

# *Vocations and Prayer*



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Being There For Others**

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# Being "With" and "For" God's People The Priestly Vocation



By FR. ANTONIO FIORENZA, RCJ

I always remember the day of my priestly ordination. It took place at my hometown's main Church, in San Severino Lucano, a small town located in the mountains of the Pollino National Park in southern Italy, on August 12, 1978 at 6:00 p.m. while the funeral of Pope Paul VI was held in Rome. Two moments of the celebration are particularly engraved in my mind: the singing of the *Veni Creator Spiritus* (Come Creator Spirit) during the bishop and the priests laying on of hands on my head, and the singing of the *Tu es Sacerdos in Eternum* (You are a Priest forever) during the consecration of my hands.

At the singing of the *Veni Creator*, I felt the breath of the Holy Spirit taking me and setting me apart for God's people. It was a moment of ecstasy. When the choir played the *Tu es Sacerdos in Eternum*, I felt that my life had changed forever, irrevocably. I could never be the same again; for all eternity, I will be a priest of God, and as a priest, I am to Jesus Christ, the High priest, the Mediator between God and men. United, and identified with Christ, I represent him before his people; in him and with him, I have been consecrated as a mediator between God and his people.

Being *sacerdos in eternum*, then, means that my life belongs to God for the goodness of his people. My life is forever linked to the people of God, in a "spousal" relationship. As a priest I live "with" and "for" the people.

Also, I feel that my priestly identity is connected to the people of God: "There is no identity – and consequently no joy of life – explains Pope Francis – without an active and unwavering sense of belonging

to God's faithful people" (Homily at Chrism Mass on Holy Thursday 2014). And to a priest who is looking for his own identity, the Pope suggested: "exit from yourself, exit to seek God in adoration, go out and give your people what was entrusted to you, for your people will make you feel and taste who you are, what your name is, what your identity is."

This is the experience I have every time I meet people during my priestly ministry.

There is another important aspect making the relationship between the priest and the people of God absolutely special. At the beginning of this past June, a person dear to me reminded me about it with a message on WhatsApp: "Dear Fr. Antonio, I just want to remind you that you and your Brothers are in my prayers. As we begin this month of June, dedicated to the Sacred Heart, I will be praying in a special way that every one of your priestly brothers be strong and holy priests, after the heart of Jesus Christ. The more holy you are, the more holy we will be."

The priestly vocation is "a gift and a mystery," but also a tremendous responsibility. ■



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# The Priest's Ministry

## Set Apart or Connected To?



Photo by Sammie Vasquez

By Fr. JOSEPH I. CISETTI

*Every high priest is taken from among men and made their representative before God to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal patiently with the ignorant and erring for he himself is beset by weakness.*

Hebrews 5:1-2

### Two Poles

How are we to understand the role of a priest? Is it to be set apart from people or connected to them? Some choose to emphasize the former citing Hebrews 5:1. A priest, they hold, is set apart for a specific task that is singular, unique and distinctive. This is all true but can very easily shift from that which is distinctive to that which is superior. Others emphasize the latter approach of being connected to; emphasizing the connection of the priest to those he serves. Support for this thought comes from Hebrews 5:2. St. John Paul II spoke of a priest being a man of communion. In a similar vein, Pope Francis emphasizes that a shepherd is to have “the smell of the sheep” and speaks of accompaniment. In other words, the priest is present to and in relationship with his people. This too is true but if distinction is lost, the ordained ministry could seem inconsequential.

In order to function in a given position, it is important that people acknowledge that which is unique to that position, be it a priest, a doctor, lawyer, teacher or any other role. If there is not some respect for that position and trust in that person, those people will not be able to function well. However, if it becomes too elevated, that necessary respect can easily falter into an abuse of power. If it becomes so isolated as to avoid contact with those whom they are ordered to serve, the purpose of the distinction becomes irrelevant.

It is as if there are two poles. One is called, set apart and the other, connected to. Priests are called to hold these in a creative and life-giving tension. Think of a computer or television screen, with its light and dark setting. If the setting is all the way to darkness, nothing will be seen. If the setting gives all the way to brightness, again, nothing will be seen. The vision comes somewhere in the middle and requires some contrast. If the setting to being set apart becomes too pronounced, the result will be isolation. If the setting to being close becomes too strong, one may not be effective.

If that distinction becomes so blurred, there is no reason to have the position in the first place. When sick, one needs

someone who is not like oneself, i.e., one needs a doctor or health care professional. One needs what is distinctive about that other person. However, if the doctor looks down on others, belittles them or tries to exclude them, people will look elsewhere. The vision requires both similarity and difference; both comparison and contrast.

### Equal in Dignity

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews acknowledges a priest as one taken from among people, that is, there exists something distinctive, important and essential to this role. Distinction does not mean better or worse, it means different.

This distinction must always be understood within the context of a broader unity. Distinction unmoored from unity becomes separation. St. Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians, speaks beautifully of Christ's followers being the body of Christ and that while there are many parts, and thus many roles, they are all to work together and be part of a greater whole.

Americans greatly value equality and rightly so. We are all equal in our human dignity and we insist not only that people possess certain unalienable rights. but

that these rights have been “endowed by their Creator.” When patients go to the doctor, they often sit there wearing only a sheet while the doctor examines their body. At that point the relationship is very unequal. The doctor may possess a higher role than the patient but that does not mean the doctor is a better person than the patient. It means that they have two different roles and at that moment, the doctor has greater power and therefore greater responsibility. The doctor’s greater authority exists to serve the patient. However, even the idea of being made a representative of others implies a connection with them rather than isolation.

## Expert on Humanity

It is also important to remember what the Epistle to the Hebrews says in the very next verse, that the priest can deal patiently with the erring, because he is aware of his own weakness and we could add even his own brokenness. In other words, the distinction between priest and people, doctors and patients, etc, flow from a deeper unity: their common humanity. Priests are to be in touch with their own humanity and able to deal patiently with others because they are aware of their shortcomings and sinfulness.

When making his historic address to the United Nations in 1965, St. Paul VI described the Church as, “an expert on humanity” placing itself at the service of others. If the Church is to be an expert on humanity, then its leaders, especially its priests are to be experts on humanity, both their own humanity and that of others.

An interesting insight about St. John Paul II is that as a young priest, serving as a chaplain to university students, Father Karol Wojtyla came off as rather unconventional. He did not see his role merely to provide the sacraments for the students but also to accompany them in life. For this reason, he would go join students on hiking, skiing and kayaking. The story is that while kayaking, the students would take turns riding with him

and that would be time for personal conversation with him. He was set apart with a distinct role, but he was also closely connected to those he served and even as pope some of these people continued to be his friends.

Many years ago, while in Rome I took a cab and the driver, noticing I was a priest, began to talk to me and soon it was as if I was doing spiritual direction with him, all with some limited Italian. I do not think he opened his heart to all his customers as he did to me that day, because I was set apart, I was able to connect with him in what I said.

Priests are indeed set apart but this setting apart is a distinction rather than a statement of superiority. They are set apart and ordered for service, both to God and others. “The greatest among you must be your servant” (Matthew 23:11). St. Francis de Sales noted something similar: “Such are bishops and priests, who by a sacramental consecration, and by a spiritual character that cannot be effaced, vow themselves, as branded and marked serfs to the perpetual service of God.” While he certainly realizes that which is distinct, he clearly grounds all this in and recognizes its orientation toward service.

## Molding One’s Self

Priests are set apart to offer gifts and sacrifices but also so that they can deal patiently with those they serve. A haughty clericalism and a self-conscious pseudo familiarity that tries to ignore distinctions are both out of place. Both can easily become dangerous and in extreme cases can lead to any number of abuses.

Boundaries are essential to good ministry. Being present and close to people does not mean abandoning boundaries. It means that boundaries become even more important and we are constantly being reminded of this truth. As with other professionals, there must exist an invisible line between the one serving and the one being served, a distinction. Note that the term here is line and not a

wall. The line serves not to limit the relationship but give it the proper focus. Distance and focus are two different things. Being united with those we serve does not mean having a peer relationship with them but neither does it mean that one is to be cold and distant. Being professional does not mean priests are not to be personable. If anything, professionalism requires priests to show themselves to be as personable as possible. In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores dabo vobis*, St. John Paul II went so far as to say: “In order that his ministry may be humanly as credible and acceptable as possible, it is important that the priest should mold his human personality in such a way that it becomes a bridge and not an obstacle for others in their meeting with Jesus Christ.”

He went on to speak of knowing the depths of the human heart and about how important is the capacity to relate to others, noting, “This is truly fundamental for a person who is called to be responsible for a community and to be a man of communion.” He also spoke of affective maturity and of being capable of having interpersonal relationships with men and women. In other words, while having a distinct role from others, a priest must also be connected to others. Solid human virtues and virtuous human warmth are assets to priestly ministry, not a liability.

