

Don't Go Away Sad: Follow Jesus

“If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” When the young man heard this statement, he went away sad, for he had many possessions’ (Mt 19:21-22).

I do not usually start my vocation articles with a ‘downer’ story, like this story of the young man in Matthew’s Gospel, but I do think it is important for us to understand why the Church continues to lose many of Her vocations to the priesthood and religious life, and this story is a great illustration.

On the surface, this story cautions against greed, and it is true that materialism damages our young people’s ability to attach themselves intimately to Jesus, rather than to the things of this world. Yet I believe that greed is the smoke and not the fire when it comes to losing vocations. The fire is really pride. In Matthew’s story of the young man, it seems to me the young man’s pride runs deeper than his greed. In his opinion the young man believed he was already living a pretty good life, and he wished Jesus to confirm this. When Jesus asked him to do something outside of his expectations, however, the young man balked. Since Jesus offers to us as his disciples ‘everything’ that He received from His Heavenly Father, it only follows that He asks us to leave ‘everything’ to follow Him. Yet this young man in Matthew’s story was bewildered that Jesus asked for so much.

Most often it is our pride that tries to reduce Jesus’ call to leave everything, so that it fits into the expectations we have for our own lives. In essence, because of our pride, we oftentimes ask Jesus to follow us rather than us following Him. The result, I am afraid, is that many of our Church’s callings to the priesthood and religious life are being lost.

Through prayer, may we all grow in humility, and become more like the Virgin Mary. God’s plans for her life could not have fit into the expectations she had for her future. Yet because of her humility, she was ready and excited to ‘Let it be done to her according to God’s word.’ (Lk 1:38). Mary, Queen of Vocations, pray for us!