

My brother, the sisters, I'm very glad to be here with you to offer this Mass with you, to pray this Mass with you. For those of you who do not know me, my name is Father Kyle Ratuisti. I am the vocation director for our diocese, and I also live and work based out of Bishop White Seminary in Spokane. So, for me, vocations work and seminary work have really been the center of my attention and ministry for the past number of years. And what a beautiful thing it is to be able to, accompany these young people, these young men, who are considering a call to the priesthood. Now, this is an interesting thing that may surprise you about things I look for a young man who is discerning the priesthood. Some people would think, well, a man who actually knows for sure he will be a great seminary candidate. But really, what I've experienced - I've been a vocation director since 2019 and a seminary formation director since 2022 – and observed is that a man who thinks he knows with absolute clarity that God is calling him to be a priest, he doesn't last.

He shows up to seminary, and he thinks he has everything all right. He thinks he knows the answer. And so, he's not asking for help. He's not asking for guidance. He believes that God told him what to do, so he is just going to go do it. What is lacking? Well in a word, humility. And in our first reading today, we hear about this exhortation from the prophet Zephaniah: *“I seek, the Lord, all you humble of the earth who have observed his law; seek justice, seek humility.”* He speaks about leaving a remnant in their midst - *‘a people humble and lowly.’* And this virtue of humility, something that is essential for anyone who seeks to discern what is their call and I would also say that the virtue of humility is something that is essential for all of us who need to be disciples of Jesus. Because after all, to say that Jesus is Lord, as you say that: *“I am not Lord. You are not Lord in your life. Jesus Christ is Lord.”* And for us to say

that you must be humble before God. You must recognize in the truth that God is God and we are not. That we have been made good, by God to be in relationship with Him, and He calls us to conversion. He calls us to live a life, and we don't get to plan, and personally, I am grateful that I don't have to plan out in my life. Because God's plan is so much better than what I could have come up with. For me, when I grew up, I was something with a, you know, an introverted people pleaser who really was not very keen on public speaking, or anything like that. So, God has a sense of humor. He called me to be a priest to speak in front of you, give homilies on a daily or weekly basis and to be out there, and preach things from time to time, that may not please people. He called me out of myself to minister to people who otherwise be strangers to me. Through God's grace, I'm able to recognize those individuals as beloved sons and daughters of the Father. I can only be open to the call by avoiding pride, trying to be humble.

We can understand this humility if we consider what our Lord says in our Gospel today. The famous beatitude, the beginning of the famous Sermon on the Mount from Matthew Chapter 5 and when we think of blessed, blessed is an interesting word. Because the word blessed, like holiness, can be something that we describe as 'Church speak'. I mean, it's Church language and it kind of sounds holy and religious and so forth. But what does it actually mean, 'blessed'? Blessed means that good things will happen.

But another way to understand 'blessed' or 'beatitude' is happiness. And so, a way for us to interpret this is that they unsettle us. So, they jar us with it. "Happy are the poor in spirit. Happy, are they who mourn. Happy are the meek." And the Lord is giving us the beatitudes, these keys to happiness. A happiness that the world does not give, but a happiness that God gives. And these people,

and us, who are more and more weak, who hunger for righteousness and so forth we are able to be happy because the Lord provides for us in that humility, in that lowliness.

These are our promises the Lord's offering to us: to accept a smallness in the world that is marked by competition. We are taught and led to believe that happiness comes from being on top or being the winner, or possessing more, whatever the more is - if it's wealth, or power, or possessions and so forth. But the Lord is pointing out that true happiness does not come from these things. It will not come from the rat race of competition but rather, it comes from that 'small'. There's a lot to preach on here, but I want to tease out a few things just for our own reflection. "Those who are poor in spirit", and "those hunger and thirst for righteous". I would like to focus on those two today.

*"The poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."* Again, this ties into this message, the call to humility because to be poor in spirit is to recognize our spiritual poverty. We are not holy on our own. We don't will ourselves by our own efforts to become saints. We need God's help. But we need to recognize that we need God's help. Again, think of the seminarian who thinks he knows everything but is unable to receive. If we are disciples of Jesus, or as we say we are disciples of Jesus, but if we think that we know everything already, that we have everything, that Jesus came to save all these other sinners, but, you know, He just kind of holds me up. No. We have to recognize our need for God. Maybe when we think of those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, you think of those out there or ourselves, who look out into the world and see a world that is bereft of righteousness. The world that is torn by war and violence and justice and so forth. And we say, "I hunger for justice and

righteousness in the world” but first, let's ask about ourselves. Do you hunger and thirst for righteousness in your own lives?

Because we, as human beings were made to be brought up in the love of God. We are meant to be perfect in love, perfect in charity, to be perfect in this self-gift of ourselves to one another. And for many of us, it takes on certain kinds of predictable as it were recognizable patterns. I am called to this pattern of self-gift which is Holy Orders, to priesthood. Married couples are called, you were called to the pattern of self-gift, that is defined by marriage of spouses who themselves love exclusively and faithfully lifelong to one another and to their children. And all the way to be of different models, in different ways, who are maybe single, or those who are widowed, those who are still seeking out, maybe so young, where God are you calling me? But what is that we've been calling to give ourselves away in love? And I think we recognize that there's part of us who's instant in our life, which even despite our best efforts, our best intentions, we fall short.

I am a vocation director, I am a seminary formator. I want to love the men that got to put in my life and the way that will best serve them. I want to intercede for them. I want to be gracious to them. I want to be working out for their needs proactively. But how often I recognize in myself that I may fall short. Maybe I allow myself to get frustrated by someone who doesn't seem to be getting it. Maybe I am tired and I act selfishly. Maybe I, in a moment of weakness, I give a bad example of what it means to be kind and faithful. You can examine yourself in your own context, your own relationships. Perhaps you perceived someone who needed that loving word or that loving embrace and for whatever reason, you held back. And someone was looking forward to your presence, but you just wanted to move and so you just walked away and denied them that experience of love.

Maybe we give, we give, and give, and we get so frustrated and fed up that the gift is not received.

We think about our relationship with God. God has given us everything. The God who gives a second chance again and again, even as we fall. The God who died for us. And we may say, with great intention, “Lord, I want to give you everything.” And then you recognize, “Oh, no. I'm not giving God everything. There are ways in which I hold things back, in which there are bad habits which distract me away from God.” My brothers and sisters the Lord knows all that. He has seen all that when He decided to create you and me, the entire human race. And knowing all this, knowing our silliness, and our weakness, and our sinfulness, God has still chosen to create us, to hold us in need, to love us, to cause us to be living.

And that, I'll say, is grounds for happiness, that God is on our side. Even though we are undeserving, even though we are spiritually poor, God still is with us. He still pursues us. And He comes to us powerfully, in Word, in this proclamation of Scripture. He is already in our midst because as Jesus said, “*Where two of you are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of you.*” By virtue of the Sacrament of Baptism, which I imagine most or all of us have received, we have been incorporated into the body of Christ. And so that when the Church gathers and we all know in a few moments we will celebrate the Institution of the Eucharist, the Eucharistic prayer, in which God will come to us under the disguise of bread and wine, to be present to us in the Eucharist, to nourish us with His very self.

So, my brothers and sisters, we rejoice. We are happy because God has loved us and He's called and we have the opportunity today to be with Him. Praise be Jesus Christ now and forever.