

**Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C
(Nov. 7, 2010)**

Jesuit Vocations

This Sunday I am not going to preach about that provocative encounter between Jesus and the Sadducees who do not believe in the resurrection of the dead or even of eternal life. Indeed as you heard in the Gospel story Jesus answers them quite well. So rather than talk about people who have been married and their conditions after death I want to talk about people who do not get married and their condition in this present life. I refer to the Jesuits.

This past week on Monday the church celebrated the feast of All Saints, and on Friday the Jesuits celebrated the Feast of all the Saints of the Society of Jesus. Our Provincial and our Father General have asked us to make a special effort to promote Jesuit vocations in all the works that we do. So today, and in some instances next week as well, you will hear the Jesuits speak about what it means to be a Jesuit.

People constantly ask me about our Jesuit life and what it means to be a Jesuit and seem generally interested in the things we do and how we serve the Church as members of the Society of Jesus. For this parish of Holy Trinity this has a very practical purpose. I often hear people say the reason they come here is because of the Jesuit presence. This of course is very flattering to us but from a practical point of view the fact is that our numbers are dwindling and unless we see some increase in the number of young men entering the Society the day will not be far off when the Jesuit staff is diminished – perhaps even significantly diminished. So it is important for us to promote vocations to the Society of Jesus and perhaps equally important for you to help us in that promotion

Now I am fully aware that the vast majority of you have already found your vocation in life and are happy with it and I do not intend that you should seriously consider changing. For many that is impossible. But to the young men who are still searching for their place in God's plan of salvation I say: give some serious consideration to the possibility that God might be calling you to follow in the footsteps of St. Ignatius. And to those

of you who have already found what God intends you to do with your lives, I say: encourage the young men you see who you feel could be good candidates for the Jesuits, encourage them to at least think about it and perhaps make some inquiries with the Jesuits here at Holy Trinity or with our local vocation director. Making inquiries does not commit you to anything, and who knows what the Holy Spirit might inspire.

Now let me say just a few words about the Jesuits that might prompt you to think along the lines I am suggesting.

People often try to categorize us and make generalizations about what Jesuits are like. But it's really difficult to do that. We seem to have a reputation today of being on the liberal side, but the fact is that Jesuits can be found all along the liberal-conservative spectrum. We do not think either liberal or conservative is a bad word. Indeed you might find us taking a conservative position on certain issues and a more liberal one on others. In all things I think we try to discern what's most for the glory of God and that's the position that we take. Obviously not everyone will agree with us. In general I think we feel as parish priests our greatest responsibility is to be pastoral in our concerns, doing our best to help people who come to us for help in whatever way we can. From that perspective you might find many of us more inclined to be less concerned with the letter of the law if that is what we feel will be most helpful to the people we serve.

Just as it is impossible to categorize Jesuits it's also difficult to say exactly what is our greatest area of activity. We have been known mostly as educators but St. Ignatius did not think he was founding an order that would specialize in education. He and his first companions presented themselves to the pope and said we will do whatever you think is best for the good of the Church. And that did lead to a large concentration on education.

But the fact is you find Jesuits doing just about everything and sometimes very surprising things. Peter Canisius founds 18 colleges which some say ignited the counter-reformation in Germany. Aloysius Gonzaga, an ex-prince, dies at age 23 while nursing the plague-stricken in Rome. Matteo Ricci sells the Gospel through western science in Peking. Francis Xavier baptizes ten thousand in a single month in India. Peter Claver is

slave to the slaves in Latin America. John Francis Regis has an apostolate among prostitutes. Miguel Pro dies before a firing squad in Catholic Mexico. Pedro Arrupe survives the first atom bomb in Hiroshima and becomes the Superior General of the Society of Jesus. You will find Jesuits gracing the Vatican in cardinal's robes, Jesuits as confessors to kings and martyrs to kings; army chaplains and all out pacifists; Jesuits on the golf course and Jesuits on the waterfront; Jesuits in clown suits and Jesuits in jail; Jesuits in costly classrooms and Jesuits in stinking slums – the whole gamut of human and inhuman living. And sprinkled among the pack, large as life, but not famous, not making headlines, are people like ourselves, the Jesuits here at Holy Trinity. I like to think that we are the normal Jesuits – if there is such a thing as a normal Jesuit!

If I may speak for myself personally, I have been happy to be a Jesuit for more than 61 years now. I entered the Novitiate at age 18, perhaps not really knowing what I was doing. But God was definitely at work in my life. My life as a Jesuit has been a happy one. Not that there haven't been difficulties. Of course there have as is true of any of your lives as well. But the good days have far outnumbered the bad ones, and while there are things that I wish I had done better I would not want to change the life I have lived for any other. Serving God's people, serving you, has been immensely satisfying, and I feel sure the other Jesuits on our parish staff would say the same thing. We are not perfect. We would be the first to admit it. But we do try, and from the things I hear you say, it seems that most of you, at least, think we are doing a pretty good job.

So once again I invite those interested to make inquiries, and I urge all of us to pray for vocations to the Society of Jesus. It's good work that we all do, whether here or in other Jesuit apostolates. Most importantly it's all God's work, and with God's help we will continue to do the best we can for the greater glory of God, as St. Ignatius used to say.