

**Knights of Columbus Vocations Mass and Banquet
Sacred Heart Church, Effingham, Illinois**

**The Twenty-Eighth Sunday of Ordinary Time - Year A
October 9, 2011**

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

Reverend Monsignors and Fathers, [Deacons,] men and women religious, seminarians, Knights of Columbus, dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

It is good to be with you here to celebrate this Knights of Columbus Vocations Mass. Throughout the ages people have found comfort and inspiration in the words of the Psalm, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Psalm 23:1). This great Psalm is fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ and in him each of us ought to have this same confidence.

Reflecting on these moving words of King David and of the words that follow in the twenty-third Psalm, Pope Benedict XVI recently said:

Jesus is the "Good Shepherd" who goes in search of His lost sheep, who knows His sheep and gives His life for them (cf. Matthew 18:12-14; Luke 15:4-7; John 10:2-4,11-18). He is the way, the right path that leads us to life (cf. John 14:6); the light that illumines the dark valley and conquers our every fear (cf. John 1:9; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46). He is the generous host who welcomes us and saves us from our enemies, preparing for us the table of His body and His blood (cf. Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:19-20), and that definitive table in

Heaven's messianic banquet (cf. Luke 14:15ff; Revelation 3:20; 19:9). He is the regal Shepherd, the King of meekness and of pardon, enthroned on the glorious wood of the Cross (cf. John 3:13-15; 12:32; 17:4-5).¹

It is he who laid down his life for his sheep (cf. John 10:11).

We know that in his goodness and concern for us the Lord has promised to send us shepherds after his own heart, shepherds who will guide his sheep through the dark valley to his house (cf. Jeremiah 3:15, Psalm 23:6). From where do these shepherds come? They do not come straight out of heaven, but, as you know, from parishes and families.

Sometimes we are tempted to worry about the future and forget that nothing can be lacking if the Shepherd is with us. As we look forward into the so-called shortage of vocations, we must remember that "he who goes with the Lord even into the dark valleys of suffering, of uncertainty and of every human problem feels secure."² We must remember that the Lord has not said, "I *want* to give you shepherds," but rather, "I *will* give you shepherds." The Lord is the shepherd of the Church, therefore we shall not be in want of priests. In this promise we must place our trust and cooperate with him in proposing vocations in the Church and do all that we can to help the Lord form shepherds after his own heart.

Several days ago in the Office of Readings, Saint Augustine spoke of the union of the shepherds of the Church – that is, of bishops and priests – with the one true Shepherd, Jesus Christ. He said:

Do not imagine that there will be no more good shepherds, or that we shall find them lacking, or that the Lord's mercy will not produce or establish them. Certainly, if there are good sheep there are also good shepherds; good sheep give rise to good shepherds. But all good shepherds are one in the one good shepherd; they form a unity. If only they feed the sheep, Christ is feeding the sheep.³

If, then, we are to help the Lord raise up and form shepherds for his people to act in his person, each of you, dear brothers and sisters, must seek to listen always to the voice of the Good Shepherd and, following the example of Mary, to do whatever he tells you. If you heed his voice in all things you will be good sheep and we will have good shepherds.

It is through the ministry of priests that we gather around the altar of the Lord to share in the foretaste of the heavenly banquet of the Lamb, who invites us with the words, "Behold, I have prepared my banquet...and everything is ready; come to the feast" (Matthew 22:4)!

Today's Gospel uses the imagery of a delicious banquet as one of the most satisfying and enjoyable experiences the human mind could imagine. If we were invited to this feast, would we not jump at the chance? What on earth could stand in our way? The Gospel asks this question of us - and warns that the experience of others is that when some people have been invited, they have found other concerns too important to bother with the invitation. Some have even been hostile to those who delivered it. This can be seen in the fate of many of the prophets, and of Jesus himself. The depiction of the king mounting a military campaign and destroying the city may be said to refer to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The words about the unprepared guest can imply that, once people have responded to the invitation by faith and baptism, there is a further expectation to live a just life of good works. Membership in the Church alone does not guarantee salvation. There must also be an appropriate response of putting the teachings of the Gospel into practice.

In his message for the past World Day of Prayer for Vocations, the Holy Father Benedict XVI said:

Particularly in these times, when the voice of the Lord seems to be drowned out by "other voices" and his invitation to follow him by the gift of one's own life may seem too difficult, every Christian

community, every member of the Church, needs consciously to feel responsibility for promoting vocations. It is important to encourage and support those who show clear signs of a call to the priestly life and religious consecration, and to enable them to feel the warmth of the whole community as they “yes” to God and the Church.⁴

You, my brother Knights, through both your words and deeds - both as a local Council and as the international body - have always demonstrated your recognition and acceptance of this great responsibility. Indeed, your great slogan is a simple summary of the Pope’s words: “Vocations are everybody’s business.”

Here in this Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, we have recently known that the voice of the Lord has *not*, in fact, been drowned out by other voices but continues to resound in the hearts of his friends. When I came to this Diocese just over a year ago we had eleven seminarians, and I had the pleasure of ordaining one, Father Brian Alford, your Parochial Vicar, to the priesthood this past May. Today, we have twenty seminarians preparing for the priesthood in five different seminaries.

Many of our seminarians are with us here today; the others, despite their wishes, are unable to join us. In their name and in my own, I thank you, my brother Knights, for the great support and encouragement you give to them, not only through your financial support but most especially

for the many prayers you have offered on their behalf to “our God and Father” as you ask the Lord to supply all their needs “in accord with his glorious riches in Jesus Christ” (Philippians 4:20).

The Pope has said that “the ability to foster vocations is a hallmark of the vitality of a local Church.”⁵ This is true not only of an entire Diocesan Church, but also of each local parish: the ability to foster vocations is a hallmark of the vitality of a parish.

I am therefore counting on each of you to help bring a vocational focus to every parish in the Diocese that every parish group, every parish council, committee and organization will always have before the focus of proposing vocations to those who show clear signs of a call from the Lord. “It is essential,” the Pope has said, “that every local Church become more sensitive and attentive to the pastoral care of vocations” and must have 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.”⁶

From the first days after the Servant of God Father Michael J. McGivney founded the Knights of Columbus, you, dear and worthy Knights, have always been keen supporters of vocations to the priesthood

and to the consecrated life. I ask you now to endeavor with renewed zeal to help build not only a civilization of love, but also a civilization of vocations so that we will indeed have shepherds after the heart of Jesus Christ, our eternal High Priest.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience Address, October 5, 2011.

² *Ibid.*

³ Saint Augustine of Hippo, *Sermo* 46, 29-30. In the *Office of Readings*, Friday of the Twenty-Fifth Week or Ordinary Time.

⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, Message for the 48th World Day of Prayer for Vocations.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*