

Most Reverend Michael F. Burbidge, Bishop of Arlington
Homily to National Catholic National Conference of Diocesan Vocation Directors
September 5, 2022

“You know what the Lord requires of you,” says the prophet Micah: *“to walk humbly with your God.”* This is the phrase that I took as my episcopal motto, and often people ask me the reason I chose this particular verse. I begin by saying that I was assured that my family members and priest friends – who keep me very humble – would help me to live it. And sure enough they do!

Humorous events in life also help to keep us humble. One such event for me was my time as Rector when I was having one of those days, like I am sure you have experienced, when nothing was going right and one difficult issue after another was surfacing. Finally, to relieve the stress, I decided to take a short ride to the nearest golfing range to drive some golf balls. Back then, you had to put coins in a slot and the balls dropped in a basket. However, somewhat distracted, I forgot to put the basket down and so the golf balls started to fall and bang on the cement in every direction possible. The glare of the other people at the range very much humbled me.

Humility helps us not to take ourselves so seriously and, even at times, to smile when we are reminded of our humanity. However, we also know humility involves so much more: it allows us to see ourselves as we truly are in the sight of God, the One who is the Source of all good gifts, and without whom we can do nothing. Humility helps us to recognize the essential need to attach ourselves to his Son, the true vine in whom we must live and abide. Humility helps us to acknowledge that we are merely the branches, and, only in Christ, can we produce abundant fruit.

During these days, you are reflecting on how *to remain humble*. You are being reminded to keep your spiritual life the highest priority; to pray fervently especially before the Blessed Sacrament; to rely on the help of each other; and to carry out your work not seeking earthly gains, but only to offer praise and glory to God. Heed the words of Saint Teresa of Calcutta, the one the Church honors today who said: *“I do not pray for success. I pray for faithfulness.”*

May I also add two other ways that you might reflect humility. The first is through your *perseverance*. In the midst of often hearing “no” from candidates and seminarians who decide to withdraw from the seminary or the application process, you continue to carry out your work. To assist you in your perseverance, I believe the Lord wants you to hear the word “yes” during these days. Yes, you are in your current ministry because it is God’s call for you at this particular time. Yes, the Lord will equip you with all that you need to do the work that has been entrusted to you. Yes, God will use the many seeds you plant in incredible and magnificent ways. In hearing the Lord’s “yes,” you will discover the grace to persevere and *to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received with all humility*.

Another way you reflect humility is *by radiating joy*. The new Program of Priestly Formation states: *“The joyful witness of the vocation director makes the reality of the priesthood attractive to the one called to this vocation.”* At the same time, your joy is an important gift for the presbyterate in your diocese. You need to reflect to them a reason for joy as we look to the future of the Church, you need to be a sign of hope for them; you need to tell them about the incredible

discerners you are meeting; your brother priests cannot see discouragement from you; nor hear grumbling. Humility allows you to reflect joy even in the midst of the demands and challenges of your ministry because you are convinced that, upon relying completely on the Lord's amazing grace, he will work in and through you to produce abundant fruit in your diocese and within his church.

Dear vocation directors, my brother priests: Thank you so much for the gift you are to your bishop, to your diocese, to those you serve, and indeed to the entire Church. Strengthened by the Eucharist you are about to receive and through the intercession of Mary, Mother of Priests and Saint Teresa of Calcutta, may you leave this conference with a firm resolve to remain attached to Jesus, the true vine; to persevere; to radiate joy; and *to walk humbly with your God*. Amen.