

The Synod is our vocations program

By Father Joseph A. Hart
Guest contributor

The priest shortage is on everyone's mind these days as the Rochester diocese begins clustering more and more parishes in an attempt to provide priestly ministry to every viable parish community.

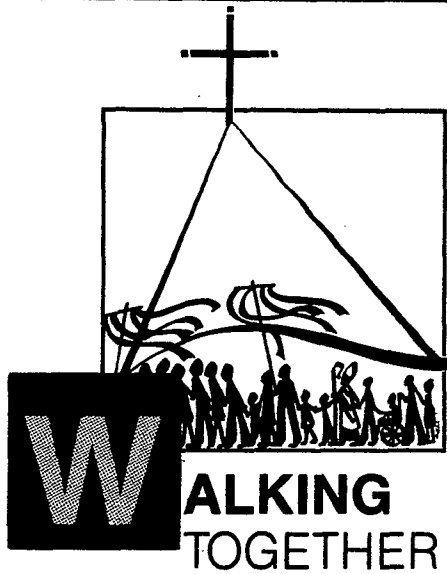
I believe it was this fear that someday soon some of our parishes would be without Sunday Eucharist which inspired quite a number of parishioners to recommend the end to priestly celibacy when they discussed parish life and ministry in the fall Synod sessions.

Meanwhile other parishioners focused in squarely on the vocation question itself, recommending an ongoing parish-based vocation recruitment program to encourage much needed priestly vocations.

Given the high level of anxiety surrounding this question, one would have expected that this vocation recommendation would have scored high on the Regional Synod delegates' list of the most important recommendations for our local church. It did not, finishing ninth in its category out of 14.

But why?

Could it be that we already know what Pope John Paul II has been telling us and research studies are just starting to point out: that vocations do not come about because of clever



Madison Avenue techniques or elaborate vocational programs. Vocations to the priesthood, to religious life, to the diaconate and to lay ministry are born in dynamic faith communities.

The pope has written: "Certainly a vocation is a fathomless mystery involving the relationship established by God with human beings in their absolute uniqueness ... But this does not eliminate the communitarian and in particular the ecclesial dimension of vocation ... The church, as a priestly, prophetic and kingly people, is committed to foster and to serve the birth and maturing of priestly vocations through her prayer and sacramental life, by her proclamation of the

word and by education in the faith, by her example and witness of charity." (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 38)

A recent study revealed this same insight. The Rev. Thomas Carr, one of my former students and now a Baptist pastor in Connecticut, recently published the results of an ecumenical study he conducted for the Lilly Foundation. The study explored the reasons why people choose to enter the seminary. He found that the local congregation played a more significant role in the choice of a religious vocation than any other factor. He also pointed out what we already knew: that through the years some congregations have produced many vocations while others have yet to produce a single one.

In studying a number of very diverse congregations with a history of sending many students to the seminary, he found that they all shared similar characteristics: a vibrant worship life; a strong Christian education program; a committed group of lay leaders; and a hands-on outreach program. The pastors of these "sending congregations," as his report refers to them, present ministry as an attractive vocation by their words and by their example. In addition, the central shared characteristic of these sending churches "is a prevailing sense of expectation, a sense that the Gospel will have concrete effects on their shared life, and that one such effect

will be the calling out of members for leadership in the larger church," the study said.

What this report underscores is the vital importance of our Synod process for our local church. Over the past three years, it has asked each and every Roman Catholic in our local church to be a leader, to take responsibility for carrying on Jesus Christ's mission. Throughout these discussions, we've explored ways to make our local congregations "faith-filled, celebrating communities." We've looked for ways "to improve our efforts in faith development and inviting others to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ." We've explored the thorny problems of our own times — from poverty to terminal illness — in search of concrete hands-on ways to be of service.

According to the Rev. Carr study's terms, then, our Synod has really been our vocation program. Relying on his data, one could argue that to the extent which our parishes are enriched by vibrant workshop, life-long religious education, committed lay leadership and hands-on outreach, to that extent vocations will flourish in our local church.

Perhaps that is why no further recommendation about vocations is really needed. If the Synod's spirit takes root in a parish, vocations will follow.

