

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday. The Fourth Sunday of Easter is always a reading about Jesus as the Good Shepherd. This is also the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. And the letter all priests, deacons, and religious received from the Office of Vocations asked us to approach the homily using a hermeneutic of vocation. Whatever that means.

For a few years, we followed an approach to vocations as priest, deacon, religious, married, and generous single life. Because, regarding vocations, everyone has a vocation. Vocation comes from the Latin word *vocare* which means - "to call" or "to be called." In Baptism we are all called to service in the Church and in the world ... each in different ways ... and in different proportions.

I figured that I might talk a bit about my own call to priesthood, and the long and winding road that brought me here.

I've been ordained just under 5 years. My 5 year anniversary of priestly ordination is about three and a half weeks away.

I started this chapter in my life about 12 years ago. So you can see, it takes about 7 or so years to make a priest. The usual range is 6 to 8 years.

Normally priests are put through two areas of study: philosophy and theology.

There's a reason for this. Philosophy is, at least I like to call it, the study of thinking about thinking. We all think, but do we really think about how we think? In Philosophical studies one learns about the different philosophies that have come out of various times and places over the years.

Now the reason that priests need to be able to think about thinking is so that they can help people - either in the sacraments or in preparing for the sacraments; or else in preaching and in teaching. If you can't relate to someone, you can hopefully at least see where they're coming from. Philosophy is psychology before there ever was psychology ... it's sort of psychology without all the drugs and co-pays.

The second course of study is in Theology. Theology is the study of God. Since God is beyond our understanding, it's important to be able to articulate what we know, why we know it, and what it all means ... as well as to be able to know what we don't know, and the difference between the two.

In this way, the priest will hopefully understand himself, other people, and God. And be able to apply that knowledge in a constructive way for the good of the Church and the People of God.

But the key to any vocation - be it Marriage, Single Life, Religious Life, or Holy Orders - is found in relationships. Most especially in one's relationship with God and Jesus Christ ... but also as played out in our relationships with each other.

And in my own path to priesthood, I've held onto one very important thought which I often impart on those who might be considering any vocation. I usually state it in the form of two questions - "What are you running away from?" and "What are you running toward?"

That, in my mind, is the key to any discernment. It doesn't help a marriage if the reason you got married was to get away from a dysfunctional home. Nor does it make for a good priest or religious if you are running away from a bad life.

I find it best that if someone isn't running away from anything that they can then honestly answer the second question - "What are you running toward?"

And hopefully, that answer, in any vocation, is God ... eternity ... and Jesus Christ.

For my own journey to priesthood, I started out as the middle of five kids ... the second boy. One of my first memories of church is running up the middle aisle toward the altar ... I was probably about four years old ... during a Solemn Mass ... so I could see what was going on up there.

I played and sang in parish music ministry, and eventually took on the position of leading a group part time. At the same time, I finished High School, and got undergraduate and graduate degrees in Engineering.

I worked for a dozen or more years for General Motors, Robert Bosch Corporation, and Ford Motor Company. For six years I served in the U.S. Navy ... most of them overseas in Japan in Naval Aviation and Cryptology.

When I decided to start studying philosophy and theology, I did it on my own at night school - tapping into the GI Bill ... so what you see before you are your tax dollars at work.

It wasn't easy. Seminaries are for younger men. I was in my 40s when I went through seminary. And it was at times frustrating - probably for them as much as it was for me.

I remember one mentor - who recognizing that we were the same age - I may have been a bit older - told me he wasn't sure how to mentor me other than to "walk with me as a brother in Christ." That was a period of great blessing.

By the time I arrived in Saginaw, at the request of Bishop Carlson, I already had the degrees in Philosophy and Theology ... bought and paid for by my own savings and the Navy College Fund.

After two years, he ordained me a deacon ... that was August 2008. And on June 5, 2009 I was ordained to the priesthood.

This is running a bit long, and I'm not sure I've gotten anywhere. But I hope you can see that vocation is about listening to God's call, and running toward Him. Priesthood, and any vocation for that matter - requires sacrifice, but also comes with great blessings.

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ ... let us listen for the voice of the Good Shepherd. Even if we are well-confirmed in our own Baptismal call ... or if we have questions ... in hearing His voice, we can know where we should be going, and to whom we should be running.

May the graces of this Eucharist strengthen each one of us in our relationship with Jesus Christ ... and with each other.