

**Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> May, 2019**

## **WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS AND MOTHER'S DAY**

World Day of Prayer for Vocations always falls on the 4th Sunday of Easter, which is also called Good Shepherd Sunday because of the Gospel readings. In 2019, 12 May also happens to be Mother's Day. How can we celebrate these two important days together in a harmonious way? We can start by remembering the words of Pope St Pius X, "Every vocation to the priesthood comes from the heart of God, but it passes through the heart of a mother."

### **POPE FRANCIS'S MOTHER SURPRISED BY HIS VOCATION**

In an interview for a Spanish-language newspaper, Pope Francis's only living sibling, María Elena Bergoglio, recounts how their mother discovered he was interested in the Priesthood.

At age 19, young Jorge Bergoglio initially felt that he wanted to study medicine. Wanting him to have a quiet place to study, his mother prepared a special room for him by cleaning out a cluttered room on the family's terrace.

One day, the future pope's mom entered the room to clean it. But she ran into a surprise: books of theology. The pope's sister, the only one of his five siblings still alive, recounted the conversation between mother and son: "Jorge, come here. You told me that you were going to study medicine."

"Yes, mother."

"Why did you lie to me?"

"No, I did not lie to you mother; I am going to study the medicine of the soul."

Surprised by the news, his mother wept, because she understood he would have to leave home to study. His father, however, rejoiced in his son's vocation. Eventually the entire family embraced his call to the priesthood. Jorge Bergoglio was ordained a priest in 1969 and elected Pope in 2013.

### **POPE SAINT PIUS X KISSES HIS MOTHER'S WEDDING RING**

Pope Pius X was a very humble man and had a saintly mother. Because they were so poor, she worked as a washer woman and a school janitor to earn enough money so that he could go to the seminary (in those days, the family had to pay for the seminarian's education).

When elected pope, his mother was present at his installation and kissed his large papal ring, as is the custom. She then presented her tiny hand with her wedding ring and said, "Now you kiss my ring—for without it, you never would have received yours!" In addition to praying that young people hear the Lord's voice, let's pray that their parents happily support and encourage them as they respond to His call.

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### **Mary, Mother of Vocations**

Today, we see Paul and Barnabas in the Acts of the Apostles urge the people in Antioch “to remain faithful to the grace God had given them.” Likewise, mothers have played an important role in our faith-development, including our response to our God-given vocation. Indeed, mothers have a blessed opportunity to nurture priestly and religious vocations. When I told my mother that I wanted to be a priest, I told her just before I went to bed. She was delighted. Then, the following morning, while I was washing the dishes after having breakfast, my father stood next to me and asked, “What’s this news that you want to be a priest?” Since I told my mother just before I went to bed the night before, I had not yet told my father. I told him what I told my mother. Then he said, “Your mother was crying all night last night.” I was astounded to learn this and asked why. “She was deeply touched,” he said. I can see that mothers experience a great privilege when their son responds to such a noble vocation.

Today’s Psalm affirms that God “made us, we belong to him,” and that “we are his people, the sheep of his flock.” In contrast, the two things the evil spirit never wants us to discover is WHOSE we are and WHO we are. We live in a culture which conditions us to think in a reactive way, usually in response to fear of being criticised for swimming against the tide of various ideologies, even when such criticism consists of micro-aggressions. In response, many people think: “Tell me who I’m supposed to be and I will be that person.” But, our identity has already been bestowed upon us in the Sacrament of Baptism. Our vocation in life is an expression of who we are called to be in Christ.

As for John the Apostle, he saw in his vision the people who are in heaven. Indeed, every Catholic who is in heaven would be grateful for the priests who administered the Sacrament of Reconciliation to help them grow in God’s grace, for John says that their “robes were made white again, washed in the blood of the lamb.” This is a clear reference to what Confession does for us.

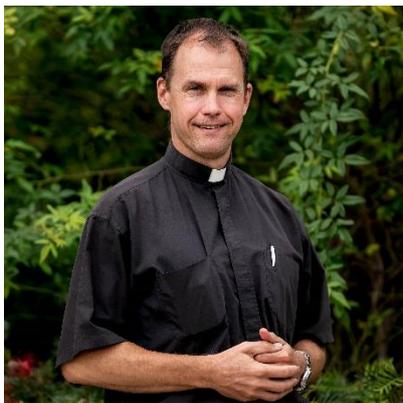
As for what we see Jesus do today, He calms our fear, assuring us that no one will ever steal his sheep from him. Pope Francis says in his message for the 56th World Day of Prayer for Vocations that since we are “bearers of a promise,” we ought to have “the courage to take a risk, with him and for him.” When a person feels called to the Priesthood or Religious Life, he or she can experience a lot of confusion and anxiety. But the saints tell us never to make a decision about one’s vocation in a state of fear. Rather, we must find that place of inner calm and then respond to the call, whatever our vocation is. We must rely on the Good Shepherd, who will never call us where his grace cannot sustain us. Jesus says that the sheep that belong to him listen to his voice. To hear the voice of the Good Shepherd requires silence and solitude.

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Let me conclude with something Pope Francis said in his message for today:

“...we should always look to Mary. Also in the story of this young woman, vocation was both a promise and a risk. Her mission was not easy, yet she did not allow fear to prevail. “It was the ‘yes’ of someone prepared to be committed, someone willing to take a risk, ready to stake everything she had, with no more security than the certainty of knowing that she was the bearer of a promise. I ask each one of you: Do you see yourselves as bearers of a promise? What promise do I bear within my heart to take forward? Mary’s would undoubtedly be a difficult mission, but the challenges that lay ahead were no reason to say ‘no’.”

Indeed, in Mary’s “Yes” many mothers find much inspiration, as do the men and women whom God is calling to priestly and religious vocations. As we pray for our mothers today, let’s also pray that the family home may be a seedbed for future priests and religious brothers and sisters to serve the needs of the Church.



**Homily by Fr Michael De stoop**

*(Parish Priest of Our Lady of the Rosary, Fairfield)*

