

**May 16, 2010**

**On Tuesday, the priests of the diocese will join me in celebrating a Mass of Thanksgiving for our vocation to serve all of you, God's priestly people. We will also offer our heartfelt congratulations to our brothers who are celebrating special anniversaries of ordination this year: Fathers Selvaraj Selladurai, Charles Mosley, and David Nowak are celebrating their 25th anniversary of priestly ordination; Father Anthony Janik, O.F.M. his 40th anniversary; Father Myron Lowisz, O.F.M., Monsignor John Morales, Father Robert Evers and Father Gerald Sroka celebrate their Golden Jubilee.**

**Through the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, we are all consecrated and made sharers in Christ's priesthood. We all exercise our common priesthood as we offer ourselves with Jesus to the Father in the Holy Eucharist, receive the Sacraments, render praise and thanks to God in our daily prayers, and witness to a holy life by love of God and neighbor.**

**The ordained priest serves the common priesthood of all the faithful. Through the Sacrament of Orders, the priest is configured to Christ Who is Head and Shepherd of the Church. As such, the ordained priest teaches, sanctifies, and governs in the person of Jesus. He gives his total self to the Church out of love for Jesus and love for the people whom he is sent to serve.**

**While all of the baptized are called to embrace the radicalism of the Gospel and grow in intimacy with Jesus, the priest is called all the more to the perfection of pastoral charity. St. John Vianney described the priesthood as the "love of the heart of Jesus."**

**Through the celebration of Holy Mass and the other Sacraments, praying of the Liturgy of the Hours and other devotional prayers, the priest is challenged to**

grow more and more with those qualities and virtues that configure him to Jesus, the Good Shepherd: faithfulness, integrity, consistency, wisdom, goodness of heart, patience, a compassionate and welcoming spirit. The exercise of these virtues is manifested in the priest's interaction with his parishioners. Pope Benedict XVI described the mission of the priest in this way: "to be a mediator, a bridge that unties and thus brings man to God, to His redemption, to His true light, to His true life."

The priest's challenge is not easy for he is to be a living and transparent image of the Good Shepherd who out of love laid down His life for all of us. In his very person, the priest is a bearer of the great mystery of God's incredible love for us. With genuine joy he is to lead the people into deeper communion with God and challenge them to be bearers of God's love for one another and especially for those in need.

Like marriage and the single life, the priesthood is a gift from God and a call from God. "You have not chosen me, I have chosen you." Many more are called than those who choose to respond. The number of men who respond to the call to the priesthood in First World countries has diminished greatly as secularism and materialism have taken deeper root.

From 1965 to 2008, the number of diocesan priests in the U.S. has declined from 36,000 to 27,600, and religious priests have declined from 22,700 to just under 13,000. On the other hand, the numbers of priests continue to increase very significantly in Third World countries.

During this Year For Priests, I invite you to join me in expressing gratitude to those who have responded to the Lord's call to this special ministry within the Church here in our diocese and to support them with your love and collaboration in our common mission.

I also invite you to pray that those who are called to priestly service will respond with generous hearts. Finally, when you sense that a particular young man has the qualities which could indicate a possible vocation, encourage him to be in touch with Father Kevin Huber, our Vocation Director, or after July 1, with Father Mick Kopil who will assume that special ministry.