

Homily based on the readings from January 26, 2025 (Nehemiah 8.2-4a, 5-6, 8-10; 1 Corinthians 12.12-30; Luke 1.1-4, 4.14-21)

One of the *many* highlights of being a deacon is getting to experience firsthand the incredible variety of people who make up the Catholic Church. I am not sure whether you all realize how much Father and I can see from up here, but every week we look out onto the faces of hundreds upon hundreds of individuals – representing almost every conceivable background and stage of life. We see little children “exercising their free will,” as Father Roland often puts it, as well as their parents who are frantically trying to prevent them; we see young adults and senior citizens; we see lifelong Catholics and recent converts; we see truck drivers and bankers and members of the military; we see American citizens and foreign nationals. Although it is difficult to say for certain, I am *sure* we also see Democrats and Republicans, independents and Libertarians. In a society that ostensibly celebrates diversity, the Catholic Church has been quietly serving as a role model for generations.

This diversity, of course, does not just manifest itself on Sunday mornings. In order for a parish to thrive, it requires a huge range of talents and abilities – exercised either by trained professionals or by an army of loyal volunteers. We need musicians, mechanics, publicists, teachers, cooks, accountants, gardeners, and custodians – just to operate on a daily basis. Many of the people who do the *most* for our community are virtually invisible – not because their contributions are insignificant, but because it would be *impossible* to imagine what parish life would look like without them. The most important contribution that *anyone* can make, of course, is *prayer* – which only *God* can truly perceive.

There is another aspect of the Church's life that is largely invisible to many people. We often think of the *parish* as being the fundamental unit of the Church – which it is, in a certain sense – but a parish cannot exist without the foundational structure of the *family*. *Lumen gentium*,

one of the main documents from the Second Vatican Council, made the following observation:

The family is, so to speak, the *domestic church*. In it parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children. (11)

Indeed, for the majority of the faithful, the most important preachers of the Gospel are *not* members of the clergy. Likewise, the most meaningful religious instruction does *not* take place in an organized program on Sunday mornings. For most of us, our primary preachers and teachers were our own *parents*, who patiently and lovingly explained the key principles of the faith, but – more importantly – who modelled those principles *every day* by how they lived their lives.

In our own diocese, it is common to speak about a “vocations crisis” in reference to the priesthood. In a sense, that description is accurate – but perhaps not in *exactly* the manner it is typically understood. Despite what some people would have us believe, there is not an absence – or

even a shortage – of priestly vocations. The problem is not that God has stopped *calling* men to serve as priests. The problem is entirely on our end, with the individuals who are intended to receive that call and with *all* of us whose job it is to support them.

The root of the problem, to a large degree, has nothing to do *specifically* with the priesthood. The fact is that every single Christian – every baptized person across the globe – has a personal vocation, a sacred calling, that comes directly from God. As we heard from Saint Paul a few moments ago:

Now you are Christ's body, and individually parts of it.

Some people God has designated in the church

to be, first, apostles; second, prophets; third, teachers;

then, mighty deeds;

then gifts of healing, assistance, administration,

and varieties of tongues.

In other words, every single one of us – with absolutely no exceptions – has an *indispensable* duty to proclaim the Gospel of Christ and to serve the people of God. For some individuals, that means being a member of the clergy or a religious order; for others, becoming a parent and raising children; for others, serving as a teacher; for others, maintaining the physical or financial structures of the Church. All of us *together* form the Body of Christ. The various roles we play may differ substantially, but they are all *vital*ly important. This is not a commitment that we can fulfill in an hour or two over the weekend. It must be the *fundamental* principle around which our entire life is organized.

Every one of us has a vocation. Many of us have already discerned, through prayer and reflection, what that vocation is. Many others are still trying to determine the direction in which God is calling them. The answer to the “vocations” crisis – both for the priesthood and for *every* aspect of Christian life – is remarkably straightforward. Pray for ourselves and pray for others. Pray for the Church. Pray for our nation. Pray for the world. Each of us is a *gloriously* unique creation, with our

own *specific* God-given vocation. We just need to have the *courage* and the *humility* to follow wherever God is leading us.