

Encourage, Not Discourage Vocations.... Last week, a good friend of mine who is studying for the priesthood, Michael Scaramuzzo, invited me down to Florida to spend about five days with him at St. Vincent DePaul Seminary which is located just outside of Palm Beach. The weather was beautiful, the scenery magnificent and I got to swim in the ocean in February which is really a first for me.

Beyond all those things, however, I was so impressed with all these young men studying for the priesthood, about one hundred of them all together. I was able to witness firsthand their joy and prayerfulness at Masses celebrated in the seminary chapel. All of them were very enthusiastic and excited about becoming priests. Michael, only 23 years old, is originally from Staten Island. His parents moved down to Naples, Florida some time ago and he is studying for the Diocese of Venice. I met other men from different areas such as St. Petersburg, Miami and Savannah, Georgia. What struck me about all these fellows is that they were all very normal young men who enjoy sports, games, a good joke and a beer or two! They have, however, a deep and passionate love for Christ and His Church. Today some people try to discourage young men from following the call of Christ to serve in the priesthood. Several years ago there was a picture of young priest in a book that I saw with a caption underneath - "Father what a waste!" But it's never a "waste" to give your life to God and to serve others. In that vein, recently, a priest in a local parish was going around his school on a Wednesday afternoon visiting the CCD classes. Father asked one teacher what lesson she was giving the students that particular day. "Oh," the teacher replied, "I am preparing them for the day there are no priests!" Father answered, "Why not prepare them to be priests instead?" That is a good question! Sometimes we can have a defeatist attitude when it comes to our Catholic faith and especially with a religious calling. I suppose that all of us can get affected by that kind of negativity. We have a wonderful Seminary here in the Archdiocese of New York - St. Joseph's in Yonkers. Believe it or not, ten new priests will be ordained this year to be of service to God's people in the ten counties of the Archdiocese. Certainly, there is a lot of work to be done and we really could use five times that number. Without the priests we really can't have the sacraments; think of all the Masses that would not be celebrated, the confessions not heard, the anointing and blessings not conferred! Therefore, we could say that "vocations are everybody's business." This being the Lenten season, it is always a good idea to do a little bit more praying. Along with the extra prayer, why not include a prayer that the Lord might raise up some young man from this parish to enter the Seminary and prepare for the priesthood? As the Lord Jesus said, "The harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few." Let us pray that the Lord raise up more workers to send into the vineyard of the Church and the world!

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. Jerome