

**Homily for Mass for Priestly Vocations - 9/28/09**  
**2009 NCDVD Convention**  
**Fr. Len Plazewski**

Today the Church celebrates the Feast of St. Wenceslaus. Unfortunately for most of us, the only thing that we know about the good king is that “he went out on the feast of Stephen.” While I am not going to reflect on this heroic martyr in today’s homily, I would direct you to the Holy Father’s homily today which he delivered in the Czech Republic at his tomb.

I would like share an experience with you that happened to me just last week, but before I do so I need to give you a little background. I grew up in a small Catholic town north of Tampa. Named San Antonio, in honor of St. Anthony of Padua, I not only was baptized at St. Anthony of Padua Church, the second oldest in our diocese, but attended the parochial school next door. This school, dating from 1884, is the same school that my mother attended, my siblings attended, and now their children attend.

For the last month, in between vocation work and NCDVD stuff, I have been working on a diocesan history project which has included getting pictures of several historic sites. One of the places, I had never been to (though I had been by many times) was St. Louis Cemetery which is located in downtown Tampa and dates from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century. I knew that the graves of three priests who died of yellow fever in 1887 were buried there. Since this is the *Year for Priests* and since these are the oldest priests’ graves in my diocese, I wanted to stop by and offer a prayer at their graves. Now St. Louis Cemetery is not a particularly large cemetery – it is only about a city block so I figured it would be pretty easy to find these priests. Well this turned out to be a lot more complicated than I thought. I walked back and forth up and down, all to no avail. After about 45 minutes of this, I finally did what I should have done to start with. I decided to ask for St. Anthony’s help. After I finished that prayer of intercession, I opened my eyes and looked to the far corner. Even though I had been over there before, I decided to try that section again. As I approached that corner, I came across the grave of a name I knew quite well. The name on the tombstone was “Mrs. Cecilia Morse.” It was Mrs. Cecilia Morse who founded St. Anthony of Padua School in 1884! No one knew that she had been buried there. And what was even more striking was the day of her death: June 13<sup>th</sup> – the Feast of St. Anthony of Padua! As tears welled up in my eyes, I thought to myself: **“St. Anthony, this is who you wanted me to find!”**

Oftentimes, we set out with one purpose in mind, but God has something different in store. Think about our own vocation stories. Many of you started out with quite different career paths or at least intentions in life only to discover an invitation to follow the Lord in a different direction. And even those of us who sensed a call to the priesthood from a young age, no doubt our experience of priesthood has been quite different than what we first thought it might be. How true is that also in the ministry of vocations! Who responds to our invitations? Who doesn’t? Who is it on the other end of the phone or the writer of that email we have received? Is it who we thought it would be or is it, more likely, somewhat of a surprise?

In the Gospel today, we hear of a dramatic moment as Jesus gives his apostles a lesson in humility (by placing a child before them after they had been arguing about who is the greatest). There is also in this very same passage an application to vocation work. *Do we not find ourselves thinking once in a while “who is our greatest seminarian or*

*candidate?" Which one of them would be the most valuable for our diocese? Is it the scholar? Or the athlete? Maybe the extravert? Surely the linguist? Jesus warns his disciples not to get full of themselves which is so easy to do, but also not to judge by external appearances, much like Archbishop Sambani said earlier today in his wonderful example regarding St. John Vianney.*

We must welcome those whom the Lord sends us. But without some special gift of clairvoyance however, we cannot possibly know in advance whom the Lord is sending us and for that matter whom he is not. What can we do then? **We can come to know the One who has sent them to us in the first place.** By knowing the Lord we then have the ability to recognize the ones He sends us. Knowing the Lord is the most important part of vocation ministry. We must become, if we are not already, men and women of prayer. And if we are already men and women of prayer, then we must become men and women of deeper prayer. This also extends to praying for vocations. It is very interesting that the Lord tells us to pray, and to pray a lot, but it is very interesting that there are very few things that the Lord actually tells us to pray for, but vocations is one of those things so we should take the Lord at his word when he tells us to "beg the harvest master to send workers into his vineyard." We should not be surprised then if we pray for vocations and the people of our diocese are praying for vocations that indeed they do come forward!

Incidentally, as I was walking back to my car from Mrs. Morse's grave, I did come across those priestly graves. And I did say a prayer there as I intended, but I also knew that if I had found them right away, I would have never gone back to where Mrs. Morse's grave was. We have all set out for this convention for all sorts of reasons. Maybe to learn more about the PPF, to learn how to do vocation retreats, to understand immigration law, to learn how to interview candidates, maybe even how to run a vocation office. But is that really the main reason why the Lord has brought you here? ***Is it not rather to encounter Him, to deepen the understanding of your own call so that in turn you may then assist others with theirs!***