

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER – YEAR C

Acts 13:14, 43–52; Rev 7:9, 14b–17; John 10:27–30

World Day of Prayer for Vocations

by Father Charles Fillion

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Brother and sisters, a couple of passages stuck me in today's readings. The first comes from the Acts of the Apostles: "When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and praised the word of the Lord: and as many as had been destined for eternal life became believers". Many might take this passage as thinking that it has been determined or some people are destined to receive eternal life. What it is really saying is that we are all called, destined for eternal life. Unfortunately, some will refuse not knowing what they are in fact refusing. Yes, even the Gentiles are called, not only the Jews.

When we speak of World Day of Prayer for Vocations, we are also speaking that we are all called to spread God's word. That is how Saint John in our second reading sees "a great multitude that no one can count, from every nation". They have heard the voice of the Shepherd, Jesus. Today, He still speaks to us through the Gospel. But he also speaks through the Pope, the bishops, the priests, the deacons, and also through his people in many ways.

This past week, the priests from our Archdiocese were on their annual retreat. It was Sister Jacqueline St-Yves who was our retreat master. She invited us to identify in a new way who are the people that influenced us in our vocation and those are still influence us. It is always important to come back at the source of a vocation and share it.

I was born in a Catholic family. I was born with a heart defect. Because of my heart problems, the family moved from Transcona to Richer, than La Broquerie. I also went to Sainte-Anne School for Grade 4 to 8. I then did my High School at Collège Secondaire de Saint-Boniface. During that time, I stayed at the Minor Seminary. It is there that I first time **acknowledge** the calling to the priesthood. The 1980's was a time of great spiritual growth with weekend retreats through many Search, TEC, Charismatic Prayer Group, and more. I was also involved with Development & Peace. I also worked full time at Provencher Shell while completing my BA part-time at Collège Universitaire de Saint-Boniface.

In 1989, the year before graduating, I quit my job to finally join the Oblates. Unfortunately, it did not work out. I guess I did not hear God's call correctly and said I least I tried. Being a priest was no longer a possibility for me. So, after graduating, I struggled to find work. I was able to find seasonal contracts, working at the Festival du Voyageur & at Jostens taking pictures in schools.

But in 1991, I had the privilege to go on a mission trip in Haiti with Development & Peace. This really transformed my outlook on many fronts. I saw in the eyes of the Haitian people their deep hope. I was privilege to live in Canada where I had no excuse of being depressed. Coming back home, I searched for a way to use the talents God gave me. I loved being a radio host and started a show on the new French station CKXL, 91.1 FM. Named Écho de la Parole, my main focus was to evangelize through Christian songs.

In 1992, the Catholic School of Evangelization open its door and I became one of the first students. But I made a deal with God: “I will give you a year of my life, and at the end I would to have a full time job”. Well, we shouldn’t do that because we never know how God will answer. In 1993, I started what it now called the St. Malo Catholic Summer Camps. At the end of the Summer, I stayed at the school to help out, since God had not given me a full time job. Later in the Fall, a priest came to the school and asked why I was still there. I told him that I was looking for a job. He said that the Trappists in Holland Manitoba is looking for someone. So off I went to the mountain area. I still was doing my radio program since this was a volunteer position. I also came back to do the Summer camps in Saint Malo.

In 1996, God surprised me through three little children, around 10 years old, at Summer camp. One asked, “Are you a priest?” I answered “no!” The second asked, “Are you a seminarian?” I was puzzled and answered “no!” The third asked, “Are you thinking about it?” OK God that is very good! I’m listening. Its time. I went to see the Vocation Director and entered the Grand Séminaire de Montréal that Fall. The one thing I learned is to let God be in control when is time to answer. I let the authorities, the teachers, the bishop decide if I was really called.

Unfortunately, Archbishop Hacault died before I was ordained deacon. In the year 2000, World Youth Day was happening in Rome. It was Archbishop Hacault’s desire that I go but I had no interest till he found a way that I could not refuse. Vatican Radio was looking for volunteers to help host a radio program during the Jubilee year. I was accepted and went to Rome for three months. I came back home but did not want to be rushed in being ordained a priest.

All my life I was involved in the Church, but **outside** the parish. I had no clue how a parish was run. Yes, I had some formation at the Seminary and some exposure in parishes. But I was also waiting for our new bishop to ordain me. Well, a few months later I gave in and was ordained by the same retired bishop Noel Delaquis on 27 April 2001. Since then, I was associate pastor for a year in Saint Bernadette Parish. From 2002-2008, I was pastor for Ste-Agathe + Aubigny + St-Jean-Baptiste. From 2008-2013, I was pastor for Cooks Creek + Oak Bank + Garson. And finally, from 2013 to 2019 in Lorette, before coming here in Saint-Norbert since August 2019.

God can speak directly to someone, in prayer, in your heart... But mostly, it is by events, by people, etc. What is important is to remain open, listening, and answer with humility. Why would God ask me? Why not me! At our priests’ retreat, we journeyed with Simon Peter. We saw how Jesus called Simon the fisherman to become Peter, to “catch” no longer fish, but people. Yes, like Simon Peter, we have our faults; in our own way we will deny Jesus.

But we also have our strengths, and Jesus says, “Feed my sheep”; “Follow me”. It not about promotion, even if recently I am now the Vicar General. It’s about answering a need, a call, to serve, to bring love, hope & life, especially eternal life to all we meet. How are you answering God’s call? How are you being “a light for the Gentiles”, the fallen away, the indifferent? How are you bringing “salvation to the ends of the earth”?