

Homily Reflection – Vocations

In his profoundly moving book, *Den of Lions*, former Beirut hostage Terry Anderson recounts what it was like to exist for seven years imprisoned in darkness and chains. Each day he faced the question, "Will I be killed today or not?" and it was from this experience that he wrote "*faith is what you find when you think you are alone and you're not.*"

In his prison setting Terry Anderson found his faith, and he might tell you, his vocation – his calling to follow Jesus more closely. He and his fellow captives, among them Servite Father Lawrence Martin Jenco, referred to their time of deep spiritual sharing as "*the Church of the Locked Door.*" But do you see the irony in that? For Terry Anderson and Lawrence Jenco and the others, their physical imprisonment gave way to a tremendous freedom of spirit. The Church of the Locked Door became for them a place where the doors were flung open to the working of the Holy Spirit.

Those wide open doors are the image that the Holy Father has used for the dawn of the third millennium of Christianity. He calls all Christians to open wide the doors of their hearts to Christ. In doing so, like Terry Anderson, each person discovers a vocation: a profound calling from God.

The Second Vatican Council understood the primary vocation of the human person: to share in the divine nature of God. This invitation of God is given to each of us on the day of baptism. For in baptism God has given to us everything God has given to Jesus – looking upon us, God sees the image of the Son!

Now, the way each of us accepts the invitation to share in God's life takes a unique shape. For many, participation in God's life will be expressed in the sacrament of marriage. Others will live it as a priest or deacon, brother or sister. As members of Christ's Body, the Church, we are challenged to consider the kind of contribution we can offer God's people.

As we reflect upon our own vocation, we are challenged to be true to God's word. The Lord did not abandon us but gave us shepherds, ministers to lead us in word and sacrament. What do the People of God need to be true to God's word? Certainly we need good leadership from people who can inspire us with lives of holiness and service. For each of us to respond to God's word, we must first hear it. Within the Body of Christ there are men and women who are dedicated to a life of ministry, encouraging all members of the church to hear God's word and act upon it.

In order to proclaim the Good News of salvation, the church needs people who are faithful to their vocation. Our common vocation, by virtue of baptism is holiness. To live a life of holiness we strive to respond to God's self-revelation in a way that makes others aware of God's abiding presence. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Lord has endowed each of us with gifts. Our vocation to holiness is to develop these gifts and to offer them generously to the church. The gifts of the Lord are as varied as the members of the Church. There are some among us who are given the necessary gifts to minister to God's people as priest, deacons, sisters and brothers. Many of us are given the gifts for the single life and marriage. All make up the church and all are necessary.

A recent study suggests that many more young people consider following a vocation to priesthood and religious life that actually respond to that call. Their number one reason for not responding to the prompting of the spirit is that no influential adult in their lives encouraged them to consider it. Vocations to priesthood and religious life are not manufactured in diocesan vocation offices: they are nurtured in families and parish communities!

Each of us needs to recognize our responsibility to encourage young people to prayerfully consider their vocation: priesthood, religious life, single or married. We do this by our example, our prayers, by our relationship with them, and by an honest word of invitation.

Friends let us ask the Lord to open the doors of our hearts that we might respond to his calling and that others may do the same.

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