Priests are set apart, not so they can be arrogant. Being set apart is not meant to be a cloak for priests’ emotional insecurities or desires to dominate, but rather, so that they may be connected to others and then hopefully, connect them to Jesus and the new life he offers all of us. ■



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# Saying Yes to God

## A vocation Discernment Journey

By Fr. MIKE PERUCHO

In Luke's Gospel (24:13-35), we hear of the beauty of the Resurrection as Jesus appears to two disciples on the *Road to Emmaus*. They are talking about the events that have occurred, not quite understanding it all and trying to make sense of it. Then, out of nowhere, Jesus appears, yet they do not know that it is him. As they journey together, they go deeper into what has taken place, and Jesus explains to them Scripture which all points to him. The disciples ask Jesus to stay with them. As they gather at table, as Jesus breaks bread their eyes are opened that it is Christ, the Risen Lord before them. Jesus disappears, but rather than just keep their experience to themselves, they share it with others. This wonderful encounter of the disciples with Christ is what God hopes for each of us as we too have that experience of great and profound love and intimacy with our Lord. And from this experience, we discern our vocational call.

The Road to Emmaus offers insight into the continual journey that we have in life with Jesus Christ. Jesus constantly reveals himself to us when we least expect it, and in that revelation, he invites us to go deeper in our understanding of him and our faithfulness to do as he asks. Within this passage of Scripture, I hope to highlight some key points that are important for our young men and women as they discern their calling from God.

The first is to remember that we are all on a journey. Like the disciples were traveling so too are we journeying on this earth. Their destination that day was Emmaus. Ours eventually is heaven which we achieve if we do as God asks of us. But notice that they are not traveling alone. They are traveling together. They are not trying to make this trip by themselves, isolated, independent, without any help. They travel together conversing and trying to figure out what is going on. This brings me to my second point of discernment: do not do it alone.



Photo by Jed Villejo

It is important that our discerners journey with another. The act of accompaniment can come in various forms from a spiritual director, discernment group, talking with seminarians, priests, postulants, novices or religious. There are also discernment retreats where young men and women can hear stories of others and share their own as they continue to open themselves up to the call. When we are discerning, many things sometimes do not make sense and there are questions that we have. By journeying with someone, it helps things to be clarified and answered. It gives a perspective to things that sometimes we do not see, and it allows us to truly go deeper on this journey.

The next point is Word and Sacrament - Mass. The two disciples experienced the living Word of God as Jesus explained the Scriptures. They also recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread. In discernment we must stay close to our Lord who we hear, see, and receive every time we go to Mass. Mass should be daily if possible as we begin to grow in our love of Scripture and the Eucharist. Other devotions such as Lectio Divina and Eucharistic Adoration would also be important in having that intimate encounter with Christ, to hear his voice, and experience his love. This is our life of prayer as we grow intimately in our relationship with God.

Finally, in our discernment journey, we must act. Discernment is a life-long journey, but it should not be a journey where we do not act upon our encounter with Christ. The two disciples did not just keep what they experienced to themselves. Rather, they recounted and proclaimed the Risen Christ. Their faith grew and because of this intense experience they were invited to do something, to proclaim what they saw, to bring the joyful news to others, to share Christ's love with the world. Our discernment helps us do that as well. Our discernment leads us to ultimately say yes to God in sharing the life of his Son with the world whether it be as a priest, a religious, a husband or wife, or consecrated lay person. Discernment invites us to do the work of God. With faith, hope and love, take that next step in your journey with Christ. ■



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# Discerning a Priestly Vocation

## Toward a Program of Integral Human Formation



### Self-knowledge

The virtue of humility or the habit of knowing the truth about oneself is the foundation for good self-knowledge. The Ratio encourages self-awareness because “every seminarian should be aware of his own life history,” (Ratio 94). This knowledge, including knowledge of factors that have influenced behavior and habits, is key to establishing mature and “well balanced interpersonal relationships,” (94). Skilled human formation counselors can accompany these men as they increase their awareness of how early family of origin issues have formed them. An exploration of these issues, along with other factors, both nurture and nature based, inform the seminarian’s self-understanding. Although love and grace can be the greatest influences on human behaviour, knowledge of deficits in early formative years is essential in the journey toward wholeness. Skilled human formation counselors can navigate these challenging concerns seminarians may bring to counseling sessions, including questions pertaining to one’s sexuality. The Ratio calls for deeper awareness regarding the need for an “integrated sexuality.” Integrated sexuality is other focused, meaning one is cautioned against going inward and focusing on self-interests when it comes to sexual expression, eclipsing the deeper meaning of human sexuality as gift of self to other.

Self-knowledge regarding the correct expression of celibate and chaste sexuality is essential, especially given the research of Dr. John Cacioppo and others on the toxic effects of loneliness on one’s overall physiology. Insight into safe intimacy highlights the need for emotional and spiritual intimacy in the life of the priest.

In the discussion on the importance of self-awareness and social competencies, the Ratio includes responses to women during this period of discernment. The “ability to relate to women” (94) should be

By JOSEPHINE LOMBARDI, Ph.D.

*“But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.”*

*I Corinthians 6:17*

In 2016 the Congregation for the Clergy promulgated a new Ratio or method of priestly formation, “The Gift of the Priestly Vocation,” a document addressing today’s context and developing the insights of Pope John Paul II found in *Pastor dabo vobis*, his “Exhortation on the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day,” 1992. This more recent document highlights the need for every seminary to develop a program of “integrated formation” and personal accompaniment, (Ratio 10, 44). This integrated formation is to lead to “configuration to Christ,” meaning the pattern revealed in Jesus is to be reproduced in the life of the

priest, (PDV 21).

Both magisterial documents affirm four pillars or dimensions of priestly formation: human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral. Formation in these four areas contributes to the seminarian’s growth, helping him in his discernment. Human formation, however, is the “basis of all priestly formation,” cultivating “a series of human qualities” and building the “capacity to relate to others” (PDV 43). Each seminary must address this dimension as “...the seminarian is called upon to develop his personality, having Christ, the perfect man, as his model and source,” (Ratio 93). In order to be Christ-like the seminarian must work on, in collaboration with others and God’s grace, the following human skills: self-knowledge, virtuous leadership, stability of personality or character development, empathy, and self-regulation.



Photo by Benjamin Davies

assessed, observing seminarians' interactions with female staff and faculty, including support staff. Seminarians are encouraged to monitor their ability to relate to women, noting any discomfort or difficulty relating. Women faculty and staff, in collaboration with male clergy and staff, can assist with identifying harmful behavior and addressing other behavioural deficits in the area of social communication. Following the wisdom of Pope John Paul II, the presence of the "feminine genius" in seminary formation assists with this very important work of human formation.

## Virtuous Leadership

Emphasis on the cardinal virtues is essential when it comes to the integral formation of the human person. "Awareness of (one's) social environment and the capacity for social interaction" (94) hinge on the cultivation of virtuous behavior, the ability to acquire the habits of self-control, courage, justice, and prudence, plus humility and magnanimity. Inspired by God's love and wisdom, these habits lead to a "stable sense of identity," (94). Self-control assists with the disciplined expression of righteous anger and the "capacity to correct oneself;" courage reduces fear when it comes to submitting to God's divine will, limiting one's attachment to being liked; justice encourages seminarians to give

others their due, recalling the need to be merciful and fair; prudence leads to just decision-making, rooted in truthfulness and tact. Humility keeps one anchored in the truth, inspiring seminarians to be mindful of the support they receive from family, friends, faculty and other staff, encouraging them to demonstrate gratitude and graciousness throughout their formative years. Finally, magnanimity inspires seminarians to strive for excellence, magnifying God as they grow and model stability and Christ-like behavior. Workshops or sessions on virtuous behavior should be included during house meetings or internship gatherings. Examinations of Conscience can be designed to include self-assessments in the area of virtuous leadership, generating great insights into one's behavior.

## Stability of Personality

Perceiving oneself and others correctly informs self-knowledge and virtuous behavior. Moreover, the ability to assess and correct oneself requires a well-formed conscience, (PDV 43, Ratio 94) examining the implications of one's behavior, including the fruits of harmful habits. Humility and a "balanced sense of self-respect" (Ratio 94) encourage the monitoring of mood and how others respond to one's fluctuations in mood. It can be very chal-

lenging to serve with a pastor or parish leader whose mood is unpredictable, confusing at best, harmful at worst. One has grown as a virtuous individual when one's private behavior matches one's public behavior. Scandal often arises when one's private behavior contradicts one's public behavior. Self-monitoring and input from others, asking: "What does it feel like to be in my presence?" coupled with God's grace can help one acquire a stable mood and personality. It requires great humility and heroic self-discipline, but it is possible with a collaborative approach and responsible and tactful fraternal correction.

