

Baptism of the Lord - A
Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7;
Acts 10:34-38;
Matthew 3:13-17
Little Flower - 1/12/14

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. The Baptism of Jesus marked the transition from his hidden life to his public life. It marked the beginning of his public ministry.

This year the Archdiocese has asked the East and South deaneries to participate in the CALLED BY NAME Program for the next two weeks. The CALLED BY NAME Program is designed to enable parish communities to recommend individuals whom they feel possess the qualities for service in the Church as priests, brothers or sisters.

God calls each of us by name and makes us his own. This call is deeply personal, a wonderful affirmation by God addressed to each person, but it often comes to us through the tangible and concrete invitation issued to us by other people. All of us are being invited by Jesus to share with Him in calling by name those whom He has chosen to serve in the ministerial priesthood and the consecrated life.

As you know, the need for more priests and religious has never been more critical here in the United States. The best evidence for this in our Archdiocese is the *Connected in the Spirit* program. As I have mentioned before, the Archdiocese sent out a bar graph with the ages of our priests grouped in decades. By and far, the largest numbers of priests in our Archdiocese are in their 60's. The end result of the *Connected in the Spirit* program will be the closing of some parishes, the mergers of others, and others sharing pastors. Also, today the presence of men and women religious in our Catholic schools and hospitals and other Catholic institutions is minimal. However, the women and men religious were the ones who traditionally have done the most outreach to those in need and those who are marginalized, high priorities of Pope Francis.

Many priests will tell you that they first thought about becoming a priest because someone suggested it to them. However, surveys frequently report that today there is a lack of encouragement of vocations. Many young people today have not been asked, have not been encouraged, to consider a religious vocation.

In the early years of the Church, the local community, in need of people to minister to their human and spiritual needs, prayed to God for direction, looked around their own community, selected those having the necessary qualities, and asked them to be their leaders. We would like to imitate that example. Through your help, perhaps we can discover in our own parish some of those whom we can "call by name."

The work of encouraging and fostering vocations belongs to the entire Christian community. For the next two weeks, I am inviting you to join with me in encouraging vocations to the priesthood and religious life. As in the days of the early Church, I am inviting you first of all to pray. Pray for guidance; pray for this program; pray for open and responsive hearts to our Lord's call. Use any form of prayer that you prefer, but please pray.

Second, I am asking you to look around your community to notice those who are fourteen years of age or older who appear to have some of the qualities that you feel could make them

good priests, sisters, or brothers. Look in our parish, in your neighborhood, in your place of employment, even in your own family.

There are response forms in the pews. I am asking each of you to take at least one home. After praying and looking, use the response form to recommend a person, or more than one person if you wish, who you believe might be a candidate for priesthood or religious life. Return the response form to the basket in the sanctuary, in the collection basket, or to the rectory during the next two weeks. After the response forms have been returned, all of those whose names have been recommended will receive a letter of invitation from the Archdiocese to attend an informal gathering to learn more about vocations in the church today.

To give you some idea of the kind of a person who might respond well to Christ's call, please keep these five qualities in mind:

1. Love of Christ and His Church: someone who demonstrates an interest in the church and relies on the Lord in his/her own personal life.
2. Service: someone who shows an interest in people and cares about the welfare of others, especially those who need help; someone who can relate well with others.
3. Integrity: someone who demonstrates honesty in relationships and in school or work; someone who possesses sound moral values.
4. Intelligence: someone who can appreciate and communicate the values of Christ.
5. Health: someone who possesses the energy and ability to continue the mission of Jesus.

My brothers and sisters, the Lord needs us to pray and to invite those who we feel have the qualities necessary to be good brothers, sisters, and priests. Those whom the Lord is calling by name to be priests, brothers, and sisters need us to affirm their good qualities and encourage them to respond to his call. Please give careful consideration to being an instrument of Christ to invite others to consider priesthood or religious life. Please pray. If possible, please recommend someone you would like to see carry on the work of Christ as sister, brother, or priest. Please join me in the CALLED BY NAME Program. As St. Paul wrote to the Romans, "*But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring (the) good news!'*" [10:14-15a].