

Faithful priests all around

Witness awakens vocations. Offered by the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI, this was the theme for the 47th World Day of Prayer for Vocations April 25. One man can make a difference. In Jesus Christ we know this to be true. In and through Christ this continues to be true for His priests. How does this happen? And what brings it about?

Essentially it boils down to three things: first, a personal relationship (friendship) with Christ through prayer; secondly, the increased ability to give one's self to God and others without compromise; and finally, living a life of communion with others, by being open to them and their needs. There is a beauty and attraction, born of God, that continues to draw men to this priestly way of life.

Witness awakens vocations. I have seen it and experienced it personally. I know it to be true. The faithful, selfless, generous and prayerful example of one priest can and does make a difference. Like St. John Vianney, whom we honor in a particular way during this Year for Priests, my home pastor in Mountainside, N.J., Monsignor Raymond Pollard, came to Our Lady of Lourdes parish when no one else would. There were divisions and bitterness. It was a trying time for all, including our new pastor. His response, though, was not to shy away out of fear or uncertainty. He knew himself to be a priest - one sent by God to bring healing and communion. This he did, with no small measure of patience and perseverance.

Much of the time in the early part of his pastorate was spent listening to others and praying for God's divine assistance. As it is with God's grace in most of our lives, the change was small at first and to some seemingly insignificant. Not for Monsignor Pollard. He was confident God was "stirring into flame that gift of faith" that St. Paul had recounted in his Letter to Timothy (1:6).

His persistence paid off. Within several years the parish was thriving – a genuine lived experience of community centered in Jesus Christ, a vibrant youth group, many ministries and societies had been established or restored and were all flourishing. Three of us who were young men in the parish at the time heard the call to priesthood and are now serving happily and joyfully as priests of Jesus Christ.

Witness awakens vocations. It did so for me. I can still remember, as a seventh-grader, walking home from school, seeing Monsignor Pollard pulling into the parish driveway for the first time. I can see him bringing holy Communion to my mother the day she died. I can feel being taken into his arms and comforted just after she died. I can still hear his words of consolation to me, my brothers and my father. His priestly witness made an impact on us – and on countless other families over the course of years.

Witness awakens vocations. Even to this day. I have been blessed the past nine years to be working with men discerning a call to priesthood. It gives me great hope to see that God is still calling faithful and courageous young men to follow in the footsteps of His Son, in the path that Monsignor Pollard walked so faithfully for nearly 60 years as a priest of Jesus Christ.

Witness awakens vocations. Look around. The witness of faithful priests is all around you. This is the “precious legacy” that is handed down from one generation of priests to the next – genuine holiness, selfless service and abiding fidelity. Rest in peace, Monsignor Pollard. Witness awakens vocations.

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