## Empathy

The ability to demonstrate empathy, respect and concern is key to good pastoral care of souls. Empathy is the ability to understand and enter into the vulnerability of another person. Revealing the heart of the Good Shepherd, the empathic person, like Mary and John, stands with the wounded, accompanying them with mercy and truth. Although one's own personal struggles can inspire compassion, problems with the formation of conscience or prenatal and postnatal trauma can prevent one from experiencing and communicating empathy. A skilled human formation counselor and other informed formators, who can observe behavior that is



Photo by Paola Chaya

insensitive in class and in community, can alert others that more specialized therapy is required. An inability to express empathy may signal deeper, underlying psychological issues that require assessment and treatment. Empathy helps with the ability to know the depths of the human heart, “to perceive difficulties and problems, to establish trust in relationships, to listen attentively,” (Ratio 94) and to read vulnerability in people. Women, whose gift it is to read vulnerability, can help identify individuals in need of support and other resources. Pastoral counseling and courses in pastoral theology can train seminarians to listen attentively and validate feelings, making them more empathic.

## Self-regulation

Self-regulation can be achieved with the help of good maternal and paternal prenatal care, early nurture, an authoritative parenting style, and the formation of a healthy conscience. Self-regulation is essential when it comes to the discipline of thoughts, words and actions, making it easier to form interpersonal skills. Both a fruit of the Holy Spirit and a cardinal virtue, self-control is the basis for emotional balance and the “ability to responsibly assume the life of a public person,” (Ratio 94). Observing the dangers of reckless

speech, Rumi, the Persian mystic, spoke of three gates of speech: 1. Is it true? 2. Is it kind? 3. Is it necessary? Similarly, countless scriptural verses signal the importance of disciplined speech. This self-regulation must begin in the mind; our thoughts must be disciplined before we speak. Awareness of less than life giving habits can give one a head start when it comes to self-regulation. For example, drinking excessive alcohol can impair one’s judgment and critical thinking skills, making one reckless, potentially violating promises of confidentiality or other boundaries. A good examination of conscience and expert counseling advice can assist a seminarian in the investigation of his thoughts, words, and actions, monitoring triggers and entry points for harmful behavior. In this era of enslavement to social media and electronic devices it is worth the effort to examine the factors or influences that undermine one’s ability to self-regulate. Establishing house rules and social media fasts, coupled with an increased awareness of one’s responses to certain habits and stimuli, can help with self-discipline and limit the negative influence of harmful and addictive media. Addictive tendencies can be inherited or acquired, changing one’s neurobiology and physiology. Addiction education is essential in any program of human formation.

Seminary formators, dealing with problems rooted in family of origin issues, possibly trauma and other levels of brokenness, are in need of experts who can offer a multi-disciplinary approach to human formation, assisting with their training in psychology, addiction, adolescent development, and marriage and family therapy. Teams of multi-disciplinary formators, male and female, would provide a great service to the seminary environment. At least one or two full time human formation counselors can monitor growth and character development, accompany men as they strive to be Christ-like, healed and restored with God’s grace. Collaboration with other seminaries would encourage an exciting dialogue and inspiration for new approaches to human formation. ■



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# The Family is the Seedbed of Faith and of Vocation

## A Conversation with Most Rev. Joseph M. Siegel, Bishop of Evansville, Indiana

By PAMELA SELBERT

Bishop Joseph M. Siegel was born in Joliet, Illinois on July 18, 1963, the youngest of the nine children of Francis and Marie (Wallace) Siegel. He was raised on a farm and attended grammar school at the Cathedral of St. Raymond Nonnatus in Joliet.

After graduating from St. Charles Borromeo High School Seminary, he studied at Joliet Junior College and then completed his college education at St. Meinrad Seminary in St. Meinrad. He was then sent to the North American College in Rome for his theological studies, attending the Gregorian and the Angelicum Universities.

He was ordained a priest for the Joliet Diocese on June 4, 1988, and completed his Licentiate in Sacred Theology at the University of St. Mary of the Lake in Mundelein, Illinois. He is a Fourth Degree Knight of Columbus and a member of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre (Knight Commander with Star).

On October 28, 2009, Pope Benedict nominated Father Siegel as Auxiliary Bishop of Joliet. He was ordained a bishop by Bishop J. Peter Sartain on January 19, 2010. On December 3, 2010, Bishop Siegel was elected Diocesan Administrator of the Diocese of Joliet when Bishop Sartain was installed as Archbishop of Seattle. On October 18, 2017, Pope Francis appointed him to serve as the sixth Bishop of Evansville.

Bishop Siegel has a reading knowledge of Spanish and Italian. He enjoys Cubs baseball, classical music, reading (especially history), and playing the piano and organ.

Bishop Siegel recently answered the following questions about vocations in his diocese:



**Are you seeing an increased interest in vocations to the priesthood or religious orders?**

I believe there is a growing interest in priestly and consecrated vocations in our diocese. We have ordained nine men in the past four years. Several other men and women have entered consecrated life in the past few years as well. For the relatively small size of our Catholic population (around 75,000), those numbers are both impressive and hopeful. I am optimistic that the young people of the diocese are receptive to the call of the Lord to serve as priests and religious.

**If so, are older people as well as young people considering a vocation?**

Yes, we have also noticed that women and men in their 30's and 40's are discerning. Communities of consecrated women in our diocese have seen some of their vocations come from this age group. Likewise, two of our recently ordained priests were in their late 40's or early 50's at their ordinations.

**What do you do to encourage a person's interest?**

Our diocesan vocations office hosts sev-

eral events each year to increase awareness about vocational discernment and to help facilitate making a decision to enter. In collaboration with parishes and orders within the diocese, the office hosts gatherings of young adults and of high school students, like the annual "Picnic with the Bishop." For this event, young people are invited from across the diocese for Mass, dinner and a discussion about celibate vocations led by seminarians, priests and by religious and consecrated women and men. Gatherings like this afford opportunities for young people to join others considering a religious vocation and so realize that they are not alone in considering this life.

Responding to the need for making space for men to intentionally discern a vocation, our diocese also opened a "House of Discernment" in August 2018. One of our diocesan priests serves as its director, guiding 18 to 30-year old men who are open to coming to know God's call for their lives. These young men refrain from dating relationships for the year while spending more intentional time praying together, doing spiritual reading together, and hearing from a variety of priests, married and single men about their own vocations.

The house of discernment also serves as something of a hub for vocations events in the Evansville metropolitan area. Every Monday evening, scores of young adults gather for a Holy Hour and Mass for vocations at which the residents of the house of discernment serve. These young people spend time together afterwards at optional faith formation conferences or for fellowship at a local restaurant.

In its first year, the house has already produced one seminarian for our diocese and one seminarian for a Clerical Society of Apostolic Life of Pontifical Right. Additionally, more than 60 teenage boys have voluntarily gathered at the house of discernment for monthly faith formation with their dads. Several of them have indicated hearing the stirrings of a priestly calling. Simply getting vocational discernment before the eyes of our young people helps tremendously with their ability to consider their own vocation more deeply.

### **How do pastors and youth ministers help a person discern God's call?**

Personal witness to holiness is certainly primary. People also need to see joy in living out a vocation. A person is not going to imagine himself or herself in the role of pastor or as a married person if priests and laity don't convey the joy of their vocations. Of course it could be said that guiding the faithful toward a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ comprises the entire work of pastors and youth ministers, and indeed, perhaps of all who labor for the Church. If we, as ministers of the Gospel, can focus on helping people know, love and serve God more deeply, then their vocations will stand before their very eyes.

### **How does your Office of Vocations work? What sort of spiritual direction do you offer?**

Our vocations office is led by two diocesan priests who work together with our seminarians, our house of discernment, and with all vocations promoters. They also coordinate with vocations personnel in religious orders in our diocese to connect those discerning with a possible community and to share resources. The diocese has a list of spiritual directors to which the faithful may avail themselves should they seek it.

### **Is there prayer for vocations throughout the parishes?**

One of our deacons began a prayer apostolate in 2012 called the "Good Shepherd Prayer Apostolate." This apostolate secures 24-hour adoration for intercessory prayer to support the ministry of the bishop, priests, deacons and religious of the diocese. Parishes volunteer for a 24-hour window of adoration on their own campus every six weeks or so. There, the faithful are provided a booklet of prayers for an increase and sustaining of vocations to ordained, vowed and married life. Once the 24-hour prayer period ends at one parish, another has already started their day in another part of the diocese. Within two years of conceiving the apostolate, nearly 1000 people had participated, drawn from almost every parish in our diocese. Though

impossible to mathematically measure the results of prayer, I have no doubt this apostolate has been tremendously fruitful.

