

Quo Vadis Discernment Day

Introduction

I'm happy to see everyone here today taking part in the Quo Vadis discernment days. I especially want to greet Father Sorra, the Director of Vocations for the Archdiocese of Baltimore, all my brother priests, deacons, and seminarians. And how welcome are the moms and dads and family members of those of you who are taking time to think and pray about the question which the Risen Lord asked the Apostle Peter: Quo vadis? Where are you going? What will be the direction of your life?

Let me say that this is a good place to think about that question. A long time ago, back in the antediluvian days, I was a seminarian here at the Mount. And I used to come to this chapel every day for prayer and for Holy Mass. It was in those pews, where you are sitting right now, that I became convinced, once and for all, that God was calling me to be a priest. For well over 200 years, the Mount has been forming men for the priesthood. It was founded by a holy and courageous priest, Father John Dubois, and it was befriended by the first American saint, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. And Mary watches over her seminary day and night as the beautiful statue of Mary at the Grotto reminds us.

The Joy of the Priesthood

Let me talk to you a little bit about the purpose of these Quo Vadis Days. You already know what the words mean and where they come from. These are days when you make yourself available to the Lord. You allow the Lord to ask you the question: "Where are you going?" "What is the direction of your life?"

When a lot of guys think about the future, they might be thinking about what job or career they are going to pursue. As I go around the various parishes celebrating the Sacrament of Confirmation, I will often ask the newly confirmed where they go to school and what their favorite subject in school is. And sometimes they will say, "I like math and hope to be an engineer one day." Or, "I like biology and I'm thinking about becoming a doctor."

And that's pretty good. Young people your age should be thinking about your future. But a vocation is not the same as a career. A career is what you work at; it's

becoming successful in your chosen field. A vocation is something different. It's a calling. It's not just an occupation we choose for ourselves but a calling that comes to us from God. And it's not just about what we do during a working day but who we are and what we devote ourselves to all the time, 24/7.

Every baptized person has a vocation to love as Jesus loved. When you were baptized, the love of Jesus came in your soul. And if we allow our faith to develop, that love gets stronger. Pretty soon, we'll become aware that the Lord is calling us to a particular vocation, a particular way of loving and serving others. For some, it might be marriage and family; for others, religious life; and for still others, the priesthood.

The Priesthood Let me talk to you personally about the priesthood. I've been a priest for 38 years and a bishop for 20 of those years. I began to think about the priesthood when I was very young, just after I was confirmed in the fourth grade. But I really felt the call to become a priest when I was in high school.

Once I entered the seminary, I learned a lot more about what the priesthood is. I learned through prayer, study, and by the example of the wonderful priests who served on the faculty and who served in my parish at home. After I was ordained in 1977, I realized I had a lot to learn. It's one thing to learn about being a priest, and another thing to be a priest. But as I started baptizing, saying Mass, hearing confessions, visiting the sick, helping couples prepare for marriage, preparing the dying to meet God... I realized what joy and a privilege it is to be a priest. I remember one night a few months after ordination. I was sitting in the rectory and it really dawned on me: Jesus not only lives in me but acts through me as a priest.

I've had a lot of experience over these past 38 years. Like everyone else I've had good days and bad days and in-between days. But I am always happy every morning to be a priest. And what makes me happiest as a bishop is what made me happiest as priest: to being Jesus to people and people to Jesus, to help people meet Jesus in faith just like Jairus in today's Gospel or like the woman who had such a terrible affliction. I can't tell you what joy it brings me when at the end of a long day I realize that Lord has worked through me. Sometimes it's bringing someone back to the faith. Sometimes it's reconciling someone to the Church. And sometimes it's just

letting a person in trouble know that the Lord loves him. But when I serve as a priest, I'm not just making people feel better. I'm bringing to them the power of Jesus' death and resurrection, a love stronger than sin and more powerful than death. I helping make people's lives better not just in this world but in the next.

Conclusion

So I hope that as the result of these Quo Vadis Days, you'll let Jesus ask you every day, "Where are you going?" Until that day when you discern the vocation the Lord is calling you to accept, and for many of you I hope and pray it will be the priesthood. Then you can say to the Lord, "I'm going with you!"

May God bless you and keep you always in His love!