us sinners. Note also the way the Lord was baptized: by being submerged in waters of the Jordan. His submersion foretells Jesus' death on the Cross and his burial in the tomb. Jesus' coming up out of the water, in turn, foretells how Jesus will rise from the dead. And, Jesus arises from the waters, the Holy Spirit appears above him as a dove and the Father testifies that Jesus is his well-beloved Son. Through Baptism, we began to share in the Lord's death and resurrection. This partaking brings about two wonderful results in our lives: First, all our sins are forgiven, especially original

sin; any sins we subsequently commit are forgiven in the Sacrament of Penance. Second, by Baptism we begin to share in the unique relationship of love that existed from all eternity between the Father & the Son in the Holy Spirit. Just as Jesus is the Father's well-beloved Son, so by baptism we become the adopted children of God. Seeing Jesus in us by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Father says to us: "You are my beloved son!" And in identifying us as his beloved children, the Father also calls us to participate in the mission of his Son Jesus to proclaim the Gospel and to help others share in his saving death and resurrection. You are here this weekend because something in you has made you wonder if the Father may be calling you to be a priest after the heart of his well-beloved Son!

Turning to today's reading from the First Letter of John, we find reference to the Eucharist which is at the very heart of the priesthood. The reading speaks of the united testimony of Water, Blood, and Spirit. What this means is that the Holy Spirit testifies that Jesus is truly the Son of God who came to us by water, that is, by being baptized, but who also came to us by blood, that is, by being crucified, an event that is re-presented anew whenever Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is celebrated. The Letter of John is telling us that the truth of Jesus' baptism and death are brought to life in the Church by the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. The Holy Spirit testifies to the truth of Jesus by making his redemptive power come alive in us.

In baptizing and in celebrating the Eucharist, in forgiving sins and imparting the new life of the resurrection to others, the priest bears witness in the power of the Holy Spirit to the blood and water that flowed from the side of Christ, to the redemptive power of Jesus' death and resurrection. I can tell you, it is an utterly humbling and awe-inspiring experience to be the Lord's instrument in bringing his saving love to others. After more than 40 year of priesthood, this is what gets me up in the morning and this is what brings the greatest joy into my life: when I know that, despite my limitations and unworthiness, the Lord can use me in this way: to bear him witness in preaching and to dispense the grace of redemption to his people.

A joyful life is not necessarily an easy life, but then again, you wouldn't be here if you were aspiring only to an easy or comfortable life. Something in your heart is telling you that you must share deeply and intentionally in the Lord's Paschal

Mystery – his death and resurrection – and any vocation worthy of the name will require of us a sacrificial, self-giving love, not unlike the Lord's own love, a self-giving love that a priest must carry with him beyond the walls of the Church, in his unshakable joy, come what may, in his love and respect for others, in his generous care for the poor, the sick, and the dying, in his readiness to walk with people and to help them find Christ, in his willingness to sacrifice his own comfort for the sake of the Gospel. The source of all this is the sacramental life of the Church of which one day, I hope and pray, you may indeed be the ministers.

As we reach the noon hour, let us ask the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, that she may pray with us and for us as we continue this time of discernment. May we be led to embrace God's will with joy and fidelity just as she did in giving the world its Savior and in her pure and beautiful discipleship that led her to the foot of the Cross, to the Upper Room, and to the courts of heaven.

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