### **What is the role of parents and other family members in helping a young person discern God's call?**

Parents are the primary educators of their children, especially in the Faith ("Catechism of the Catholic Church," 2223). If mom and dad smile upon the suggestion a son or daughter makes about a religious or priestly vocation, that child is much more likely to pursue it. Sadly, too many parents mistakenly think that a celibate life is necessarily lonely and, there, unhappy, and many parents not only refrain from discussing vocation as something to be discerned with God's help, but actively work against a child discerning anything besides marriage. I remind parents that what will make their children happy in their lives is following God's will. An important part of their parental vocation is to enable them to discern God's call and then help them follow it. The family is the seedbed of faith and of vocations, and we need their help in providing fertile ground.

### **Should family members actively encourage pursuing a vocation?**

Yes. For example, parents (and grandparents) could ask children questions like, "What do you think God wants you to be when you grow up?" or "Have you ever thought of religious vocation?" Our culture does not always encourage us to consider God's voice and the Church's mission when thinking about our lives. The family is a place where parents can make room for children to dream about the Lord's plan for their future. Family members could also point out the traits they see in youth and young adults that might serve them well in a vocation to priesthood or religious life.

### **How can a person be certain they've been called?**

Certainty is difficult to obtain for matters of the heart and soul, but there are sure signs of being called. Joy, peace, ease and other gifts of the Spirit: these are signs that

a person has found the place where God's grace is active (cf Gal 5:22-23). Part of the beauty and wisdom of discernment and formation for any vocation -- priesthood, marriage, consecrated life -- is that none of these are quick processes. Seminary takes at least six years. Marriage is preceded by engagement, which is preceded by dating. Religious orders have differing periods of postulancy and novitiate, and they all include many years before final profession or solemn vows. If a person has found a place where, on the whole and for the most part, he or she finds the fruits of the Spirit active in his or her daily life, then there is a great amount of reason there to believe he or she has found his or her vocation. Surrender to the process of discernment is often the difficult first step to take.

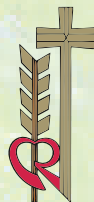
### How do you create an inclusive vocation culture in your diocese?

One of the priests of our diocese offers a prayer "for an increase in vocations to priesthood and religious life, and for an increase and strengthening of holy marriages and families" as part of the Universal Prayer at every Mass in which he presides. This is not a panacea for correcting the misconception that "vocation" excludes marriage, but it is a start. We need to remind ourselves that as God called forth His first priests and set out the evangelical counsels for consecrated men and women, He also made man and woman for each other (cf Gen 2:24). If God calls a man and woman to marriage just like God calls a man to be a priest, then "vocation" is an appropriate word which should likewise remind us that the Lord is calling each one of the baptized to a specific purpose in His Body, the Church. We need to listen. ■



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# A Sacrament of Commitment

## We Don't Have a Vocation Problem: We Have a Commitment Problem



Photo by Paola Chaaya

By JOHN M. RINALDO, D. MIN

**A**t my home parish in the Diocese of Las Vegas, before we begin every Mass, we are asked to pray a Prayer of Vocations. I love that prayer for many reasons. For starters, it is such a blessing that the entire parish prays it each week. As Catholics, we believe that when such prayers are prayed, good results happen.

The second reason I love the prayer is because it speaks to both the young person being called as well as the parents. Below is the full text of Diocese of Las Vegas Vocation Prayer:

*Lord Jesus, Son of the Eternal Father and Mary Immaculate, grant to our young people the generosity necessary to follow Your call and the courage required to overcome all obstacles to their vocation. Give their parents that faith, love and spirit of sacrifice which will inspire them to offer their children to*

*God's service and to rejoice whenever one of their children is called to the priesthood or religious life. Let Your example and that of Your blessed Mother and Saint Joseph encourage both young people and parents and let Your grace sustain them. Amen.*

As I travel around the country in my work as a Parish Coach and Consultant, one of the realities that continues to hit parishes and dioceses hard is the lack of priests. The number of Catholic priests in the United States hit an all-time high of 59,192 in 1970 and has declined to just 36,580 in 2018. That's a drop of 38%. As many priests move closer and closer to retirement, the number of seminarians in formation are not keeping up to continue to fill the need in the same way as in the 1960's and 1970's.

As much as we think that this is merely a concern for priestly vocations, the same is true for the other Sacrament of Vocation, Matrimony. In 1970, there were 426,309

Catholic marriages. In 2018, the number dropped to 143,082. That is a drop of 66%!

Both statistics should be alarming.

It should be noted that the other popular name for the Sacraments of Vocation is this: Sacrament of Commitment.

With the steady decline of priestly ordinations as well as the decline of the Sacrament of Matrimony, one could argue that we don't have a vocation problem: we have a commitment problem.

Just recently, the Director of Vocations for my home Diocese of Las Vegas presided at my parish's 8am Mass in which my family attended. One of the lines he said that really stood out to me was that everyone has a vocation. He also stated that morning that we don't have a vocation problem. He said that we have a listening problem. We simply don't listen to God's call. At the end

of his homily on vocations, he encouraged all of us to listen to the calling of God and to take the call seriously.

Whether it's a listening problem or a commitment problem, it begs the question: **Why is there a lack of commitment in young people?**

1. **Selfishness:** this is really a question of today's culture. So many of our influences, especially the media, encourage selfishness. Selfishness and Vocation really don't go together well. It's hard to have a successful marriage if one spouse or the other is selfish and always wants their way. A vocation to priesthood is defined by the idea of service to others, with is the antithesis of selfishness. One only has to see Jesus washing the feet of His disciples at the Last Supper to note the importance of being of service to others.
2. **Choices:** one could argue that, due to technology and our first world desires, young people have more choices and options today than previous generations. We have come to expect choice. When we expect choice, it's difficult to stick with one thing, whether it's a career (or a vocation to the priesthood), a spouse, or a jar of peanut butter. Research actually suggests that choices are paralyzing. The more options you have, the less likely you are to choose any of the options, so you walk away.
3. **Desire for control:** This is closely related to choices. We want to control our environment. When we commit to the priesthood or to marriage, we lose a certain level of control. As a priest, I take the vow of obedience. As a spouse, in some sense, I also take a vow of obedience. The idea of being obedient to someone else does not foster positive feelings. I want the flexibility to choose to do what I want to do and go where I want to go. I don't want someone else telling me what to do. Not a bishop, not a spouse, and certainly not God. Which leads

4. **The Church (and God) is not relevant to life:** There are many that might argue that the Church has no grasp on the reality of life today. They might point to the Church's teaching on morality, especially issues of sexuality and identity, as being out of touch. They might point to the hypocrisy of the hierarchy, especially Church leaders judging others or the sexual abuse scandal. The list could go on, but the data suggests that young people are disaffiliating from the Church for many reasons. Therefore, if the Church is not relevant to the lives of youth, then why would they even consider a vocation to the priesthood or a Catholic marriage?

Despite all this, we should not give up on our young people or the need for a commitment to the Sacraments of Vocation. Pope Francis' Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, "Christ is Alive," wrote directly to young people saying, "Christ is alive and he wants you to be alive!"

One way we are to be alive is to listen to our vocational call. Pope Francis dedicated an entire chapter of this exhortation on the topic of vocation, calling young people to friendship, being there for others, love and family, work, and the vocation to special consecration, all of which challenge the four reasons stated above as to why young people won't commit. And it is no surprise that he follows the vocation chapter with a chapter on discernment.

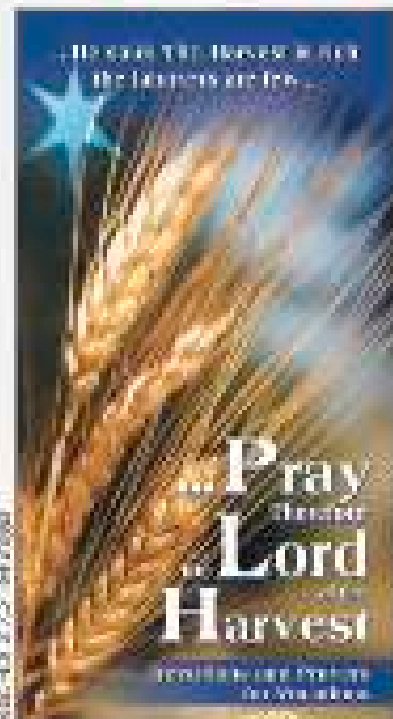
As leaders in the Church, let us be alive and accompany young people on this journey of life to model the way of true vocation in God.■



**JOHN M. RINALDO, D. MIN**

Is a coach and trainer for the Parish Success Group. John earned his Doctor of Ministry, D. Min. in Leadership and Organizational Development from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, as well as a Master of Arts in Pastoral Ministry from Santa Clara University.

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# Let us pray the Lord of the harvest

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*(From the message of Pope emeritus Benedict XVI for the 48th World Day of Prayer for Vocations, 2011)*

Vocations to the ministerial priesthood and to the consecrated life are first and foremost the fruit of constant contact with the living God and insistent prayer lifted up to the "Lord of the harvest," whether in parish communities, in Christian families or in groups specifically devoted to prayer for vocations.

