

Pastoral Letter on Vocation to Priesthood and Religious Life

Dear Rev. Fathers, Brothers, Sisters and my dear People,

Thy Kingdom Come!

Vocation to priesthood and religious life is a gratuitous gift of God. He calls whom he wants (Mk. 3:13). He calls them "to be with him and to send out" (Mk. 3:14). They are his ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20). They are called to be his spoke-persons (Ex. 4:16, Jer. 1:7, Is. 6:9, Lk. 12:12). They should stand for him and speak in his name. It is a discipleship. The cost of discipleship is very hard and radical. If anyone wants to follow me, give up everything and follow me (Lk. 14:24). "No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God" (Lk. 9:62). "For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it" (Lk. 9:24). "...unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn. 12:24). Thus, extremely and exceptionally radical is Christ's discipleship!

This year our diocese is specially blessed as we have two ordinations and both are born and brought up in the diocese - Dns. Francis Minj and Jose Zade. Indeed it is a great event for us. We thank God for the same. As per now we have 17 priests, 88 religious Sisters from our diocese besides two religious brothers and not less than 40 in different stages of formation. It is great numbers for an infant diocese like Chanda. Let us continue to pray: "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest" (Mt. 9:37-38).

Vocation Promotion is a task of every Christian. "The duty of fostering vocation falls on the whole Christian community, and they should discharge it principally by living full Christian lives" (*Optatam Totius* 2, Vat. II, CCEO 329). The families are the nursery of vocation to priesthood and religious life. The harmony, the morality, the spirituality and the sacramentality of the families pave the way to sprout vocations to missionary commitment as priests and religious. The exemplary life of parents, siblings and other family members play an important role in hearing the 'whispering' of God to our sons and daughters. The importance of daily family prayer is beyond comparison in accepting God's call to priesthood and religious life. "Family that prays together, stays together" - where there is harmony there is peace, where there is peace there is love and where there is love, there is God present because God is love. The presence of God facilitates, easy and frequent communication with God, and that opens channels to our children to listen to God's voice better. We know, for a Christian the sacramental life adds beauty to his/her life in faith. Simultaneously it locates him/her in the community/society as an invisible grace of God made present in visible form and action. Thus genuine Christian life of our families become fertile land to accept vocations to priesthood and religious life.

As we all know the expression 'vocation' is not restricted to priesthood and religious life only. Call to family life and to life as single are also considered by the Church as vocations. Not that, one is more important and greater than the other. As St. Paul reminds us: "Each one remain in the vocation that one has received" (1 Cor. 7:20). In Mathew 5:48 the evangelist states: "Be holy as your heavenly father is holy". It is the 'vocation' to everyone - to be holy.

Accepting God's call, each one should remain in one's own state and strive for holiness. A Christian, leading a family life or single, is as holy as a priest or religious. What is required is to be 'faithful to one's call'. There is no sense in glorification of one's state of life or belittling another's. Every state of life is great and there is a role for everyone to play in building up the Church. The Vatican Council II corroborated the prime importance of our families when the Council Fathers addressed it as 'domestic Church' (*Lumen Gentium* 11). Thus the Council Fathers exhorted all families to be like Church - Holy, Catholic, Apostolic and One. So I warn every parent in the diocese to be responsible to focus on family morality, harmony, spirituality and sacramentality.

Holy mother Church celebrates the first Sunday of May as the Vocation Sunday. It once again reminds every faithful and all missionaries to take necessary measures to foster vocation to priesthood and religious life. The parishes and institutions should do what is needful to communicate to the faithful the great need of missionary personnel in the Church. Arrange any programmes that are feasible to serve the purpose. Please add special prayers to Karozuza on Vocation Sunday to foster vocation to priesthood and religious life. Cultural presentations, wall magazines, ward prayer programmes etc. can also create greater awareness among our people about missionary vocation.

In 2018 we have converted Kalmana as Apostolic Boarding wherein our Catholic children from standard V are granted admission and is imparted orientation accordingly. Its purpose is to create a congenial atmosphere to discern vocation and grow in it. As I have already articulated the circumstances can build up or tear down one's vocation. So all Fathers, Brothers and Sisters are requested to send such boys and girls who show some sign of vocation to priesthood/religious life be sent to Kalmana boarding so as to help them to discern vocation better.

It has been custom in the diocese for many years to do a collection during the season of Annunciation (Advent) for Seminary Fund. More important than a collection is vocation promotion. May I request all priests-in-charge to avail this occasion every year to create an awareness among people with regard to vocation to priesthood and religious life. So also it is recommended to find sponsors for our seminarians. Participation of the laity in the formation of Church personnel in different ways including sponsorship programmes is the mind of the Church. So kindly do whatever is feasible and needful.

I earnestly request every Christian in the diocese and missionary personnel in particular to take great interest in promotion of vocations to priesthood and religious life. Let us pray that the Lord of the harvest may send more labourers to His vineyard.

With warm regards and Prayers
Yours devotedly in Christ Jesus



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