

Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Parishioners,

At a gathering held at a nice hotel in Leamington Spa for the diocesan clergy (i.e. what are known as the *secular* priests) back in June, Archbishop Bernard Longley encouraged all his priests to avail of the **Year for Priests**, launched on this occasion, to avail of every possible opportunity to tell their vocation stories over the course of the next twelve months. The occasion may arise where I unburden myself of my own story – whether it is interesting must be left to the listener to judge, but it certainly is a little unusual – but for the moment I decided to explore the stories of other men who were ordained to the priesthood. I thought it might be an interesting idea to explore how and why some of the priests who left their mark on history chose to go forward for ordination and what vision they had of the priestly ministry on the day of their ordination. The vocation story does not end on that day, of course, but the narrative changes and ordination ends one journey and represents the beginning of another.

I have always had an interest in a priest's ordination day: what age were they (at least two 20th century popes, for example, had to receive a dispensation to be ordained under the age of twenty-four), where did the ordination take place (was it the diocesan cathedral, their home parish or as was most frequently the case in 19th century France, the chapel of the bishop's palace), and who ordained them? My curiosity in regard to the ordination day led me to wonder what were the young man's feelings on that day to which he had for years been looking forward? And what were his expectations of what lay ahead of him in his service of the Church?

Inspired by the medieval pulpit in St. Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham (where the priestly ordinations for 2018 took place), which depicts the four Latin Fathers of the Church, I decided to explore the circumstances surrounding the priestly ordinations of Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome and Gregory the Great. To my surprise, I discovered that none of the four actually *wanted or desired* to be a priest. Ambrose ran away, Augustine physically resisted being dragged to the altar, Gregory the Great wrote more than a dozen letters begging influential friends to prevent his ordination, while Jerome yielded to the blandishments of the Bishop of Antioch on condition that he never have to say Mass! [An article on this subject has been published in the September/October issue of *Pastoral Review*]. I have identified another dozen or so priests who impacted on the history of the Church and hope to tell their vocation stories [*PR* has been warned!]. Today's gospel of Jesus' encounter with the *rich young man* [Mark 10, 17 – 30] relates the first NT vocation story and it is often told with a wistful tone of regret. The young man declined the invitation, as have many throughout the Church's history, but the gospel does not tell us the rest of his *vocation* story: to married & family life, to become a rabbi in the tradition of his forefathers, to build a business (a farm, a vineyard) and provide employment? Priesthood is a vocation, certainly, but it is only one among many. The first calling comes at Baptism.

Father Patrick