Brothers and sisters: Let us offer this holy hour to ask the Lord of the harvest for many and holy workers to gather in his harvest. We also ask for the grace that we may be faithful in living out our own vocations.

## 2. EXPOSITION

*O salutaris Hostia quae caeli pandis ostium;  
Bella premunt hostilia, da robur, fer auxilium.*

*Uni trinoque Domino sit sempiterna gloria,  
Qui vitam sine termino nobis donet in patria. Amen.*

Another Eucharistic hymn may be sung.

## 3. ADORATION

V. O sacrament most holy, O sacrament divine,

R. All praise and all thanksgiving be every moment thine.

V. To the following invocations, please respond:

R. Blessed are you, Lord Jesus,  
for through you we discover that God is love.

V. Blessed are you, Lord Jesus, Son of God and our Brother. We firmly believe that you are here in the midst of this community that welcomes you and wants to live in communion with you.

R. Blessed are you, Lord Jesus,  
for through you we discover that God is love.

Blessed are you for the gift of your word, and for your body and your blood that are our true food and true drink for the journey.

R. Blessed are you, Lord Jesus,  
for through you we discover that God is love.

Thankful we bow down before you because you do not cease to show your love, at all times and in many ways.

R. Blessed are you, Lord Jesus,  
for through you we discover that God is love.

## 4. SILENT ADORATION AND/OR SONG

## 5. READING AND MEDITATION (Mt 9:35-38)

*A homily and a short period of silence or personal meditation, or the recitation of the Holy Rosary may follow.*

## 6. INTERCESSIONS

Let us praise Christ who gives power and strength to his people, and let us entreat him with sincere hearts, saying:

Lord of the harvest, hear our prayer.

- For all men and women called to love God and their neighbor with the love of the Heart of Christ, that they may follow him generously when chosen to serve others as a priest, deacon or in the consecrated religious life, we pray to the Lord.
- For Christian families, the source of religious vocations, that they may be prompted to encourage young people to rejoice in doing God's will, we pray to the Lord.
- For today's youth, that they may show generosity to Jesus' call and make wise decisions in choosing their vocation in life, we pray to the Lord.
- For all who support the work of vocation promotion through their prayers, sufferings, and good works, that their labors will be fruitful for the Church and that they will be blessed for their efforts, we pray to the Lord.

Now let us offer the prayer Christ himself has given us as the model for all prayer: **Our Father...**

## 8. BENEDICTION

*Tantum ergo Sacramentum veneremur cernui:*

*Et antiquum documentum novo cedat ritui:*

*Praestet fides supplementum sensuum defectui.*

*Genitori, Genitoque laus et jubilatio,*

*Salus, honor, virtus quoque sit et benedictio:*

*Procedenti ab utroque compar sit laudatio. Amen.*

V. You have given them bread from heaven,

R. Having all sweetness within it.

V. Let us pray.

Lord our God, you have given us the true bread from heaven. In the strength of this food may we live always by your life and rise in glory on the last day. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

## 9. REPOSITION AND CONCLUDING SONG

Blessed be God, Father and Creator.

Blessed be Jesus Christ, Son of God and our Brother.

Blessed be his Word that endures for ever.

Blessed be his Body delivered up for us.

Blessed be his Blood shed for the forgiveness of sins.

Blessed be the Holy Spirit, our Advocate and Comforter. Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

May the Heart of Jesus in the most blessed Sacrament be praised, adored and loved with grateful affection at every moment, in all the tabernacles of the world, even to the end of time. Amen.

### Let us adore Christ in our hearts

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

*(From the message of Pope Francis for the 51st World Day of Prayer for Vocations, 2014)*

Brothers and sisters, let us pray during this holy hour for vocations, that more men and women will have the faith to hear God's call in their lives and respond with hope in his promise and love for the Savior by following him as priests, deacons and in the consecrated life.

#### 2. EXPOSITION *(O Salutaris Hostia)*

O Saving Victim, opening wide  
the gate of heaven to us below!

Our foes press on from every side:

your aid supply, your strength bestow.

To your great name be endless praise,

Immortal Godhead, One in Three;

O grant us endless length of days

when our true native land we see. *Amen.*

*Another Eucharistic hymn may be sung.*

#### 3. ADORATION

V. O Sacrament most holy, O Sacrament divine,

R. All praise and all thanksgiving be every moment thine.

V. Our eyes are placed in you, Lord Jesus, in you who are present in the Eucharistic bread. Our hearts are open as fertile ground to receive the seed of your word. Our lives are in your hands for your Spirit to transform and shape them. We love you, Lord Jesus, and we adore you with all our minds, with all our hearts, with all our strength. Receive our prayer and praise.

V. Please respond after each invocation:

R. We adore you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Lord Jesus, gentle and humble of heart, you visit every human being to reveal the Father's love. R.

Lord Jesus, goodness without end, you liberate captives, you pardon our sins. R.

Lord Jesus, our rest and our refuge, your yoke is easy and your burden light. R.

Lord Jesus, you heal our blindness. R.

Lord Jesus, you came to light a fire on the earth. R.

Lord Jesus, you are the Way, the Truth and the Life. R.

#### 4. SILENT ADORATION AND/OR SONG

*5. READING AND MEDITATION (Mark, 12:28-33)*

A homily and a short period of silence or personal meditation, or the recitation of the Holy Rosary may follow.

#### 6. INTERCESSIONS

Let us call upon Christ, the Good Shepherd who comes to the aid of his people, saying:

**Good Shepherd, hear us.**

- That all peoples and nations fight for the values of the Gospel, which bring peace, justice and true freedom, we pray to the Lord.
- That priests and consecrated persons proclaim with hope the Gospel of Jesus in the world, we pray to the Lord.
- That there will always be young hearts who are willing to follow God's call and dedicate their lives at the service of their brothers and sisters, we pray to the Lord.
- That Christian households give witness to the Gospel and foster the Christian vocation of their children, we pray to the Lord.
- That all our schools commit themselves to evangelizing communities and to sowing the call of Christ among their members, we pray to the Lord.
- That all of us become true salt of the earth and light of the world, we pray to the Lord.

Now let us offer together the prayer our Lord Jesus Christ taught us: **Our Father...**

#### 7. BENEDICTION *(Tantum ergo)*

Come adore this wondrous presence,

Bow to Christ the source of grace.

Here is kept the ancient promise

Of God's earthly dwelling place.

Sight is blind before God's glory,

Faith alone may see His face.

Glory be to God the Father, praise to his coequal Son,

Adoration to the Spirit, bond of love, in Godhead one.

Blest be God by all creation, joyously while ages run. *Amen.*

V. You have given them bread from heaven,

R. Having all sweetness within it.

V. Let us pray.

Lord our God, may this sacrament of new life warm our hearts with your love and make us eager for the eternal joy of your kingdom. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

#### 8. REPOSITION AND CONCLUDING SONG

Blessed be God. Blessed be his holy name.

Blessed be Jesus Christ, true God and true Man.

Blessed be his Heart filled with love.

Blessed be Jesus, present in the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

Blessed be the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete.

Blessed be the Mother of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Blessed be Saint Joseph, chaste and responsible spouse.

Blessed be God in the glory of all his saints.

May the Heart of Jesus in the most blessed Sacrament be praised, adored and loved with grateful affection at every moment, in all the tabernacles of the world, even to the end of time. *Amen.*

# Let us serve the Lord with love

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*(From the Message of Pope Francis for the 54th World Day of Prayer for Vocations, 2017)*

We must overcome a sense of our own inadequacy and not yield to pessimism, which merely turns us into passive spectators of a dreary and monotonous life. There is no room for fear! God himself comes to cleanse our "unclean lips" and equip us for the mission.

Brothers and sisters, let us offer this holy hour to ask the Lord for the graces we need in order to respond generously to his call to serve his Church with love as single men and women, as loving husbands and wives, as understanding parents, as trusting children, and as dedicated priests, sisters, deacons and brothers.

## 2. EXPOSITION *(Adoro te devote)*

Godhead here in hiding, whom I do adore,  
Masked by these bare shadows,  
shape and nothing more,  
See, Lord, at thy service low lies here a heart  
Lost, all lost in wonder at the God thou art.  
Jesu, whom I look at shrouded here below,  
I beseech thee send me what I thirst for so,  
Some day to gaze on thee face to face in light  
And be blest for ever with thy glory's sight. *Amen.*

## 3. ADORATION

V. O sacrament most holy, O sacrament divine,  
**R. All praise and all thanksgiving be every moment thine.**

V. How good it is to be with you, Lord Jesus!  
How wonderful is your living presence in our midst!  
We praise you! We adore you! We glorify you!  
Great is your power,  
and great is your desire to be with us.  
Welcome, Lord Jesus, our friend and brother!  
Flood our hearts, fill our minds, possess our wills, take our whole lives.

