

## **Friendships crucial to priestly vocations**

A vocation to the priesthood is difficult to bear in isolation. This is not to suggest that a vocation lies anywhere other than the deep interior of a person. Vocations indeed are planted by God in the depths of the human heart, for they are meant to draw out every dimension of the human person in love, and they are nurtured well by silence. Discernment of the priesthood cannot be superficial. The priesthood can easily be ignored by someone who does not pray in solitude, or who has a busy and noisy lifestyle. Still, a vocation to the priesthood is something that is overly frightening if it is discerned too much in isolation. Fear kills many priestly vocations, which is why John Paul II repeated over and over and over again to young people and to the whole Church - Be Not Afraid of Christ and His Call! Early on in my own discernment, I was guilty of trying to discover my vocation in secret.

As I prayed with our seminarians a few weeks ago during our annual pilgrimage with the Archbishop, I got the overwhelming sense that the time we were spending together was 'saving' some priestly vocations that might otherwise be lost. By this I mean that the diverse callings of our men to the priesthood seemed to be feeding off of one another. This was especially evident in the way that the seminarians prayed with and for each other. It was a special joy and privilege to be present as the Archbishop himself took on the task of forming these men for the priesthood. It was an inspiring look into the future, to see all of our seminarians opening themselves up in friendship to their brothers primarily because Christ is calling them not only as individuals, but together, to serve the people of the Archdiocese as His priests.

As I discuss priestly vocations and interview men throughout the Archdiocese, I always ask who their friends are. Then what I ask them is if they were to enter seminary, whom among their friends would they most like to see enter with them? Jesus Himself called two sets of brothers, Peter and Andrew, and James and John. It is important for me as vocation director to get together men who are equally open to the priesthood, and then allow friendships to form that will produce a more generous response from our young people. What a joy it is to see young men from the Archdiocese rise together to meet the challenge of responding to the Lord's call to priesthood. Please pray a rosary or make a holy hour for vocations!