

In the Heartland With Bishop Pates

Blessed with Vocations

In my many travels, whether to parishes or schools, in planes and airports where I frequently meet parishioners from the diocese and in conversations with diocesan representative councils and committees, often the focus falls on vocations. Fellow Catholics are concerned about priests and about those who are going to respond to the call of Jesus in this vocation.

This concern manifests insight into the core life of the church. It responds to the deepest appreciation for the Eucharist and the indispensable role priests render in its celebration. For the Eucharist, in making present the death and resurrection of Jesus, plunges us into the very life of God. We are nourished and strengthened on our journey to the fullness of the Kingdom.

On June 2, the prayers and hopes of ever so many will be responded to with the ordination to priesthood of three fine young men – Fabian Moncada, Ross Parker and Adam Westphal. They have been preparing intensely for this day by giving of themselves to what is described as human, academic, pastoral and spiritual formation, that is, to seminary life. All of these dimensions coalesce in forming one into a disciple of Jesus – an individual who, penetrating through the static and distractions of contemporary culture, has heard the irrepressible invitation “Come follow me.”

The day on which these three are being ordained, Friday, June 7, commemorates the feast of the Sacred Heart. St. John Vianney, the patron of diocesan priests stated: “The priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus.” In both his person and also in the exercise of his ministry the priest makes present the powerful love of Jesus – the love of His heart.

Saint Bonaventure taught: “Flowing from the secret abyss of Our Lord’s heart, as from a fountain, this stream (of blood and water) gave the sacraments of the Church the power to confer the life of grace, while for those already living in Christ it became a spring of living water welling up to life everlasting.”

Thus, the priest through ordination is enabled to exercise the function of making the heart of Jesus operative in the celebration of the Sacraments. Moreover, in the sacrament of his person, the living sign, the priest makes this same heart present in the many roles he exercises, but especially in that of the spousal love he manifests in his relationship of service to the Church and its members.

Demonstrating this bonding of the priest’s human heart with the heart of Jesus are the words of Pope Francis addressed to ten men whom he ordained to priesthood for the diocese of Rome on April 24th.

“Today I ask you in the name of Christ and the Church, never tire of being merciful. You will comfort the sick and the elderly with holy oil: do not hesitate to show tenderness towards the elderly, when you celebrate the sacred rites, when you offer prayers of praise and thanks to God throughout the hours of the day, not only for the people of God but for the world – remember then that you are taken from among men and appointed on their behalf for those things that pertain to God. Therefore, carry out the ministry of Christ, the Priest with constant joy and genuine love, attending not to your own concerns but to those of Jesus Christ. You are pastors, not functionaries. Be mediators not intermediaries.”

As of late, it appears the two-fold communication between God and those he is calling to religious life and priesthood is occurring more often. The three who are being ordained for the Diocese of Des Moines come from a robust corps of 18. Four more have already stepped forward to take their places in the seminary next year. Dowling Catholic high school gives evidence of being a seed bed of vocations with seven alumni scheduled to be attending St. John Vianney Seminary next year.

Our diocese is also seeing young men being called to religious life. Five, I am aware of, are in formation to potentially serve as a Benedictine, Jesuit, Augustinian, Madonna House in Toronto, and as a Legionary of Christ. Young women have likewise manifested a strong response to a vocational call. Three have joined either contemplative or apostolic orders in the last few years. From programs that the diocese sponsors for young women, there is a grounded optimism that there are many others considering this opportunity for service.

On the same day that he ordained the ten priests at St. Peter’s Basilica, Pope Francis said: “Behind and before every vocation to the priesthood or to the consecrated life there is always the strong and intense prayer of someone: a grandmother, a grandfather, a mother, a father, a community . . . This is why Jesus said: Pray therefore to the Lord of the harvest, that is, God the Father, to send out laborers into his harvest” (Mt. 9:38). Vocations are born in prayer and from prayer; and only through prayer can they persevere and bear fruit.”

In the Diocese of Des Moines we have many prayer warriors who are fulfilling what the Holy Father advocates. In his tireless efforts on behalf of vocations, Father Joseph Pins, Vocation Director of Des Moines, encourages us in our efforts to build a culture of vocations. He is supported by many in our parishes who are vigorously responding. Special momentum in this prayer effort is achieved through the Serra Clubs of Council Bluffs and Des Moines as well as the vocation committees in our parish communities.

I invite you to be one with those responding to the imperative of Jesus. Pray, therefore, to the Lord of the Harvest by joining us daily in the diocesan prayer for vocations:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God,
Give to the People of the Diocese hearts open
To the Call of Your Holy Spirit.

Help us Work Together with Richard, our Bishop
To Cultivate a Culture of Vocation.

Inspire our Young People to Give Generously
Of Themselves and the
Courage to Follow their Vocation in Life.

In the Spirit of Faith, Love, and Sacrifice,
Help our Parents Rejoice when their Children
Are called in Service of Your Church.

May the Parishes of Southwest Iowa
Support those Called to Priesthood,
Diaconate, Lay Ministry, and Consecrated Life.

Sustain our Faith which Calls us
To Walk in the Footsteps of Christ.

Mary, Queen of Heaven and Earth,
Patroness of our Des Moines diocese, pray for us.
Amen.