

# Laborers in the Harvest:

## *What Exactly Are We Praying For?*

14<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time – Year C

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*Isaiah 66:10-14c*  
*Psalm 66:1-3, 4-5, 6-7, 16, 20*

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*Galatians 6:14-18*  
*Luke 10:1-12, 17-20*  
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For the second time since Easter our Sunday Gospel speaks to the subject of vocations. The Fourth Sunday of Easter, commonly referred to as “*Good Shepherd Sunday*” is also observed as the “*World Day of Prayer for Vocations*.” Now, mid-way through the summer, our Gospel speaks of the call for workers in the harvest, with the all-too-familiar reminder that “*the harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few.*”

Across the board, we have a tremendous need in our Church for religious priests, sisters and brothers. We see fewer and fewer religious teaching in our schools and priests serving in our parishes. We hear references to the “graying” of the clergy. Those who are entering formation are coming through neither fast enough nor numerous enough to replace those who are leaving, retiring, or passing away. The work for those currently serving in ministry is progressively increasing as the responsibilities continue to grow more and more abundant.

Many a vocation homily or reflection has included the words of this Sunday’s Gospel – “*...ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest.*” The call to prayer is important and reminds us that our first duty in addressing the vocation crisis faced by the Church is to pray earnestly for quality people to serve in the priesthood and religious life. However, when we “ask the master” to “send

out laborers” do we really know what we are praying for? What is the attitude we bring to our prayers for vocations, particularly in light of the great shortage we see?

This question is what eventually drew me to the priesthood. From my years in Catholic grammar school we were taught to pray for more priests and religious. However, it came to feel somewhat awkward always praying for an increase in vocations when I, myself, seemed disinclined to consider it. I began to ask: If not me, then who? This, of course, was only the beginning.

In his *Confessions*, St. Augustine expresses the caliber of his spirituality prior to his great conversion in a brief, rather laughable prayer – “Lord, grant me chastity...but not yet.” In praying for vocations, do we unintentionally incorporate an attitude similar to that of Augustine’s? – “Lord grant us vocations, (but not me),”

“Lord, call more men to the priesthood, (but not my son),” “Lord, call more sisters and brothers to serve in our schools, (but not my child).”

People look to the parish priests for leadership and guidance. They admire those that can rally the spirit of parishioners, young and old. Families have fond memories of that special priest who witnessed their marriage, baptized their children, gave them their First Communion and guided them to their Confirmation. We speak highly of that special

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## Praying for Vocations: What Are We Praying For?

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priest who worked so well with the youth of our parish. Yet, how many parents use such admiration to encourage their sons to consider the priesthood?

We admire the religious sisters and brothers who taught us in school. Yet, do we consider entering the religious life to continue the work of those teachers we so admire? How many encourage their children to consider the religious life in order to continue the work of those religious priests, brothers and sisters we remember so fondly?

We admire, from a distance, such communities as Mother Theresa's Missionaries of Charity, and their work with the poorest of the poor. Yet how many parents are willing to encourage their daughters to consider a vocation in that community? How many would be happy to hear that their daughter is interested in joining those sisters, and participating in that work?

Have our families inadvertently adapted St. Augustine's prayer for chastity, into their own prayers for vocations? – "Lord, grant us more priests, but not my son." "Lord, call more men and women to the religious life, but someone else's child." Has this been our prayer over these past decades of declining vocations? When an entire generation has been praying, "Give us vocations, but not our children" are we really surprised to see a shortage of priests and religious? Is this the reason we continue to see a decline? When we pray for vocations, what are we *really* praying for? Has God, in fact, been answering our prayer all along?

Perhaps, just perhaps, what must happen before we see an increase in vocations is an examination of what attitudes we bring toward the priesthood and the religious life. What is the

spirit behind our own prayers for vocations? We may admire them. We may appreciate them. But do we truly see such vocations as something we want our sons and daughters to enter?

Let us remember, as the Gospel reminds us, that the great and abundant harvest needs workers, that we re-examine how we encourage (or discourage) vocations. Let us remember that the first vocation directors of our Church are the parents who raise their children in the faith. While a vocation to the priesthood or the religious life cannot be forced, for parents to at least let their children know that the priesthood or the religious life is an acceptable alternative (assuming they see it as such), our young people can truly consider it as an option for their lives, because the seeds will have been sown in the harvest of the home.

Let us resolve as parishes to foster vocations to the priesthood and religious life, beginning with our own parishioners, and our own children. When we see a member of our families or our parishes who may have the potential for a vocation to the priesthood or religious life, and the openness to consider

it, let us resolve to politely and humbly tell them so, planting what seeds we can so that the harvest may also yield worthy workers. But most importantly, let us pray that those whose vocations it is to be the parents of children, raise their young ones to be open to whatever God calls them to, even, perhaps especially, if it is to service in the priesthood and religious life.

Fr. William Nicholas  
July 6, 2007

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