Discipleship costs, but it's worth the price

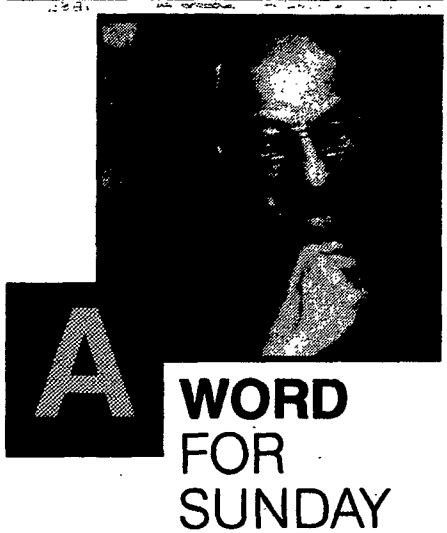
By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 16:21-27; (R1) Jeremiah 20:7-9; (R2) Romans 12:1-2.

Peter was a rock when he confessed Jesus to be the Son of God. But when Jesus began to teach that the Messiah was not going to be a political leader against the hated Romans, but a suffering servant, Peter reneged and tried to dissuade Jesus from that role. Peter became a stumbling block.

His advice seemed much like that of Satan in his temptations. So Jesus wheeled on Peter and repulsed him with the exact same words He used to repel the devil in the desert. In both instances, He used the Greek words, *Hupage, Satana*. *Hupage* literally means "go under," or, as we would say, "get lost," or "beat it." It means to depart noiselessly, without creating a stir.

In Greek, *hupage* is followed by two other words, *opiso mou*, which means "behind me." Our translation says, "Get behind me, Satan!" Another translation could well be, "get lost, Satan!" and "get behind me, Peter;" that is follow me and don't be trying



to lead me. Peter later learned the lesson well and did follow Jesus even to the cross.

Jesus summons all of us, individually and as a church, to get behind Him, to imitate His life of redemptive suffering. This means denying one's very self every day; that is, putting what God wants, His ways, ahead of what I want, my ways. This means taking up the cross and following in

His footsteps, which can mean that many times you can't be the nice guy or girl and go along with the crowd, that you will be hated, laughed at, rejected just as the great Jeremiah was, simply because you try, like him, to abide by God's standards.

Two West Point cadets had very different abilities and talents. One was athletic and intelligent, while the other was an average young man without much athletic ability. To graduate from West Point, seniors had to pass a physical fitness test, which included push-ups, sit-ups, and a two-mile run within a set period of time. Both cadets took the test on the same day.

For the first cadet, the test was no problem, but it was for the second — the problem of his life. For if he failed the test, he would not graduate. The two-mile run was the problem. He had never run it in the allotted time. He was doing poorly on the test.

He was about to give up when the first cadet noticed what was happening to his friend. So he decided to help. This was no easy decision, because he would lose valuable time and points in his overall standing in

the class. But he felt his friend was worth it. So he slowed down, waited for him to catch up and then proceeded to encourage him with words like: "You can do it," "go for it," "you're gonna make it."

With the first cadet running alongside him, he continued to plod along, pushing himself for all he was worth. He managed to cross the finish line, but was exhausted. It was a great moment for both men. Only one thing was wrong: they both failed the test.

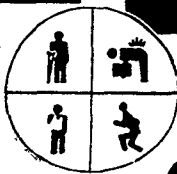
The first cadet discovered the cost of discipleship. He gave his all to help his friend do what he could not have done on his own. It cost him. Discipleship always costs. But it is always worth the price. "Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. The disciples wanted Jesus to establish His kingdom on earth without any sacrifice. They misunderstood. Peter expressed their misunderstanding.

What they failed to understand was that Jesus was a model to follow — "Get behind me." He would suffer and die, but in dying He would have life. So shall we — to give for His sake, to witness to our faith, to risk all for Him is to find life. That's the Gospel.

"We walk by faith, not by sight."
II Corinthians 5, 7

Kids Chronicle Answer Key

1. snake
2. goat
3. donkey
4. lion
5. colt
6. fish
7. sheep
8. pig



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