March 20, 2022—Third Sunday of Lent

It was a most amazing sight: a bush that was on fire but remained unburnt. No wonder Moses went closer to look at it. Even more wonderous than that was the encounter Moses had with God for the first of many times. Egypt worshipped many pagan gods, such as, the Nile River, frogs, cats and the sun. This was not any false god but the living God, the God of his ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who spoke to Moses from the burning bush.

The one, true God cared about His people Israel; He heard their pleas amid cruel slavery and was about to intervene in a miraculous way. Moses was to be His chosen leader. He told Moses His mysterious name, I AM WHO AM, which was so sacred that the Jews never wrote or spoke it except once a year when the High Priest went into the Holy of Holies to make atonement for the sins of Israel. This sacred name proclaimed God, as the basis for all things that exist, including things like the Nile River or frogs or cats or the sun. Without Him, none of those created things would even exist.

Moses was given his vocation to be the spokesman of God to the people and to Pharoah and lead the Israelites out of Egypt to worship Him on Mount Sinai. Don’t think that Moses accepted this vocation easily. He voices many objections to God’s plan that were not a part of the First Reading this Sunday. Moses didn’t think he had the necessary qualities to do what God wanted; God should choose someone better.

God has given each one of us a vocation when we were baptized. He made us His sons and daughters so that we could worship Him in the Catholic Church and bring the message of the Gospel to the entire world. Even more than that, He gave us the vocation to become saints to live our lives so that one day we will live with Him in heaven for all eternity. In addition to our Christian vocation, perhaps, we have been given a vocation to marriage or the priesthood or the religious life or the deaconate. We are called by God to live those vocations by doing our daily duty, which is our daily work, in the context of our Christian vocation.

God has given you certain talents and capabilities to carry out this vocation. Perhaps you have the skills to work with computers or finance or medicine or raising a family as a mom or carpentry or a secretary or one of the multitude of jobs that are needed in our world. God has called you to use those skills and talents to the best of your ability and serve Him and our society with integrity and honesty. We don’t start out as a finished person; even though we have certain skills or talents or desires, we must develop them over time.

When I was ordained to the diocesan priesthood for the Archdiocese of St. Louis, I knew that I would be living as a parish priest and serving God and the people within this Archdiocese for the rest of my life. I never dreamed that one day God would further call me, within my priestly vocation, to found a parish. I was very happy as Pastor of St. Joseph, in Josephville, but when then-Archbishop Burke asked me 16 years ago, to found St Gianna Parish, I immediately had a deep sense of peace that rather astounded me. I didn’t need to take any time to think about it; I accepted immediately.

When my appointment was announced, priest after priest, said things like, I feel sorry for you or what a burden. One priest even reported that many founding pastors had nervous breakdowns! No one in the administration of the Archdiocese was around when the last parish had been founded 25 years earlier, so there was little practical help available. As I look back, I realize that I didn’t know what I was getting into, but this was God’s call to me, and I just plunged ahead trusting in Him. Of course, I have learned many, many things since then and I treasure this parish and each one of you as a blessing from God.

In his book, Simon Peter, Monsignor Chevrot, writes: “**God will never do for us what we can do on our own. Certainly, He could transform us without any cooperation on our part because He is the Creator. But in that case, there would only be creation. Vocation adds the free response of a human creature to the creative action**” (p. 5). Everyone has talents and abilities from God, but they are not all the same, nor in the same amount. We are individuals, so God doesn’t expect you to accomplish what He expects someone else to accomplish. Some characteristics are more important in the sight of the world, but even the most hidden of lives can bear fruit in the sight of God. Lent reminds us that whatever our sins and weaknesses may be, we can always begin again.

Just look at St. Joseph, who seemed an ordinary husband, father and laborer. Little did people of his time realize that he was the last of the Patriarchs and the foster father of the Son of God and husband of the Mother of God. His famous ancestors longed to see the Messiah, who Joseph held in his arms and loved with his entire heart. St. Joseph, help me to respond to the vocation that God has given to me, to develop my talents, to walk in faith, hope and love, so that I may arrive safely in the kingdom of Heaven with you, Holy Mary and all the angels and saints.