Lord Jesus Christ, you come to transfigure us and to renew us in the image of God:

- **shine in our darkness.**

Lord Jesus Christ, light of our hearts, you know our thirst:

- **lead us to the wellspring of your Gospel.**

Lord Jesus Christ, light of the world, you shine on every human being:

- **enable us to discern your presence in each person.**

Lord Jesus Christ, friend of the poor:

- **open in us the gates of simplicity so that we can welcome you.**

Lord Jesus Christ, gentle and humble of heart:

- **renew in us the spirit of childhood.**

Lord Jesus Christ, you send your Church to prepare your path in the world:

- **open for all people the gates of your Kingdom.**

## 4. SILENT ADORATION AND/OR SONG

## 5. READING AND MEDITATION *(Rm 12: 1-12)*

*A homily and a short period of silence or personal meditation, or the recitation of the Holy Rosary may follow.*

## 6. INTERCESSIONS

Let us pray to Christ, the light of the nations and the joy of every living creature, saying:

**Send, O Lord, holy apostles into your Church.**

- Make your Church for ever new.
- Direct those who preach the Gospel.
- Clothe your priests with holiness.
- Strengthen those consecrated to a life of virginity.
- Shield those who endure persecution.
- Enable young people to grow in wisdom.
- Call new workers to gather the harvest.
- Fill our families with blessings.
- Keep married couples one in love.
- Comfort those who are troubled.

Let us again offer our praise to God and pray in the words of Christ: **Our Father...**

## 8. BENEDICTION *(Tantum ergo)*

V. You have given them bread from heaven,  
**R. Having all sweetness within it.**

Let us pray.

Lord our God, may we always give due honor to the sacramental presence of the Lamb who was slain for us. May our faith be rewarded by the vision of his glory,  
who lives and reigns for ever and ever. *Amen.*

## 9. REPOSITION AND CONCLUDING SONG

Blessed be God.

Blessed be his Holy Name.

Blessed be Jesus Christ, true God and true Man.

Blessed be the Name of Jesus.

Blessed be his most Sacred Heart.

Blessed be his most Precious Blood.

Blessed be Jesus in the most Holy Sacrament of the Altar.

Blessed be the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete.

Blessed be the great Mother of God, Mary most holy.

Blessed be her holy and Immaculate Conception.

Blessed be her glorious Assumption.

Blessed be the name of Mary, virgin and mother.

Blessed be St. Joseph, her most chaste spouse.

Blessed be God in his Angels and in his Saints.

May the Heart of Jesus in the most blessed Sacrament be praised, adored and loved with grateful affection at every moment, in all the tabernacles of the world, even to the end of time. *Amen.*

# The Holy Rosary for Vocations

*Optional invocation after each decade of the holy Rosary:*

V. O Mary, Mother of the Church,

R. Pray for us and obtain for us many and holy vocations.

### JOYFUL MYSTERIES

#### 1st Joyful Mystery: The Annunciation

Through Mary's intercession, let us pray for the youth to be open to the call of God and willing to say yes, like her.

#### 2nd Joyful Mystery: The Visitation

Through Mary's intercession, let us pray that consecrated people be signs of Jesus Christ and living Gospel in their service and love to others.

#### 3rd Joyful Mystery: The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem

Through Mary's intercession, let us pray that Jesus may continue to be born today in the hearts of the faithful, by the word and the testimony of priests and consecrated persons.

#### 4th Joyful Mystery: The presentation of the child Jesus in the temple

Through Mary's intercession, let us pray for parents to embrace, as a gift from God, the possible priestly or consecrated vocation of their children.

#### 5th Joyful Mystery: The Child Jesus lost and found in the temple

Through Mary's intercession, let us pray to God that seminarians, novices, religious men and women, and priests will be faithful to their vocation.

### LUMINOUS MYSTERIES

#### 1st Luminous Mystery: The Baptism of Jesus

Through Mary's intercession, let us pray that all Christians live the vocation to holiness as the fruit of our baptism.

#### 2nd Luminous Mystery: The wedding at Cana

Through Mary's intercession, let us pray for married couples to live faithfully their marriage vocation and to make their home a domestic church.

#### 3rd Luminous Mystery: The preaching of Jesus and the call to conversion

Through Mary's intercession, let us pray so that there will be no shortage of priests who preach the Gospel and administer the sacrament of forgiveness.

#### 4th Luminous Mystery: The Transfiguration of the Lord

Through Mary's intercession, let us pray for those in contemplative life, and for all Christians to discover in prayer, the beauty of following Jesus.

#### 5th Luminous Mystery: The institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper

Through Mary's intercession, let us pray for the holiness of priests, that they may imitate in their lives what they celebrate in the Eucharist.

### SORROWFUL MYSTERIES

#### 1st Sorrowful Mystery: The agony of Jesus in Gethsemane

Through Mary's intercession, let us pray that we always seek God's will in our lives with generosity and fortitude.

#### 2nd Sorrowful Mystery: The scourging of the Lord

Through Mary's intercession, let us pray for consecrated people who suffer persecution, for being faithful witnesses of Jesus in word and in deed.

#### 3rd Sorrowful Mystery: The crowning with thorns

Let us pray that we may discover the suffering face of Christ in the poor and needy, and that young people devote their lives to their service.

#### 4th Sorrowful Mystery: Jesus carries the cross

Through Mary's intercession, let us pray for the young people of today to hear the call of Jesus to take the cross of each day and to follow him.

#### 5th Sorrowful Mystery: The crucifixion and death of Christ

Through Mary's intercession, let us pray that God will grant a good old age and a holy death to those who have given their lives to the service of the Gospel.

### GLORIOUS MYSTERIES

#### 1st Glorious Mystery: The Resurrection

Through Mary's intercession, let us pray that priests and consecrated persons, with their joy and hope, bear witness to the Risen Christ.

#### 2nd Glorious Mystery: The Ascension of the Lord

Through Mary's intercession, let us pray that today's youth seek the meaning of life and true happiness, which is God revealed in Jesus Christ.

#### 3rd Glorious Mystery: The coming of the Holy Spirit

Through Mary's intercession, let us pray that God may take care of those who are preparing in seminaries to be apostles of his Son, and receive with abundance the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

#### 4th Glorious Mystery: The Assumption of Mary, body and soul, into heaven

Through Mary's intercession, let us pray that priests and consecrated persons live consecrated chastity faithfully and joyfully.

#### 5th Glorious Mystery: The coronation of Mary as Queen of all creation

Through Mary's intercession, let us pray that all Christians- laity, priests and those in consecrated life- collaborate in the building of the Kingdom of God, each according to their vocation.

FR. PETER QUINTO, RCJ

Is a Rogationist priest and assistant pastor at St. Jane of Chantal Catholic Church in North Hollywood, California.

## Vocation Ministries

### Discipline of Practical Steps



Photo by Anthony Del Anio

By Fr. LEANDRO FOSSÁ, CS

In every diocese or religious community there is a fear of being involved in vocation ministry. In fact, it is extremely difficult to find a religious or a priest who would volunteer to do vocation ministry. The fear is based upon the demand imposed on the vocation director and normally, when numbers are down, all members point out to the vocation director as the person to be blamed for the crisis. Talking from a perspective of a religious, the Provincial is desperate to find a vocation director and, when one of the members says yes, the main ministry of a religious order is guaranteed. Therefore, serving as a vocation director is to help out the religious community in its most vital task which will guarantee the future of the Institute.

I have been a vocation director for the Missionaries of Saint Charles-Scalabrinian for the past 7 years. Some practical steps that have helped me in my ministry are:

**To have a call.** When I was assigned by the Provincial in 2012, the first words he said to me were: "your first ministry of vocations is to keep your own vocation." A very important step is to keep the flame of your own call as a vocation director sparkling and kindling. In fact, people look at your eyes more than they listen to your words.

**Prayer and formation.** I recommend the vocation directors to participate in the retreats offered by their own religious community, the diocese, and even organizations who offer assistance to vocation directors. In these past few years being part of NRVC (national religious vocation conference), receiving their training, and participating in their conference has given me support to the journey of guiding those who are called.

**Clarity.** Do not look desperate. Our religious community do not need numbers. What we need is faithful young men and women who are willing to serve the charisma given by the Holy Spirit to our founders. Hence, in every prayer card, poster or letter head the vocation director has to state clearly what is the service/ministry provided by the religious community. The candidate has to be inspired by it, otherwise it is the ministry of the director to direct the candidate to another community.

**Discipline.** Vocation Directors have a very lax schedule and the freedom to build their own framework. If one is not able to put priorities and organize visits, phone calls, prayer time, community time, ministry involvement, and candidates follow ups; one might end up accomplishing very little. In the ministry of vocations, producing material, answering inquiries, connecting through media

(Facebook, what's up...) and preparing talks for retreats is a very important part of the work schedule. In order to accomplish it effectively, discipline is required. Otherwise we will hear from our confreres that "Vocation directors don't have anything to do" and proving them to be right.

