

ELEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, 2026

“The harvest is abundant, but laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers for His harvest.” (Matthew 9:37)

This is naturally a classic passage for appealing for more workers in Christian ministry in general, and for more workers in apostolic ministry in particular. It is true that every baptized Christian has a role to play in the work of the Christian Church, but there is always a need for some to make Christian ministry their profession. The ministry of Christians, both amateur, if I may use that word in this context, and professional, is led by the Apostolic ministry of the bishops, and of the priests associated with them. There is not time in a Sunday homily for a full theology of Christian ministry, the Sacrament of the Holy Orders, or of the ministerial priesthood. It is necessary to focus, and I will focus today on the ministerial priesthood.

Only Jesus Christ is a priest in the fullest sense, personally offering the Sacrifice (of Himself!) that reconciles Heaven to earth and mankind to God, and teaching on His own authority the truths necessary for people to walk the narrow way into eternal life and happiness. By Baptism and Confirmation, every Christian shares in His Priesthood, joining themselves to His Sacrifice through prayer, especially the prayer of the Holy Eucharist, and inviting people to come to listen to Jesus speaking in the Sacred Scriptures and in the Holy Church's divine worship. Some men, however, are set apart and authorized to preach publicly the message of Jesus Christ, and to offer, in the person of Jesus of Jesus Christ, the Memorial Sacrifice that we call the Holy Mass. These two ministries of preaching and celebrating the Mass are the most noble and sacred ministries in which any man can possibly be engaged. The Church's priest does many other things, both personally and professionally, besides preaching and celebrating the Holy Mass, but these are the heart of his apostolic ministry. He calls on the People of God to repent and believe in the Good News, and he offers, in the person of Jesus Christ, the Memorial Sacrifice in which the Lord Jesus' Sacrifice of Himself is mystically made present, and in which the Lord feeds His People with Himself, giving them forgiveness and spiritual strength.

Some priests are what we call “regular priests”, in that they are ordained to serve under a particular “rule”, “regula” in Latin. Such priests are attached to particular monasteries, or to particular religious communities, such as Franciscan, Dominican, Carmelite, Augustinian, etc. They have an important role to play in the Church's life, but my concern in this homily is with what we call “diocesan priests”

Diocesan priests are embedded in villages, towns, and cities. Such priests are part of the Church's territorial organization. The Bishop of Rome, the Pope, is the supreme pastor for the Church throughout the world. A bishop is the leading pastor for a particular region, such as the State of Wyoming or northern Colorado. The territory for which the bishop is the leading pastor is called a “Diocese”. The Diocese of Cheyenne, for example, is the territory of the state of Wyoming. Priests like myself are ordained to serve in a particular diocese, in my case the diocese of Cheyenne. A diocese is divided into territorial parishes, always with a priest as the pastor. My situation is simple. I am pastor for only one parish, and I am the only priest for the parish. Sometimes a priest is pastor of more than one parish, the way that the pastor of the Cody parish is also the pastor for Clark and Meteetse. Sometimes a parish has more than one pastor, with one priest designated as pastor and other priests designated “parochial vicars” (associate pastors, in effect).

In any case, the diocesan priest must live in his town or city, but not be entirely absorbed into his town or city. I mean by this that the priest must be in contact with the people, but keep his focus on the mission of harvesting souls for eternal life. He is not a community leader, but a missionary. Always, he is to be ready to speak not just a good word but God's word. Always, he is to invite people to the Lord Jesus Christ, especially as Jesus is present in divine worship, most particularly the worship of the Holy Mass. Doing this might take him into a beat up trailer home or into a multi million dollar vacation palace. He might bless fields, or hold a sign on a street corner. He might be visiting a sick person at home, or be rushing to the emergency room. He might be leading a service at a nursing home or offering Sacraments for a Summer children's and youth program, like this week's Totus Tuus Mission. People might come to him for a handout, or he might be asking a rich person for a donation. Depending on his personal interests, you might sometimes find him playing drums or playing the piano, running in a park, on a mat trying to figure out how a particular hold could possibly work, or playing a board game, or even just reading a book while sipping coffee. Even at times like those, when he isn't doing or saying anything particularly priestly, he is still a priest, and has, God helping, to remind himself that he is still a priest, a harvester of souls for eternal life, ready to speak the word of eternal life and to invite to the saving Sacraments, as the occasion might require. At hospitals, at nursing homes, at schools, at homes, in the fields, on the street, in the park, at the piano, in the choir, at the table, on the mat, or on the recliner, a priest is still a priest, called to harvest souls by being, as far as he can, like the Blessed Apostle Paul, all things to all men.

A man must be called by God to be a priest. This word "call" sometimes misleads people, I fear. The call doesn't always, or even usually, take the form of a direct and explicit message from God, "You - become a priest!" The way the call usually can be recognized is as follows:

1. You love God and Jesus Christ Whom He has sent.
2. You enjoy hearing the Word of God and participating in divine worship.
3. You are leading a good moral life, without repeated falls into serious sin.
4. You have at least average intelligence and decent physical fitness.
5. You are not committed to married life.

If all of those things are true, you should think and pray about priestly ministry. If you do so, and cooperate with each particular nudge from God, who knows your true vocation, you will one day find yourself before the Altar of God, kneeling in front of the bishop for Ordination.

I don't say that the priestly ministry is risk free. For one thing, the devil will be out to get you, so you had better start now at getting bad habits under control, with God's help. Because you speak for and stand for Jesus Christ, there is a target on your back, and someone who doesn't like Jesus Christ is likely going to send an occasional sling or arrow at you. I know priests who have been spat upon in Paris and ranted at in Jerusalem (those two cities are chronically uptight, of course, but it could happen anywhere). A priest sometimes has to work with people under severe emotional stress, and occasionally that stress causes people to lash out, just maybe at you. The work of harvester of souls is not altogether risk free.

But the Lord Jesus Christ has a job that needs doing, and you might be just the one to do it. If you are, the Church will give you the training you need.

If you are deeply inspired with a desire to serve God, His holy Church, and people in need, become a harvester for the heavenly harvest. The Lord of the Harvest needs you.

