

13th Sunday per Annum - C
I Kings 19:16b, 19-21;
Galatians 5:1, 13-18;
Luke 9:51-62
Little Flower - 6/30/13

My Brothers and Sisters,

Both today's reading from the First Book of Kings and today's Gospel are about vocation. For me, these readings are particularly appropriate since yesterday was my 38th anniversary of ordination.

As most of you know, all the parishes in the Indianapolis deaneries are now involved in the *Connected in the Spirit* strategic planning process. Although the letter from the Archbishop stated several goals, we are engaging in this process primarily because we no longer have enough priests to staff our parishes. I think I have mentioned this before, but right now the single largest age group of priests are priests in their 60's. I will be 64 in August.

Many people believe that the priest problem could be solved if we had married priests and/or women priests. However, at one of our convocations, the presenter pointed out that most mainstream Protestant denominations have a vocation problem, yet most of them have both a married clergy and women clergy. Others believe that the priest problem could be solved if priests were paid a professional salary. However, the same presenter mentioned that one branch of Judaism has the highest paid clergy in the United States, yet they have a vocation problem as well.

When it comes to vocations, Catholics often play the blame game. Laity tend to blame priests for not giving better witness to young people and not doing more to encourage vocations. Priests tend to blame parents for not encouraging their children to think about vocations to priesthood and religious life and sometimes for even discouraging priestly and religious vocations. Bishops tend to blame the secularization of society and culture for the lack of vocations. I would like to make three positive suggestions.

Today's first reading talks about vocation. God chose the Prophet Elisha to succeed the Prophet Elijah. We believe that God has a vocation or a plan for each of us. Today young people struggle to discern what they want to do with their lives. Perhaps they are asking themselves the wrong question. Instead of asking, "What do I want to do with my life?" they would do better asking themselves, "What does God want me to do with my life?" I really wonder if this would not make their life choices a whole lot easier. Perhaps all of us, but especially parents, can encourage this kind of questioning.

The first reading also tells us that Elisha first became Elijah's attendant. In other words, Elijah was his mentor. He was Elijah's apprentice. I can certainly say that I learned more about what it means to be a priest from the priests whom I knew, especially the priests assigned to Little Flower, than I did from twelve years of seminary education. Likewise, I learned more about what it means to be a pastor from the pastors I had as a child and as a priest: Fr. John, Msgr. Bosler, Fr. James Ethrington, Fr. Charles Noll, Fr. Jim Moriarty, and Fr. Mike Welch. All young people need good mentors. So many adults work with youth either professionally or as volunteers. All of them have the opportunity to have a profound influence on young people. Catholic adults who work with young people need to understand their work as a form of youth ministry. When possible, they need to encourage young men and women to consider vocations to priesthood or religious life.

Finally, in today's Gospel, Jesus conveyed a sense of urgency both to those whom he called and those who wanted to follow him. I think young people would be more likely to consider a priestly or religious vocation if they could find it meaningful and/or important. When I was in college, I was part of a survey concerning what priesthood meant to seminarians. In essence, I said that I strongly believed that all love comes from God. I thought priesthood meant helping others recognize God's love in human love. I still believe that very strongly.

And so, my brothers and sisters, it seems to me that we should want to encourage our young people, whatever their vocations may be, to fall in love with the person of Jesus and then to want to share this love with others.