



Episcopal Commission on Clergy

Homily for St. John Mary Vianney Sunday

August 4, 18th Sunday Ordinary Time

The 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time is St. John Mary Vianney Sunday. We remember and pray in particular for all Diocesan Priests under his protection and guidance in this mass. We also pray for the Young People. 2019 is dedicated to the Youth with the theme Beloved, Gifted and Empowered.

Jesus said in the Gospel of St. John, "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in my love." (Jn 15:9) These words were spoken by Jesus to his disciples, they too are spoken to everyone who cares to listen, especially the youth. The youth includes the young priests serving in the parishes and in the different institutions. And since the love of God is inclusive they are directed to everyone. Everyone is Beloved.

Love begets love. The young people who are born and raised with love are more open to be man-for-others. They who have experienced love in our home, neighborhood, school or church which are all seedbeds of vocation may end up in priesthood, consecrated life or single blessedness. They also become good parents when they choose marriage.

Giftedness characterizes the youth. Again this gift is from God. But a priest is also gifted. He has received his vocation to make Christ present among the faithful from Christ himself. "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit-fruit that will last - and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you." (Jn 15:16) Young people as well as priests are called to acknowledge this reality. Everything is gift. People who are deeply aware that everything they possess, including their personhood, is God's gift are capable of seeing things in their right perspective. They possess that character of serenity and abandonment to the will of God since they know that God takes care of everything they need and in response they abandon themselves to his will. This is the opposite of the rich man's attitude in the Gospel of storing all his grains and goods in large barns, trusting that these goods will take care of the coming years in his life, not knowing that his life will end that very night. For that man, all is vanity as the first reading tells us. You might fill up all your big barns, but if you think only of yourself, it will only be foolishness or nothingness.

That is why St. Paul reminds the Colossians in the second reading, to think of what is above and not of what is here on earth. He invites us to consider the members of our body as "dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed which amounts to idolatry." Why? Because again, they are vanity. We will leave on earth what belongs here. In the end, *wala tayong ibang bitbit kundi Pag-ibig*. Only our love for God and neighbor stays. There is truth to the saying that your richness is not about what you have gathered for yourself but what you have shared to others. For Love is not love till you give it away.

Both the youth and the priests are empowered. The Holy Spirit received at baptism empowers the youth to act like children of God. The Holy Spirit received at ordination to the

priesthood in turn empowers priests to act in the person of Christ. The source of empowerment for both is the Holy Spirit for the service of God's people.

Let us listen to St. John Mary Vianney patron of diocesan priests. "What is a priest? A man who holds the place of God -- a man who is invested with all the powers of God. 'Go,' said Our Lord to the priest; 'as My Father sent Me, I send you. All power has been given Me in Heaven and on earth. Go then, teach all nations. . . . He who listens to you, listens to Me; he who despises you despises Me.' When the priest remits sins, he does not say, 'God pardons you'; he says, 'I absolve you.' At the Consecration, he does not say, 'This is the Body of Our Lord;' he says, 'This is My Body.' (Catechism on the Priesthood by St. John Vianney)

That is how Christ empowers priests. Let us pray therefore that priests use this empowerment to make Christ present to his people: to forgive as Christ forgives, to nourish the faithful with Christ's Word and Body, to offer himself to the service of God's people as Christ did, and to join Christ as He offered his body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. On the other hand, this empowerment of our priests by Christ could be abused by priests themselves. Pope Francis calls it clericalism. For him, clericalism happens when priests think of themselves as superior to ordinary Christians, that they have special status, that they deserve to be given various favors, that they know what is best for their people and that their decisions should not be questioned. Clericalism involves belonging to a closed inner clerical circle who do not share their authority with others and who close ranks when they feel under attack or are subjected to criticism.

For Pope Francis, what should priests do to avoid falling into this mentality? The way according to him is to remain close to the people, especially those who are poor and on the margins of society. In one of his homilies he said that the priests should have "the smell of the sheep."

In this year dedicated to the Youth, may our priests serve as inspirations to them. May the Youth see Christ in our priests, may they be inspired to follow Christ through the example of our priests and may this year bring more vocations to the priesthood so that more people would experience the presence of Christ through the ministry of our priests. May St. John Mary Vianney serve as the model and guide for priests in their life of self-giving and self-emptying.

St. John Mary Vianney, pray for our priests and for our Young People.

Mary, mother of all priests, pray for us. Amen.



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