

ARCHBISHOP *of* CARDIFF-MENEVIA



ARCHESGOB CAERDYDD-MYNYW

**Pastoral Letter for the 4th Sunday of Easter, the 25th/26th April, 'Good Shepherd' -
Vocations Sunday.**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Since the age of 17 Jesus has exercised a particular attraction over my heart, which no other can replace. That attraction, the sense of being drawn to Him and wanting to respond in a concrete way, we describe as a Vocation. Today, we hear of the Good Shepherd who calls "his sheep by name and leads them" (John 10). The Lord invites each of us to follow Him in a particular way whether that is in marriage, the priesthood, religious life or as a single person living generously for others.

Today, I want to speak to you about something which is dear to my heart, namely vocations to the priesthood. We all know that without the priesthood there is no Mass, no sacraments. For this reason, priestly vocations are everyone's business. At present we have one seminarian preparing for the priesthood, with a significant number of others who are discerning a call to the priesthood with us. We are blessed to have priests who have come to minister among us from other lands. But it is not enough; we need to raise up more men for the priesthood from our own local Church.

Is the problem, that God is calling fewer to the priesthood? I think not. God is still calling; but many are not able to discern His call. When a vocation goes unanswered it is not only a sadness for the one who does not respond, but also a sadness for the entire Church, not to have that man as a priest. God, in His loving Providence, gives to the Church all the gifts she needs. The challenge today is not a lack of vocations, but rather a lack of responses.

We know that the joy of a priest is that he lends his voice to Christ at each Mass, as he says: "This is my Body. This is my Blood." It is the priest who is an instrument of Jesus' Mercy in the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. What a great privilege it is as a priest to visit the sick and dying and to anoint them in their suffering. As St John Vianney once said, "If we really understood the priesthood, we would die, not of fear, but of joy." It really is a wonderful life - challenging, yes, but truly joyful and bringing great fulfilment and happiness.

We cannot limit the horizons of the young by asking only, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" We must also ask "and what do you think God wants you to be?" We must help one another to look beyond careers and professions and to discern God's call to be holy, whether that holiness is to be lived out in marriage, in priesthood, in the permanent diaconate, in religious life, or in service of others.

In baptism, we are all called to holiness of life. A vocation to priesthood or religious life is a call to a radical form of discipleship that aspires to follow Jesus' teachings and example ever more closely. Priests are a varied and diverse group, and unmarried men can offer themselves for this vocation at different ages.

I am asking every unmarried man who is listening to this pastoral message – could Jesus be calling you to the priesthood? Would you like to take a first step in hearing more about this possibility? I invite you to join me on Sunday, 31st May for Evening Prayer (Vespers) at St David's Cathedral in Cardiff at 3.30pm. Afterwards, there will be an opportunity to meet with me and other men interested in this vocation, 10 of whom recently attended a discernment retreat in St Non's in Pembrokeshire. If you are 16 or 17 and would like to attend, then you can do so if you are accompanied by a parent or guardian. I ask all men who plan to attend to register their interest by emailing Fr Matt Roche-Saunders, the Vocations Director, on Vocations@cardiffmenevia.org The details are also on the diocesan website and in the parish newsletter. Alternatively, you can write to me directly at Archbishop's House.

I invite every person listening to this pastoral message to pray earnestly for vocations to the priesthood in our Archdiocese. Too many vocations fall by the wayside due to peer pressure, or lack of encouragement. Parents, priests, catechists, teachers and fellow parishioners all have a part to play in encouraging vocations in our parishes, our schools, and especially in the accompaniment we offer to our young people.

May many be open to hearing Christ's call in their lives and especially that many men, young and not so young, will be willing to offer themselves for the priesthood in our diocese. I ask you, too, to pray for me.

Yours devotedly,

Most Rev Mark O'Toole
Archbishop of Cardiff-Menevia