

Pray for vocations, saintly priests and bishops  
By Bishop Milan Lach, SJ

We are gathered here with our Mother. We have all come to ask for her help, to ask her for support in our lives. She is a good mother, and she cannot but listen to our prayers. As a good mom, she needs to help us. For this reason, we have gathered from across the United States.

It is not so easy to travel here to Uniontown. It takes sacrifice and even some suffering, but this, too, is part of the pilgrimage experience. Our sacrifices may include thirst, hunger, fatigue, bearing the hot sun.

Pilgrimage is important to the Christian tradition. Why is that? Because it reminds believers that they are here, on this earth, only as pilgrims. We are not at home here. Our true home is in heaven. For this reason, we need to come to Uniontown every year and to remember that we are here on earth in this moment and one day we will leave this Earth.

The Word of God today offers us the solution about how we need to proceed as Christians. What is most important in our lives? We are so busy with so many ridiculous issues in our lives that we completely forget the first and basic commandment of God — the commandment to love.

Many people say they are Christians, but they forget that the most important commandment is the commandment to love God and our neighbors. At the same time, we must follow the commandment to love oneself.

These commandments are in equilibrium. The focus is not exaggerated, that is, only on God and nothing else. No. Christianity, as an anthropological model, is so wonderful. God does not forget the human being. If we do not have respect for the human being, we do not have respect for God. If we have no respect for God, at the same time we have no respect for the human being or for ourselves.

It is so important to follow these commandments today because many Christians and many Catholics in the United States are confused by what has happened with the scandals in the church. It is sad, because we, bishops and priests, were unable to follow this basic commandment to love, to be real pastors, to be real shepherds, in our example and in our witness.

There is so much news about this every day, and we are so tired of listening to it all. But, I ask, who today is needed to be a credible witness? Saintly bishops and saintly priests. Only a saintly priest can lead the crowds to God, to the heavenly kingdom.

This is why the Divine Liturgy we are celebrating today is for vocations, because without priests, we cannot proceed. Our Byzantine Catholic Church is sacramental and we need saintly priests to minister them.

Vocations to the priesthood do not come out of seminaries, they come out of families. Mothers, fathers, grandmas, grandpas, you must witness God's love to your children. This is a big responsibility, dear brothers and sisters, because without this witness of the love of God, the boys and girls cannot recognize who God is.

We need once again to start praying every day in our families for new vocations in our Byzantine Catholic Church in the United States, because the harvest is abundant, as Jesus said, but the laborers are few.

*This Voice of the Shepherd is based on a homily Bishop Lach delivered during Divine Liturgy at the annual pilgrimage to Mount St. Macrina in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, Sept. 1.*

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