

Religious Vocations – Reasons to Hope

Jesus Christ: Yesterday, Today, and Forever ~

Two weeks ago, the priests of the Archdiocese of Seattle (Western Washington) gathered at Ocean Shores for our annual gathering called Priest Days. This is the only time all year when all the priests have an opportunity to gather for more than a three-hour event. The annual gathering starts on Sunday evening and ends on Wednesday evening. A guest speaker presents something on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. Our guest speaker this year was Rhonda Grue-newald, a laywoman from the Houston area. Rhonda began a ministry about ten years ago to help dioceses, parishes, and individuals raise up vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Since then, she has presented in over 70 dioceses across the country helping bishops and priests to know what they can do to promote vocations and accompany those who are discerning.

Rhonda's presentation was the best one we've had in the 25 years that I've been attending Priest Days. She is a gifted public speaker (she's had lots of practice doing this), educating us on the subject matter in question, and evangelizing the bishops and priests of the Archdiocese. In the coming years, I will be putting together some of the things that she recommended and hopefully seeing more fruit in this area. Although Columbia River Catholic is doing well compared to most parish families, as an Archdiocese, we are way behind where we need to be if we hope to maintain what we have, let alone get ahead.

On Saturday, July 5, Ayden Andersen, a parishioner from St. Thomas Aquinas Parish in Camas, left for seminary. A brief biography and his vocational story was in the bulletin last weekend. Let's keep Ayden and all our young men and women from Columbia River Catholic who are in formation to become priests and consecrated religious in our prayers: Elizabeth Marie, Evan MacKenzie, Gabriel Brands, Ines MacKenzie, Jesus Gomez, Townsen Poissant, and Ayden Anderson. There are others from our parish family that are discerning too, some unknown to us, so please keep storming heaven for them too.

The current false thinking around religious vocations goes something like this: God wants almost everybody to get married, but there is a (very) small number of people He is calling to religious life – are you one of them? This is incorrect. God invites every single, young Catholic who is of sound mind and body to join him as a priest or consecrated religious. The reason why it seems that God only "calls" one in a thousand Catholics is because only one in a thousand Catholics have heard the invitation and said yes: all the others either didn't

hear the invitation, or did, but said, "No" in one way or another. The truth is God does not play favorites. His invitation to come after Him and be fishers of men is not limited to that special someone. It is generously given away to all who can and are willing.

Think of the parable of the great supper where a man is having a marriage feast for his son: "A man once gave a great banquet, and invited many; and at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for all is now ready.' But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it; I pray you, have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them; I pray you, have me excused.' And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So the servant came and reported this to his master. Then the householder in anger said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and maimed and blind and lame . . . Go out to the highways and hedges, and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled.'" (Lk 14:16-23) Our Lord finishes this parable in St. Matthew's Gospel by stating that: "For many are called, but few are chosen." (Mt 22:14) The "few are chosen" part isn't because God hasn't called them, but because so few have responded! Why is that?

God clearly made us for marriage: mind, body, and spirit. Choosing celibacy, especially for a young adult, sounds impossible to freely choose. What's even harder to accept: being a public representative of God and his Church, a public religious leader, always being different from everyone else in a "not one of us" kind of way, always being a good moral example for others, all of this for the rest of your life – insane too. Or is it?

To be sure, we don't feel sheepish when we invite someone to consider being a (fill in the blank) doctor, nurse, lawyer, teacher, etc., but we do when it comes to religious life for the reasons stated above: our kids might think we're actually wishing misery upon them for the wellbeing of others, but we're missing something huge—meaning and purpose.

Everyone thirsts for meaning and purpose: from the poor to the wealthy, the sick to the athlete, the anonymous to the famous, the incompetent to the talented, the homely to the beautiful, the weak to the powerful, the young to the old—all thirst for meaning and purpose. Those who don't walk with Jesus have an innate sense that something is missing and wrong at a gut level, even when 'everything' on the outside seems to be going well.

The something that is missing is the truth of God and abiding in Truth and God. While being completely provided for, priests and consecrated religious get to spend their whole lives seeking and abiding in the Truth of God, while helping others to find this Truth and abide in it too. It is immensely satisfying to find the meaning of life, Jesus Christ, to abide in Him, and to share Him in word and example with others. That is a fulfilling and purpose driven life, and people long to be fulfilled and have purpose. What's more, we long to be loved. Who can love us more than Jesus?

Here are my suggestions on how we can help foster more vocations to the priesthood and consecrated religious life.

1. Invite single Catholics who you think would make a good priest, nun, or monk to consider being one. Do not ask them to discern whether or not God is inviting them, let's assume He is, let them know that.
2. Tell them that everyone is searching for the meaning of life and purpose in their life. Jesus Christ, God, is that meaning and religious life would be a life of tremendous purpose. There is joy in that.
3. Let them know that if they say no to God's invitation, God will honor that decision and still love them with all His heart and so will you. After all, you are not a priest or consecrated religious and God still loves you with all his heart, has another plan for you, and has a place prepared for you in heaven.
4. Let them know that God loves them very much and will bless them in untold ways if they will pursue religious life.
5. They have a higher chance of being a better person for having chosen religious life than if they had not. I certainly have.
6. Let them know that if they say yes and persevere to the priesthood or consecrated religious life, they will literally save souls from the fires of hell. Can anyone think of something more important than that?
7. Let them know that they have your and the Church's full, unwavering support and love on their journey.
8. They will be rewarded beyond their wildest dreams in the life to come.
9. Direct them to resources. The internet makes it really easy, just look-up religious orders and diocesan websites. And ask them to make an appointment with their pastor.

"Then Peter said in reply, 'Lo, we have left everything and followed you. What then shall we have?' Jesus said to them, 'Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on the twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.'" Mt 19:27-29

On a slightly different but related subject. A number of my brother priests have reported that they saw more young adults coming into the Church this past Easter Vigil than they normally do. Surveys statistics bear this out. Perhaps some kind of small but real movement is happening in our wider society toward God and His Church. Below I have attached part of an article from Phil Lawler at www.catholicculture.org/commentary/under-radar-growth-catholic-commitment/. Phil is one of my favorite commentators on the Catholic Church and faith. Enjoy.

In Christ, the Herald of Good News,



Fr. Thomas Nathe

The Under-the-Radar Growth of Catholic Commitment (Abridged)

By Phil Lawler | Jun 13, 2025

At Easter this year, dioceses in England and France and Australia and Ireland and Canada and the US reported record numbers of adult conversions—**with young adults leading the way in most cases.**

Today's CWN headlines include a report on a Gallup survey with another suggestions of a subtle trend. Most Americans, the poll found, think that the influence of religious faith is in decline. No surprise there. But wait. Last year 72% of respondents said that religion was in decline; this year the number dropped to 59%. At the same time, the number of people who saw religious influence on the rise jumped from 20% to 32%.

Those figures match what I am seeing. Most Americans think that religious faith is losing public influence, and no wonder: they see the decline in public piety; they see the shrinking congregations. Insofar as they are watching the Catholic Church, they see the continued decline in Sunday Mass attendance. The overall statistics look grim. But they don't see the small but steady growth in the number of Catholics making a special commitment to the faith. They don't see the figures on new adult conversions. They aren't noticing the emergence of what then-Cardinal Ratzinger famously termed a "creative minority" of dedicated faithful Catholics. Yet some people are noticing, and their number grows every year.