**Faith.** I perform many retreats, confirmation talks, young adult camps and visit to parishes throughout the year. It has happened that by May, one month before applications are submitted, there are no inquiries. My advice is to breath and have faith. God always provides but if a vocation director works only to find numbers, he/she might be blinded and miss out that this is a ministry of planting seeds; it is God who does the harvest.

Now I have learned to give my best in the ministry of my community which is serving migrants and refugees. I trust that the end of the day God will show if this Charisma is answering to the signs of the times. ■



FR. LEANDRO FOSSÁ, CS

Is the Vocation Director of the Missionaries of St. Charles Borromeo and holds a Masters of Divinity in Biblical Spirituality. Currently, he is the Parish Administrator of St. Peter's and San Conrado Parish in Los Angeles.

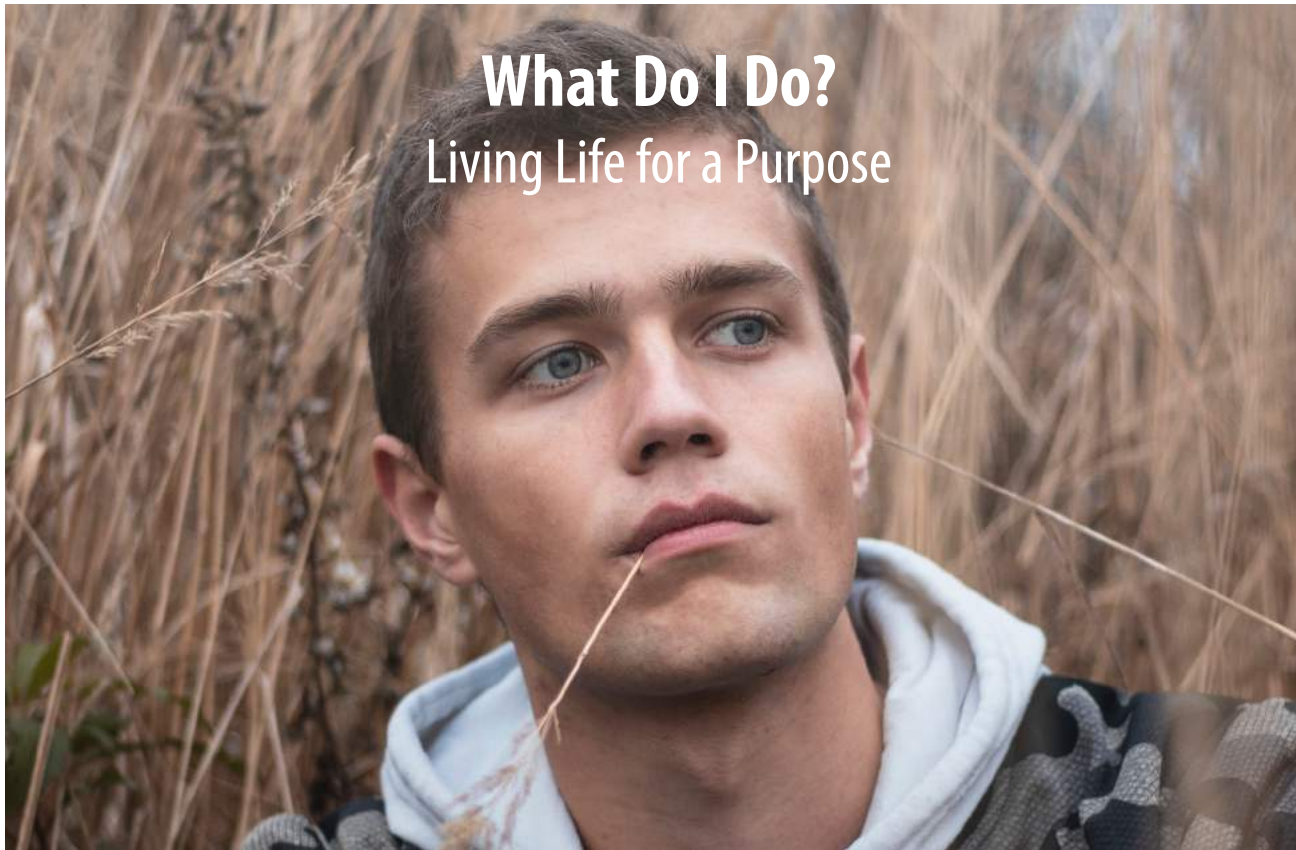


Photo by Norbert Kundrak

## What Do I Do?

### Living Life for a Purpose

By Fr. RENZO GERARDI

**A**long with Adam and Abraham, I would like to use the biblical figure of Moses in our reflection. Our question is **"What do I do?"**

It is not sufficient to know who one is or where one is going. One must reflect on "what do I do?", on "how do I do it?", and on "why do I do it?" What, how, and why?

Adam, Abraham, and Moses are all biblical figures from the past. However, each one of us must always remember: I am Adam, I am Abraham, and I am Moses.

I am Adam – that is, I am a human, man or woman, created by God in his image and likeness, and I am called to a precise task towards the same God and all of creation. I am a human who sins when I do not respect the relationships established by God. But, for this human, for this Adam, and, therefore, for me, there is the hope of God.

I am Abraham – that is, I am called by God in a particular manner, not only to life

but to faith. I am called by a path indicated by God, a God who keeps the promises that he makes.

I am also Moses. Moses is a human who grows and becomes more cognizant of who he is. He observes life around him and notices many injustices. He rebels, even at times in exaggerated and violent ways. He is a human who possesses his own fears, especially when he commits evil actions – and he pays for what he does. He must flee.

Let us observe the Bible. Moses' story begins with him being saved from drowning in the river as a baby, and he is subsequently raised in the pharaoh's court. In Exodus, chapter 2, from v.11 to v.22, we encounter Moses as an adult.

*On one occasion, after Moses had grown up, when he visited his kinsmen and witnessed their forced labor, he saw an Egyptian striking a Hebrew, one of his own kinsmen. Looking about and seeing no one, he slew the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. The next day he went out again, and now two Hebrews were fighting! So he asked the*

*culprit, "Why are you striking your fellow Hebrew?" But he replied, "Who has appointed you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses became afraid and thought, "The affair must certainly be known."*

*Pharaoh, too, heard of the affair and sought to put him to death. But Moses fled from him and stayed in the land of Midian. As he was seated there by a well, seven daughters of a priest of Midian came to draw water and fill the troughs to water their father's flock. But some shepherds came and drove them away. Then Moses got up and defended them and watered their flock. When they returned to their father Reuel, he said to them, "How is it you have returned so soon today?" They answered, "An Egyptian saved us from the interference of the shepherds. He even drew water for us and watered the flock!" "Where is the man?" he asked his daughters. "Why did you leave him there? Invite him to have something to eat." Moses agreed to live with him, and the man gave him his daughter Zipporah in marriage. She bore him a son, whom he named Gershom; for he said, "I am a stranger in a foreign land."*

## A Mission from God

Does it not seem that Moses is a human like so many others? He is a human who rebels against the violence he observes. He must flee because he is pursued. But then he gives up fighting. He takes a wife and has children, a normal family. In Exodus 3.1, it is written that "Meanwhile Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law." There are few things as tranquil as tending to grazing sheep. It is one of the less demanding jobs, a quiet, peaceful task that requires no work for the head apart from thinking of one's own family and of the flock entrusted to one by a father-in-law.

In life, there is the temptation to remain in the situation that is most comfortable – to "tend to the flock of Jethro" without any worries. However, an unforeseen event occurs to Moses. With a sudden summer storm, a beautiful day eventually became filled with thunder, lightning, and rain. The weather changes completely; the temperature lowers significantly. God's call for a mission has arrived. From a spoken perspective, it is a very simple mission. However, it was in reality a very difficult one: "Make my people come out of Egypt."

That Moses who had already demonstrated his love for justice must now return. He must take his place as the leader of a dispersed population. He must follow this new path. However, he does have his doubts. "Who am I to accomplish this? What abilities do I have? What possibility do I have of accomplishing this?"

Chapter 3 of Exodus (7-16) emphasizes God's call to Moses, the mission God entrusts to him, and the revelation of God's name.

Moses, therefore, says: "You have called me. Let's say I accept: I return to Egypt, I reunite the people, and I do what you have told me. But how do I present myself? With which identity card?" God responds: "I Am." It is Yahweh. However, Yahweh is a name that Hebrews will never pronounce or speak. To know the name of another is to have power over him or her. To know one's name facilitates dialogue and communication, as well as possibilities of

power and command. God makes himself known, but his name cannot be "said." No one is above him.

But he is certainly not a stranger: "I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob." He is the God who has already shown himself as "faithful," calling Abraham, making him his promise, and guiding his people. Moses accepts: "Okay, I will go; but I do not know how to speak. I am clumsy with my mouth and with my tongue." Can you imagine a stutterer at the head of an army or a nation? It would be a disaster. But to Moses, God says: "Do not be afraid; there is your brother Aaron; he will help you." This, too, is a sign of God and of his presence.

