

**The Fourth Sunday of Easter - Cycle A
Good Shepherd Sunday - World Day of Prayer for Vocations
Annual Scouting Mass
May 15, 2011**

**+ Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As your Diocesan Bishop, I am happy to welcome you here to this Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. You have come to this Cathedral, to the mother church of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, because, first of all, you know that a "scout is reverent" and because you have promised to fulfill your "duty to God."

You have also come here to celebrate your achievements as Scouts and to give thanks to God for the awards you will receive in recognition of your efforts to grow in the faith of Jesus Christ and to place yourselves at the service of the Church. I am proud of your efforts and I congratulate you all for your achievements. I hope and pray that the awards you will receive today will only deepen your desire to grow closer to God. Never remain far from him!

Within your various scouting programs you study and work to earn badges and awards as you seek to understand more about the realm of nature. You grow in wonder and amazement at the world around you and you develop an appreciation and a love for it.

The God who created the world with all of its wonders also created you. As you learn more about the world he created you can learn more about him, and by knowing him better you can love him all the more.

He has placed a curiosity within you, a desire to learn more, for this very reason. He wants you to know him and he wants to know you. He created you out of love so that he might love you and that you might love him and be happy with him in this life and in the life to come.

Through scouting you also learn how to be good and patriotic citizens. You learn to treat others with respect and to see the presence of Christ in every person.

In short, through your involvement with scouting you learn from your leaders the skills that will help you succeed in this life and arrive at the life that never ends. For you, scouting is an important way to follow Christ.

Following Christ means trusting in him, even if, at times, we do not understand his ways. Following Christ means that we trust in him, knowing that “he guides me in right paths for his name’s sake” (Psalm 23:3). Following Christ means that we listen to him because we want to “dwell in the house of the LORD for years to come” (Psalm 23:6).

We listen to the voice of Christ because we “recognize his voice” (John 10:4). His voice resonates within our souls and it is sweet (cf. Song of Songs 2:14). We listen to his voice because he walks ahead of us always and shows us the path of which we are to walk, the path that leads us to the happiness we desire to enjoy (cf. John 10:4).

He says to us today, “Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture” (John 10:9). In short, by listening to him and living in him we find our joy and peace.

Today we will also celebrate the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. In his message for today, Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that following Christ “means learning to keep our gaze fixed on Jesus, growing close to him, listening to his word and encountering him in the sacraments; it

means to conform our will to his.”¹ To conform our will to his we must ask the Lord what he wants us to do with our lives, whether he wants us to live a married life, a priestly life or a consecrated life as a brother or a nun. Each of us has a part to play in helping each other discover the Lord’s will for our lives because we are all one in the Body of Christ.

You who are scout leaders have a graced opportunity to help the Lord speak to those whom he calls to the priestly and religious life. We know that “...every moment in the life of the Church community ... can be a precious opportunity for awakening in the People of God, and in particular in children and young people, a sense of belonging to the Church and of responsibility for answering the call to priesthood and to religious life by a free and informed decision.”²

Many of your scouts possess the personal qualities that are necessary in the lives of priests, brothers and nuns. In your scouting endeavors you see the strengths and weaknesses of each of your scouts and you may well see one or two whom the Lord may be calling to his service in a particular way. Do not be afraid of suggesting to them that the Lord may be calling

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Message for the 48th World Day of Prayer for Vocations.

² *Ibid.*

them! In the end, the qualities of a good scout are also the qualities of a good priest, brother or nun.

Pope Benedict reminds us that “proposing vocations in the local Church’ means having the courage, through an attentive and suitable concern for vocations, to point out this challenging way of following Christ which, because it is so rich in meaning, is capable of engaging the whole of one’s life.”³

In order to heed the Holy Father’s call to everyone in the Church to urge youth to consider becoming priests, it might be helpful to know something about the qualities of those who are being ordained priests this year in the United States. The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), a Georgetown University-based research center conducted a survey of this year’s priesthood ordination class. Around a third of those being ordained have a relative who is a priest or a religious. Over half of the class has more than two siblings, with a quarter of those surveyed reporting five or more siblings. The report noted that 21% of those being ordained participated in a World Youth Day before entering the seminary. It added that 70% of the class regularly prayed the rosary,

³ *Ibid.*

and 65% participated in Eucharistic adoration before entering the seminary. The average age at which those surveyed first thought about a priestly vocation was 16. For 66% of the respondents, a priest encouraged them to consider the priesthood. Some 71% reported that they were also encouraged in their vocational discernment by a friend, parent, grandparent, relative or parishioner, while half also reported that someone discouraged them in this path.

In a sense, every religious vocation starts out by being a follower and companion of the Lord Jesus.

Dear young friends, the Lord Jesus came among us and continues to call us to himself so that we “might have life and it more abundantly” (John 10:10). If you desire the fullness of life, stay close to Jesus Christ, “the shepherd and guardian of your souls” and you will find every desire of your heart (I Peter 2:25).

May the Lord give us this grace. Amen.