

Thirteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time  
6/25 & 26, 2016

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All Saints Church, Syracuse, NY

My dear Brothers and Sisters. The passage we heard today from the Gospel of Luke is about vocations, that is, about being called by God to pastoral service. As to being called this way, it should be very clear to us that we are not the ones who make the call. God is the one who calls us. That is the reason why Jesus said, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.' That clearly means that vocations do not come from us but from God, and we are to pray for them. Vocations are not a matter of advertising, like in a business; it is not a matter of a lot of sweet talk or convincing arguments. A vocation is God's gift to an individual of God's choice, and it is up to each to accept it or not. Since the call comes from God, no other has the right to try to prevent it.

I entered the Society of Jesus in Hungary in 1947. I remember well that at one time in the novitiate we were talking among ourselves about our vocations. In some cases the idea of vocation to be a priest grew slowly through the years. In other cases it was a matter of a special moment. The strangest story I heard was that of a very intelligent young man who became a wonderful priest, and the live connection during the second world war between pope Pius XII in the Vatican, and the primate of Hungary, cardinal Mindszenti. He told us that after he finished high school, which takes eight years in Hungary following the central-European system, he found himself at a total loss as to what to do next. He had no idea about his future because nothing seemed to attract him. In desperation he did a strange thing. As he was walking in a street in Budapest he felt really down about all this, so at an impulse he stepped into a phone booth, closed his eyes, opened the phonebook blindly and put his finger on the page. When he opened his eyes he saw his finger resting on the phone number and address of Manréza, Jesuit Novitiate. His mind and heart filled with God's presence, he called the number. Shortly after he entered the Society and became a wonderful priest in God's service.

How have I been called? It was the 10th of January 1947 in the afternoon, around 3 pm. I was 18 years old, finishing high school, and preparing for the final exam. I had an oval shaped desk right at the window, and there I was sitting and getting ready to study. It was a mild winter afternoon and it was snowing gently. I remember that the snowflakes melted the moment they touched the window glass, and poured down on the outside like beautiful silver streaks. At that moment it came to me that I am to be a priest. Never in my life up to this moment have I entertained such a thought. I was working hard in school because I wanted to go to medical school and become a surgeon. I thought that being a surgeon is the quickest and most direct way to heal people. But now, at this moment, the idea of becoming a priest filled me completely and never ever left me all through my life in spite of much hardship at home, and abroad, and

through the many years of a life-time. By the evening of that day I knew that to carry out God's call I am to enter the Society of Jesus.

My dear Sisters and Brothers. I have a beautiful photograph in my room, framed and put on the wall. It is about a little girl sitting in a school desk with one of her arm raised up as high as it could go. Above her in the photo the question is written: 'Who wants to be a priest?' Her arm raised up high says it loud and clear, 'I do.' My dear Sisters and Brothers, we do not have the power to give vocations, neither do we have the right to tell God whom to call. We simply are to pray together with faith and love: Our Father, please, send laborers into your harvest. Amen.