

HOMILY: Sunday, June 14th, 2026
Where: Transfiguration/St. Catherines

Matthew 9:36-10:8
11th Sunday of Ordinary Time

“A Kingdom of Priests”

There was an old man who owned a farm in California. The California Department of Labor claimed he was not paying the proper wages to his workers and so they sent an agent out to interview him.

"I need a list of your employees and how much you pay them," demanded the agent.

"Well," replied the old farmer, "There's my farm hand who's been with me for 3 years. I pay him \$800 a week plus free room and board. The cook has been here for about 8 months, and I pay her \$600 a week and I also give her free room and board.

Then there's the dummy who puts in a lot of 18 hours days and does about 90 percent of all the work around here. I only pay him about a \$100 dollars a week AND he has to pay for his own room and board. But I do buy him a bottle of bourbon every Saturday night and that seems to keep him happy."

"That's the guy I want to talk to", said the agent, "the dummy who does all the work".

"Well," replied the farmer, "that's easy enough--you're talking to him."

Now I thought about this joke as I read our Gospel today, especially the verse where Jesus said, "The harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few."

Because what immediately came to my mind is the priest shortage we currently have in our Catholic Church. For example, here in our Rochester Diocese, we have 86 parishes spread across 12 counties, serving over 300,000 Catholics.

When I was ordained a deacon back in 2011, there were 201 active priests and 102 deacons. Today? We have fewer than 100 active priests, and around 70 deacons. So, in just 15 years, our vocations have declined by 40%. A trend that started way back in the 1970's.

And there certainly is a lot of work to do. The harvest Jesus mentioned 2,000 years ago is still very abundant today.

We have a world population of over 8 billion people. Christians make up about a third of that, or around 2.5 billion people. Which sounds impressive until you realize that two-thirds of the world, or almost 6 billion people, either don't know about, don't care about, or have outright rejected Jesus and His teachings.

On top of that, here in America, a recent Gallup poll has found that 33% of people identify as "Spiritual but Not Religious", folks who believe in something, but not necessarily God, and who don't go to church. In fact, some recent data suggests that only about 5% of Americans attend church on a weekly basis.

And finally, and this might be the scariest statistic of all, is that two-thirds of Americans ages 18-35 doubt the existence of God. And those are doubts that have doubled in just one generation.

Which means there are people all around us--in our neighborhoods, in our workplaces, in our own families--who are hungry for meaning and desperate for hope. They're lost and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd, just as our Gospel describes.

The harvest is indeed abundant. And the laborers are few.

And our response to this as a church always seems to go one of two ways. One has been simply to pray for more vocations, especially to the traditional priesthood. The other has been to push for expanding the pool of candidates by advocating for married or women priests and women deacons.

But here's the thing: other Christian faith communities that already have married priests and women clergy are also facing the same vocation shortage. In other words, this isn't just a Catholic problem. It's a Christian problem. No matter how we cut it--the laborers are few.

Which is why I think we should consider another possibility. Namely, what if this priest shortage isn't just some crisis we need to pray our way out of? What if it's the Holy Spirit's way of trying to expand the team beyond the ordained? What if the Holy Spirit is seeing a lot of potential laborers sitting right here in our pews?

Because when Jesus says, "the harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few," he's not just talking about priests, deacons, and women religious. He's talking about all of us.

You want to know who Jesus is calling to be laborers in the harvest? Look in the mirror. It's you and me.

Now there's certainly already a lot of lay people doing amazing work. But imagine what could happen if even more people joined them. Perhaps this current priest shortage is all about God trying to open our eyes to something we've always professed, but haven't necessarily embraced: namely, that ALL of us are called to be laborers in the harvest. That we've all been baptized to be Priests, Prophets, and Kings.

But here's the reality. Studies show that in the average church, 80% of the work is done by 20% of the people. Not because people don't care. And certainly not because they're lazy. After all, life can be busy with the constant demands of work and family.

But I think it's more about people either not being personally invited into ministry or perhaps they don't realize just how desperately they're needed. Or even worse, they don't feel qualified or worthy enough to help.

All of which means we have incredible untapped potential sitting right here in the pews of our church: gifts waiting to be discovered.

And that, my friends, is not a problem. That's an opportunity. Imagine the work that could get done if we doubled or tripled that 20% number? What if people came to church, not just because of what they might receive, but also because of the wonderful gifts and charisms they have to offer?

Which means, as we pray for more priests, for more vocations, for more laborers, let's also recognize the hidden truth that sometimes the answer to our prayers...is Me!

It's why Jesus tells his disciples to pray for laborers, and then immediately sends them out as the answer to their own prayers. It's Jesus not wanting us to fall into the trap of always thinking God wants someone else. Someone we think is smarter, holier, or more qualified.

Because that's a mistake. As the famous Christian quote goes, "God doesn't call the qualified, God qualifies the called."

Mother Teresa spoke beautifully to this when she said, "I am only a pencil in God's hand. God writes through us and, despite the imperfect instruments we may be, God writes beautifully."

Young people, if you look around, you might see a Church in crisis. Fewer priests. Aging congregations. Empty pews. And you might be tempted to think, "Why do I want to get involved with something that's dying?"

But I want you to flip that script. Because this is your moment. This is your opportunity to be part of something transformational. The Church doesn't need you to be perfect. The Church just needs you.

Your generation can reach people mine can't. You speak a language we don't. You understand a culture we struggle to understand.

The harvest is abundant among your peers. Two-thirds of them are struggling to understand God. They're searching. They're hungry. And you can be the laborer who reaches them. Not with judgment or by preaching at them, but by simply living out and sharing your faith authentically and then inviting them into our church.

As Mother Teresa said, you don't have to go out and do great things. You only need to go out and do small things with great love. That's all God asks of you.

And I think a lot of that is starting to happen already. There's been a huge surge in young adults joining our Catholic Church, especially on college campuses. The Holy Spirit is at work! But there's a lot more to harvest and you can be a vital part of that.

My friends, God doesn't call on us to impact the Church. God calls on us to impact the world through our Church.

And the way we do that is by becoming the presence of Christ in the world. By doing those small things with great love.

Small things that can take many forms. It might be trying to love difficult people. It might be through better listening and more respectful conversations. It might be by holding back our judgments and acknowledging everyone as a child of God.

When we live this way, when people see Christ's love lived out this way - they're drawn to want what we have. They'll want to join us. They'll want to be part of a community that lives and loves like that. This is how we harvest. This is how we grow the Kingdom."

In today's first reading from Exodus, God tells the Israelites: "You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." A KINGDOM of priests. That means all of us.

So here's my challenge for each of you today. Don't just pray for more laborers. Be one.

Ask yourself: what is God calling me by name to do? Where does God want to send me? How can I help?

Is it by joining a ministry here at church? Is it through a compassionate conversation with someone who needs to hear about God's love? Or maybe it's simply being more intentional in living out your faith at work, at school, or in your neighborhood.

My brothers and sisters, the needs ARE great. The harvest IS abundant. And the workers ARE few.

Remember that old farmer doing 90% of the work? Maybe that is our poor priests sometimes. So yes, let's always pray for more vocations.

But let's also recognize another perspective. That Jesus is the great farmer, and He calls on each one of us to be his helping farm hands.

As St. Teresa of Avila famously said, "Christ has no body now, but ours."

Jesus needs each one of us to be a laborer in the field. And if it's not us, then who? And if not now, then when?

So go and become the Priest, the Prophet, and the King you were baptized to be! Amen.