

This Sunday we have the awesome opportunity to reflect on how we are called to live our lives, especially our younger parishioners.

Let me describe the weekend of three hypothetical young people. Remember what each of them chooses to do:

Young Person #1 has just gotten a new video game in the mail and spends most of the weekend playing it.

Young Person #2 is invited to a sleepover with friends, but then hears that a cousin who lives nearby is sick, so Young Person #2 skips the sleepover to go visit the cousin.

Young Person #3 has tickets to a concert by their favorite band, but is also invited on a mission trip with their youth group over that same weekend. Young Person #3 decides to give the concert tickets to a friend and go on the trip. While on the trip, Young Person #3 is at Adoration and hears God say, "If I can take care of these people's needs, why are you worried about your needs? I love you and will take care of you."

So--just to recap:

- Young Person #1 - video game
- Young Person #2 - sick cousin
- Young Person #3 - mission trip

Who would you say is most likely to remember that weekend in 5 years? Who is second most likely to remember it in 5 years? Who is most likely not to remember that weekend in 5 years?

If you think about it, you know that the one who went on the mission trip is most likely to remember that weekend in 5 years. Why? Because they put the love of God first and encountered God in a powerful way.

This Sunday is called Good Shepherd Sunday, because today we hear the Gospel where Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His Sheep. So this Sunday is also a great opportunity to talk about vocations. Many of you teens and young people might not know what the word 'vocation' means to a Christian. Don't worry, I didn't either when I was your age. So I'm here to tell you that a vocation is

what God is calling you to do in life. God has a plan for each of us; an amazing plan both for getting us to heaven and giving us a fulfilling life here on earth.

Today, let us remember two things about our vocation; one word and one question: “Joy,” and “What is Your call for me?”

God has a universal vocation for everyone: to be holy. The word ‘joy’ can remind us of what being holy looks like. But before we look at that, let us consider Jesus, the Good Shepherd. Jesus says that he is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep. A shepherd, in order to protect the sheep in his care, puts himself in harm’s way. During the night, shepherds keep their sheep in a pen, and wolves and other animals try to come in to kill the sheep through the gate. But the shepherd makes himself the gate, and is willing to die in order to keep them out. This is an analogy for what Jesus does for all of us. He died on the Cross to defend us from sin and death. He lives forever to be our Saviour! Jesus constantly puts us first and calls us to do the same.

When we cooperate with Jesus’ grace, His help inside of us, we can put God and others first. To be holy means to do this, to put God and others before ourselves. “Joy,” that word I asked you to remember, also works as an acronym: J.O.Y.--Jesus. Others. Yourself. This simple word reminds us how to live holy lives, by putting others and Jesus before ourselves. If you remember the three young people, the ones who put God and others first experienced joy and happiness that was lasting, while the one who just lived for himself settled for short term happiness that is easily forgotten. The way we love in our lives will determine whether we are truly happy in the long term, and ultimately if we make it to the supreme and definitive happiness of Heaven.

So our first and universal call to vocation is to J.O.Y. - putting Jesus and others before ourselves. The second vocation is how God *specifically* calls each of us to put others before ourselves. This is known as our particular vocation, and it is different for different people. God’s plan for many young people is to be married and raise a family. It is a beautiful and important call! None of us would be here if our parents hadn’t followed God’s call to marriage. But I bet that God is calling some of you in a different way, some to be religious sisters and some to be priests or religious brothers.

These vocations to the priesthood and religious life are very important in the Church as well. Religious Sisters are called to give themselves to others as spiritual mothers in the Church and to be close to Jesus like a wife is close to her husband. You saw the beautiful Dominican Sisters who were here recently. Weren't they so full of joy? Maybe God is calling some of you young women to be religious sisters as well.

I also bet that God is calling some young men in the parish to be priests or religious brothers. As a priest, a man is called to give his whole life to the Church and to serve the people of the church as a spiritual father. God works through His priests to bring the Holy Spirit to babies in Baptism, to celebrate marriage with couples, to bring comfort to families grieving the death of a loved one, to minister Jesus' healing grace and forgiveness of sins in the Confessional, and above all, to make Jesus present at the altar on Sunday and every day in the Eucharist. There are many other ways we as priests are called to be fathers in our parish families, and I can tell you that it is an awesome adventure. Just like God worked in power through the early Apostles as we heard in the first reading, He is still powerfully at work through His priests today. I'm sure Father Bob and other priests would agree that there is profound joy in being a priest.

I encourage all young people to take time to consider what God's particular call is for *you*. Whatever His plan, I guarantee it will bring you more joy than you can imagine. The only way we miss the call of God is by not listening.

Which brings me to the second thing for all of you to remember--the question: "What is your call for me?" The best way to discover our vocation is to pray about it and ask God to show us His plan. He will show us, if we are patient and continue to ask and listen. It is also a good idea to rely on those we trust--parents, coaches, priests and others, when praying about our vocation. They can encourage us and give us good advice. Parents, especially mothers, I beg you not to say, "But what about my grandchildren?" if one of your kids says they want to be a priest or sister. I promise, you will be blessed beyond measure by their vocation, even if it isn't the one you expected.

I am so excited to see what beautiful families, religious brothers and sisters and priests God will bring from our parish family in the future. Let's pray: *Lord, thank you for calling us to a life of joy, a life of putting You and others first. Open up our hearts to*

*generously follow You to wherever You call us in life. Help us to continue to follow You through the power of the Holy Spirit as we consider our vocations and as we begin to live our vocations. Bless the Church and this parish with holy vocations to marriage, priesthood, and the religious life.*