

Fasting for Priestly Vocations

Today is the First Sunday of Lent, my favorite liturgical season. I don't know about you, but Lent is a time I ask Jesus to help me "jump-start" the living of my Catholic Faith. Our Lord gives us four ways to practice our walk with Him in the Gospel for Ash Wednesday (Matthew 6:1-18): *fasting, almsgiving, prayer, and righteous deeds* (for example, *acts of kindness*). I would like to introduce an important project for the diocese regarding **Fasting for Priestly Vocations** this Lent.

"**When you fast ...**" (Matthew 6:16). Jesus denied Himself often. Next week we will hear of His sacrifice in the desert for 40 days. Mortification. "Giving up." Denying ourselves some good or pleasure to leave more room for the spiritual. More space in our lives for Christ. Fasting is a necessary part of living our Catholic Faith.

Prayer, almsgiving, and acts of kindness are also important this Lent. Yet, I wish to focus this project on **Fasting for Priestly Vocations**. Other vocations are essential: the consecrated life and the married life. Yet, we are soon facing a grave shortage in the priesthood in our diocese. We are blessed by three recently ordained priests the last two years, yet we have three priests leaving full-time ministry this summer to retirements or other factors. We are blessed by five, fine young men in the seminary, but the next ordination (one priest) will be 2022, God willing. After this summer's new assignments, we could have three retirements before 2022. Of our 17 incardinated priests who have an assignment, nine will be over the age of 60 this year. We are blessed by 14 missionary priests serving generously, yet their own bishop or superior could call them home at any time. How will we provide Holy Mass, Absolution of Sins, and Anointing of the Sick in the future to our faithful in the Catholic Diocese of Dodge City in our 48 parishes? Only a priest can give us Christ in these Sacraments.

Thus, I call on the faithful of our diocese to this initiative: **Fasting for Priestly Vocations**. Beginning today, I encourage you to choose something to deny in your life in a small way: some food/drink, technology, sports, shopping, etc. Something that captures you. Something that you do not think you can get along without, even for a day. When you deny it, and feel the pang of desire, think of priestly vocations. Say a little prayer that some single man or boy will open his heart to Jesus' call to the seminary. Maybe he is a son, grandson, nephew. Possibly he is a parishioner. Perhaps he is *you*.

I ask the *priests and deacons* to each personally take on this project. Priests and deacons: I call you to make *each Thursday* this Lent, and possibly beyond, a special day for **Fasting for Priestly Vocations**. Thursday is the day of the Last Supper: the Institution of the Eucharist, the Day of the Priesthood, and the Day of Service.

I ask the *seminarians* to each personally take on this project. Work with your spiritual directors to live the discipline of fasting in imitation of Christ in **Fasting for Priestly Vocations**.

I ask the other *lay faithful* of the diocese to consider this project: **Fasting for Priestly Vocations**. Pick something small, doable, and realistic. At times, we take on too much, and mid-way through Lent, we fall off. I suggest to get your family involved. I will deny deserts/caffeine (fasting), turn off the Internet in the evening and read/pray with the Bible or other spiritual reading (fasting and prayer), continue my pledge to the Vibrant Ministries appeal (almsgiving), and write a postal letter each evening (act of kindness) this Lent. I will consider some of these practices to go beyond Lent.

Thank you for your fidelity. Let us pray for one another, that we may live out our **Fasting for Priestly Vocations**. May the Lord bless us with much fruit: with an increase in seminarians, and with holy, healthy, happy, and hard-working priests. God "**gives us a future full of hope**" (Jeremiah 29:11). The great High Priest, Jesus, loves you more than you can ask or imagine!

+ Bishop John B. Brungardt