

OUR YOUTH

Older generations tend to sell short younger generations. It has always been that way. And, so, it is now. However, the fact of the matter is that we have many very fine young men and women coming up to take our place. That means that we are actually selling ourselves short, thinking that we have not done a very good job of providing a future generation.

It is not uncommon for us older folk to project our inadequacies onto the young. Perhaps, we can feel better about ourselves if we are convinced that they are not as good as we were at their age. The truth of it all is that they are.

We attempt to blame society on the evils that we see, including what we might perceive in our young people. Yet, society is no one else but us, - as we have come to it from our own youth. Whatever deficiency we find in today's youth could very well be a reflection of our own shortcomings. On the whole, our youth is as good as we ever were; perhaps, even better. After all, the apple does not fall far from the tree. As I see it, they are not a bad reflection of us.

During last May's observance of my 20th anniversary as the Bishop of Altoona-Johnstown, I asked that we as this Diocesan Church place a special emphasis on our youth during the next several years. I envision this to take two dimensions. One would be our youth in general. A plan is being formulated by our Diocesan Director of Youth and Campus Ministry. The other would be our young men and the possibility of their being called to the priesthood. That plan is being formulated by our Diocesan Director of Vocations.

Meanwhile, I have two requests. In regard to the general focus on youth, I want to encourage our Parish Pastoral Councils to include (as a rule) a high school student or a young adult in their membership. I find that young people communicate the best with young people. In that way, they can be very instrumental in revitalizing a parish. Concerning the special focus on vocations, I ask that every member of our Faithful consider it their responsibility to identify young men in their respective parish who appear to have the signs of a vocation. Please speak to that individual and encourage him to take the steps of discerning a possible call from the Lord to serve him in the Church as a priest.

I came to realize my call to the priesthood in just that way. In my case, it was the husband of my godmother who was the instrument of the Lord in speaking his invitation to me. He is the one that was instrumental in getting me to embark upon the path that has led me to where I am today. It usually takes another to help us see our destiny.

There is no doubt in my mind that there are young men in our parishes destined to be priests. They may need a nudge. Perhaps, you know such a person, - one who appears to exhibit the qualities needed in a priest. The Lord may have chosen you as a vehicle through whom He wishes to communicate his invitation. If you do not speak, that young man may never realize that he is being called to the priesthood. What a loss to the Church that might be!

Can you even imagine what a difference we could make in the number of priests that we have in our Diocesan Church if each one of us made it a point to encourage a particular individual in this regard? I can.