

Today's readings seem to me to be especially appropriate for a vocations event. It wasn't too long ago that I sat where you now sit, wondering if the Lord was calling me to be His priest. And there were times when, at least for me, discerning a vocation felt a little like Jacob in the first reading today: wrestling with God. Truth be told, when I first thought the Lord might be calling me to the priesthood, I didn't really think I wanted to be a priest. Still, I wanted to do what the Lord was calling me to, even if it wasn't what I felt naturally inclined to; but that meant I needed to really wrestle with this calling. For that matter, I needed to see if it was really the Lord I was wrestling with, or just myself. Did I think the Lord was calling me to be a priest just because people were saying I would be a good one? Was I just being scrupulous?

One thing to notice about Jacob's example is that he divests himself of all his earthly possessions before he wrestles with the Lord. We're told that he "took his two wives, with the two maidservants and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he had taken them across the stream and had brought over all his possessions, Jacob was left there alone." When we truly want to discern the Lord's will and not just come up with a pious justification for doing our own will, we need to practice detachment, as St. Ignatius of Loyola teaches us. It's important to make sure that we're not too attached to any particular outcome that we're considering, or any particular aspect of those outcomes. To apply this to discerning a vocation,

each of the three primary vocations—priesthood, marriage, or religious life—is a good thing. The Lord wouldn't call people to each of these forms of life if they weren't good in themselves. However, that means that when it comes to discernment, if you want to find reasons for choosing a particular one, you'll always be able to do so—whether it's what the Lord is calling you to or not. That's why it's important to foster within ourselves a certain holy indifference, to be able practice saying to the Lord in all honesty "Not what I will, but what you will." We must foster detachment from any particular outcome.

We can also notice with Jacob that when we wrestle with the Lord, we come away changed. Jacob walks away with a limp and a new name. Now, this passage about Jacob wrestling with the Lord is perhaps one of the most mysterious in the entire Old Testament. I'm going to offer you one interpretation of it, but it's certainly not the only way to read this passage. We're told that "when the man [whom Jacob was wrestling with] saw that he could not prevail over him, he struck Jacob's hip at its socket, so that the hip socket was wrenched as they wrestled." When it comes to discerning the Lord's will, especially for our vocation, He will not force Himself upon us. Even if you gain a clear picture of the Lord's will for you—if you come to see "God face to face," as it were—He will never force you to do what He would prefer. If you insist on following a different path than the one He has in mind, He will let you prevail over Him. However, insisting on your own

will rather than the Lord's will be like going through life with a limp. Don't misunderstand me, the Lord will still love you and do everything He can to save you no matter how far you may stray from His plan. But the smoothest way to salvation is the one that the Lord has chosen for you. That doesn't mean it will always be easy, but when you follow the Lord's plan, you will always have Him right by your side as you fight the challenges in your life; and that's much easier than fighting the Lord Himself.

Finally, just a quick comment on the Gospel: the Lord says to his disciples, "the harvest is abundant but the laborers are few." I don't think I need to tell you all that that is particularly true here in the Diocese of Rochester. At the moment, we have far more priests retiring than we have seminarians coming in. And I've said it before, but it's worth saying again: I don't think the number of our priests is going down because God isn't calling men to the priesthood. I think it's going down because men aren't answering the call. And that doesn't mean any particular man is called to the priesthood, but I invite you to take it into consideration that there are probably a lot of men today who are missing the call. If you think you might be called to the priesthood, have an honest conversation about that with the Lord. Have many honest conversations about that with the Lord. Ask Him to grant you clarity, and ask Him to show you the way that He wants to make you a saint.