

- In our readings today we hear of three particular callings. In our first reading from Jeremiah we hear the prophet predicting our Lord calling the Israelites back from their exile in Babylon to the Promised Land.
- While Jeremiah was speaking of a real, historical event, the Israelites being called back to Jerusalem after their Babylonian exile is symbolic of God's constant calling all of us back from sin and darkness so that we might know His mercy and live in the light of Truth.
- This first reading is a great reminder that our Lord loves us and wants to be a father to us.
- Then, in our Gospel today we have the wonderful story of Jesus calling to Bartimaeus, the blind beggar on the outskirts of Jericho.
- In truth, Jesus is always calling all of us. Sometimes He is calling us out of the darkness of sin, just as He called the Israelites out of Babylon. Sometimes He is calling to us to heal us and make us whole, just as He called the blind Bartimaeus.
- In all things, Jesus is always calling us to salvation.
- To this end, sometimes Jesus calls us to a particular task or vocation, like the priesthood, which takes us to our second reading from the Letter to the Hebrews.
- As the author of the Letter to the Hebrews points out, priests are called to be representatives of mankind before God, and after 20 years of striving to do this, I can tell you that being a priest is not always easy.
- Truly, we rely very much on your prayers to procure for us the grace we need to serve you.
- Like all men we, too, are beset by weaknesses, and we need your support and your prayers to carry out the awesome responsibilities placed upon our shoulders.
- So, I am ever grateful for your prayers.
- Yet being a priest is also a great honor, and no man can ever presume to take this honor upon himself. A man may only pursue the priesthood when he has been called by God.
- For most of us priests, the call to priesthood begins as an attraction to God and to living one's life for a noble cause. Over time it develops into an attraction to the mystery of the priesthood itself and to those things that are sacred.
- Eventually, if a man who is called to the priesthood prays, he will find in his prayer a certain abiding sense that being a priest is something that must be considered.
- I have no doubt that some of you young men and boys here today will be called by our Lord to the priesthood, and I hope and pray that those of you who feel some calling toward priesthood will have the courage to pursue that call.
- Certainly, if you recognize that one of the young men in our parish may have a calling to the priesthood, speak up and tell him. One of the tell-tale signs of being called to the priesthood is that other people recognize that call to the priestly life.
- So please pray for and encourage our young men and boys here at St. Ann's whom you think may have a calling to the priesthood, for we certainly need more priests in our world.
- As for priesthood, permit me to make a few reflections. Like Christ, we priests are called to be both priest and victim. Jesus is the Eternal High Priest who makes the perfect offering by which men are redeemed. Yet He is also the offering. We must imitate Him in this.
- The priesthood, which is the extension of Christ's ministry throughout history, is the human embodiment of Christ's sacrifice. The priesthood exists to offer sacrifice – primarily to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass – but also to offer oneself as a living sacrifice.

- Above and beyond the sacrifices that come with a life of obedience and celibacy, priests must also sacrifice their own needs, wants, and desires, even their very own wills, for the salvation of souls.
- This requires exercising a charitable patience with the people of God: teaching them, admonishing them, encouraging them, loving them, and even doing penance for them. And yet, a priest must strive to do it all willingly, and with a smile.
- And while it is often easy and good to be the one who offers the sacrifice, it's never easy being the sacrifice that is offered.
- Yet, this spirit of sacrifice is what ennobles the priesthood and brings joy to the priesthood.
- We priests must be resolved to keep our eyes ever upon our Lord and His example, especially as He hung upon the Cross, imitating our Lord in this sacrificial act: generously offering ourselves for the sake of those entrusted to us, without heed for what it costs us personally.
- On one hand, we stand at the foot of the Cross, generously dispensing the blood and water flowing from the font of God's mercy and love, which is the life of souls. That's being a priest.
- On the other hand, we are called to hang upon the Cross, allowing ourselves to be broken and bruised, wounded and pierced. That's being a victim.
- What's more, priests exercise a paternity that is a true fatherhood in every way: generating new life through the Sacraments; educating, guiding, and protecting through our preaching and teaching; and providing for our children through our prayers and apostolic works.
- Our strength to manage this herculean task comes from the Mass, from the Eucharist.
- Through the faithful offering of the Mass, we are conformed to the Paschal Mystery, which leads us to loving God more. It's hard to say all those words that render God thanks and praise and adoration without falling more deeply in love with Him!
- Yet at the same time, the Mass humbles and exalts us. It is both humbling and awesome, both breath-taking and fearsome, to call down God from Heaven during the Eucharistic Prayer and hold Him in your hands.
- To think: that the sovereign Lord of the Universe is willing to become ordinary bread and wine at the command of us sinful, clay-footed men. Yet it's our vocation, our duty, and our privilege.
- Thus, the Mass forms us to live with our feet in this material, earthly world, but with our minds and hearts ever directed to the world to come, and to be that way for the salvation of others.
- Indeed, a priest is a man who stands in God's place for other men, so that all men can become like God. A priest is a man who, with feet firmly planted in this world, reaches forth for Heaven with all his might so that his people might find their way there through him.
- A priest is a beacon of light, a burning ember of charity, mercy, and truth, shining in the darkness of this world and pointing out the way to salvation, heedless of any worldly shame.
- A priest is a man who dies so that others may live. A priest is the mighty love of God hidden in the weakness of human flesh.
- St. Teresa of Ávila says that Jesus, "never gets weary of giving and never can His mercies be exhausted." And in imitation of Him Whom we profess as Lord and Savior, priests are called to be the same way with the People of God.
- Our world is so very much in need of God's mercy, and yet His mercy is not wanting for those who desire it. Just as He called the blind Bartimaeus to healing and wholeness, just as He called the exiled Israelites out of Babylon, He still calls each of us today to receive His mercy.
- And this He does through the priesthood. Please pray for us priests; please pray that more men will respond to the priesthood. And please pray that those who do respond to the call to the priesthood will live this vocation with generosity and integrity.
- And may we all heed our Lord's call to salvation!