



DIOCESE OF PAISLEY

The Right Reverend John Keenan
Bishop of Paisley
Diocesan Centre Cathedral Precincts
Incle Street, Paisley
PA1 1HR
Tel: 0141 847 6130

Sunday 12th September

The 24th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It is a joy to greet you again as parish life resumes after the travails of the pandemic!

This Sunday begins our annual *Vocations Awareness Week* in Scotland – a time when we pray for vocations to the priesthood, diaconate, and consecrated life.

Pope Francis, during this time of recovery and renewal, has asked us to focus our attention on the figure of St. Joseph. As we continue to ‘build back better’, the Holy Father wishes us to draw inspiration and hope from the example of Joseph, the Carpenter of Nazareth.

I am often asked by people what makes a good candidate for the priesthood? Is it academic aptitude? Is it an ability to engage effectively with the people of our age? Is it a notable proficiency in finance and administration? All of these are, to an extent, important and valuable but they do not speak to the *heart* of what it is to be a priest. What matters and what truly is important is whether a candidate can, in some measure, follow the example of St. Joseph. Can he, like the Carpenter of Nazareth, be ‘open’ to having *the heart of a father*?

It follows then that when I meet an applicant for the priesthood, I do not immediately rush to examine his educational achievements or run the rule over his employment history. Rather, first and foremost, *I ask myself whether this man would be a good dad!*

Priests, brothers, and sisters, are called to be spiritual fathers and mothers, providing care for their communities and protecting them from every form of danger. As Pope Francis often says, in these sacred duties, priests can have no better example than that Joseph – the very epitome of a ‘good dad’, a man who cared for Mary and Jesus, a man who protected them from persecution and a man who provided for them no matter the personal cost entailed. In Joseph, God recognized the ‘heart of a Father’ not because he had any astonishing charism or special status, but because Joseph, selflessly and without any hope of reward, cared for the Holy Family – achieving extraordinary acts of service in his daily life.



Scottish Charity No. SC013514
bishopjohn@rcdop.org.uk

When I speak to the young men of our Diocese, I constantly remind them that for all of them there is no nobler call than that of 'being a good dad', a call that can be responded in one of two ways - either through marriage and family life or through the spiritual fatherhood of ministerial Priesthood. Both require sacrifice, patience commitment and hard work but both lead to true joy and happiness.

Brothers and sisters, who are those young people in your community in whom you see the 'heart of a Father'? How can you help them perceive and accept, like Joseph, God's plan for their lives?

The priesthood, diaconate and consecrated life require men and women with open hearts, who are "capable of great initiatives, generous in self-giving, compassionate and steadfast in strengthening hopes." Such people are to be found in our parish communities, but they need our help, our prayers, and our encouragement to respond to God's dream for their lives in this difficult and confusing time. Can we rise to this challenge?

Let us conclude by making a prayer to Joseph:

*Hail, Guardian of the Redeemer,
Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
To you God entrusted his only Son;
in you Mary placed her trust;
with you Christ became man.*

*Blessed Joseph, to us too,
show yourself a father
and guide us in the path of life.
Obtain for us grace, mercy and courage,
and defend us from every evil. Amen.*

With love and every good wish,

+John

Bishop of Paisley