## A Different Path to Serve God

I observe an additional interesting aspect in this story. I imagine that Moses' stutter was a sign of his shyness. His character ultimately triumphs over his stutter, a victory that is accomplished with the help of others. However, shyness should not hinder the performance of a mission. For Moses, his mission is to go to the pharaoh and to tell him that God had told him: "Hence I tell you: Let my son go, that he may serve me" (Exodus 4.23). The call and the departure are in service of God. However, sometimes, there is a pharaoh (who is inside us) who prevents or hinders our service of God. He does not want us to serve God. This want manifests itself when we are tempted to remain in our given situation, even if it is not extremely comfortable but provides security and tranquility. To leave and to follow a different path is to serve God; it means recognizing God, obeying him, and keeping his commandments. All of these tasks are very demanding, even if it provides freedom. But we must take that risk to serve God.

The task is long and difficult and is in many ways similar to climbing a mountain. Throughout the ascent, we grow fatigued and we sweat, but when we finally arrive at the peak...we experience joy and satisfaction! It is a truly liberating, breathing the pure air and observing the panoramic view...but before leaving there is uncertainty. Moses' experience was similar, and

our own experiences are frequently the same. There will always be the temptation to remain at the bottom of the peak.

So let us reflect; what type of people are we? Are we those who do not dare to risk? Or those who affront difficulties? Let us ask ourselves: what do I do? How do I do it? I believe that Moses asked himself these questions. Do I remain here peacefully as a shepherd? God is calling me to lead my people. Should I accept?

We must constantly reflect on ourselves, regarding our own personal mission and our own personal vocation. How do I do it? The "how" is important. The "why" is important. Do I do it with authenticity? Are these choices or impositions? We do many things by imposition: we must transform them into our own choices. Are our actions the result of reflection or of a sudden gut instinct, as they sometimes are? In my actions, do I act as if I were to change to something else tomorrow or do I give meaning and dedication to my work and choices? Do I take joy in what I do, or do I let the weight and fatigue of living oppress me instead? To arrive to the peak of the mountain becomes increasingly more difficult when there is no joy or conviction. Why do I do everything I do? Is it because someone tells me to do so?

I hope this theme provided meaningful reflection. It is about living life for a purpose and not living so much for a living. As God's people, we must live for ideals, not just for a given day. We must live with "push" and grit. We must live as Moses did, asking "what do I do?" and following God's response. ■

*Translation from Italian by Stephan D. Llerena*



**FR. RENZO GERARDI**

Is professor Emeritus of Moral Theology at the Faculty of Theology of the Pontifical Lateran University (PUL). He was Dean of the Faculty of Theology from 1994 to 2000 and from 2006 to 2012 and Pro-rector of the PUL from 2014 to 2018.

"As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace."

1 Peter 4:10



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Lectio Divina

Romans 12: 3-8

# Discerning Our Vocation Called to Use Our Gifts

By Sr. Emily Beata Marsh, FSP

*"...we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us..."*

**A**s vocation directress for my community, much of my work involves answering questions from young women who are discerning religious life as a vocation. One of the most common questions is: "What advice do you have for those who are discerning religious life?" In addition to prayer (the first and best thing to do in a time of discernment!), another recommendation I often give is to reflect on the gifts that God has given you. St. Paul had the same advice in this passage from his Letter to the Romans!

"We have gifts," says St. Paul. We each have gifts that pertain to every part of our person. We have physical gifts, intellectual gifts, emotional gifts, spiritual gifts. Maybe you have really good eyesight—that's a physical gift. Perhaps you have a knack for writing, or for designing, or for singing, or for engineering—those are intellectual gifts. Are you good at listening to others? That's an emotional gift. Have you ever discovered a deep joy, or a deep courage, and you didn't know where it came from? Those are spiritual gifts.

"We have gifts," says St. Paul. Discernment calls us to come to an ever deeper awareness of the gifts that God has given us. This greater awareness of who we are before God helps us to recognize two things. First, that who we are comes from God. It is God who has given us the gift of who we are, in our body, our personality, our intellect, our will, etc. Fundamentally, we are creatures, which means that we are dependent on God the Creator. This should lead us to gratitude! God loved me into being, and he loved me into being not just as any generic human, but as myself, with my unique personality, gifts, limitations, etc.

"What do you have that you have not received?" (1 Cor 4:17).

Second, greater awareness of the gifts we have received from God helps us to move in the direction God wants us to go. God calls us through our gifts, and he calls us to use our gifts. Our task is to discern what that means. For example, if I have a gift for singing and I truly enjoy singing, does this mean that God is calling me to be a singer? Perhaps, but not necessarily. It might mean that God is calling me to be a singer. Or it might mean that God is calling me to be something else, but to use my gift of singing to give glory to him. I could give glory to God through my singing by singing in church, for example, or by volunteer-



ing with children or with the elderly and singing with them. Or I could give glory to God through my singing simply by enjoying the gift that he has given me and cultivating my singing as a hobby!

Wait a minute—that's a lot of options! Yes, it is. And we haven't yet considered the option that God may call us to a vocation that has nothing to do with our gifts (at least on the surface). Maybe I am a computer programmer and God calls me to religious life in a congregation whose mission is nursing! Or maybe I grew up an only child, and God calls me to be a wife

and mother of several children! Is God crazy? No...it is rather that God is calling us to himself and calling us to surrender ourselves to him, with all of our gifts and limitations. He promises to provide all the gifts and capacities that we need to faithfully live the vocation he calls us to. And he will surprise us—both by calling us to develop gifts we never knew we had, and by the way he calls us to use the gifts that we do have.

"We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us." With St. Paul, then, let us reflect on the gifts that we have received. Who am I? What gifts has God given me? How might he be calling me to surrender my gifts to him; how might he be calling me to use these gifts for his glory?

The last thing that St. Paul reminds us of is also important: "according to the grace given to us." We have no claim on any of our gifts—everything is grace! As we reflect on our gifts, it is important to return to this refrain: "according to the grace given us." Our first response and the first movement of discernment is gratitude for the grace of God. "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor 15:10). It is gratitude that moves us to respond to God, and even our response is by his gift and his grace. And his grace is enough for us!

*God the Father, thank you for creating me with all my gifts and limitations. Jesus Master, I surrender myself and all my gifts to you. Holy Spirit, I trust in your guidance as I seek to use my gifts in the world. Amen. ■*



**SR. EMILY BEATA MARSH, FSP**

Professed her final vows in June 2018. Sister Emily is currently the National Vocation Director for the Daughters of St. Paul.

# Anointed to Anoint

## Priesthood and Future Vocations

By Fr. JOSÉ-ROMÁN FLECHA

In the homily of this year's Chrism Mass celebrated on Holy Thursday at St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican, Pope Francis identified priests with some of the biblical figures mentioned in the Gospels. In fact, Pope Francis noted that the priest is represented in the poor who approached Jesus, in the blind Bartimaeus who asked for alms on the road to Jericho, and even in the man wounded by bandits. The priest also waits to be attended by the Good Samaritan so he can feel compassionate for all those who suffer.

We know that during the Chrism Mass, bishops bless the oil and consecrate the holy chrism. In this context, Pope Francis referred to the mission entrusted to the ministerial priest by saying: "We are anointed to anoint. We anoint by distributing ourselves, distributing our vocation and our heart." Pope Francis' words help us to consider the identity of the priest and his mission in the Church.

### The Mother Church and the Daughter Church

No one is Christian in solitude. We are not orphans or abandoned Christians, nor can priests understand, live, and fulfill in a solitary and desert autonomy.

The Church is our mother. In its bosom we have found Jesus Christ and we have received the life of the children of God. In the Church we have grown in faith, in hope and in charity. The Church has called us. We have received the call of God through the Church, that is, the Christian vocation and the priestly vocation.

The Holy Fathers also referred to the Church as our daughter. Each of us Christians have the honor and responsibility to imagine the Church of the future, to offer our strength and our collaboration so that, thanks to the Spirit of God, the Church can



Photo by Archdiocese of Los Angeles Vocations Office

be born, grow and "bear fruit in charity for life "of the world." Each one of us have a link in the chain of followers of Jesus. The exhortation of the Lord is addressed to all of us: "The harvest is great, but the workers are few. Pray, then, the owner of the harvest to send workers to his harvest"(Mt 9,37-38).

However, all this can be said in a special way of the priests. The priests know well that they have been called lovingly and freely by the Lord to go to work in his vineyard. In fact, all priests have been anointed to give their existence to God and to their brothers with sincere generosity. They have been sent to announce and make visible the gospel, in the humble service to all the sons and daughters of God.

Like all others, priests are very aware that their earthly life is very short. They are one more link in a long chain of believers and ministers of the Lord, although they know well that the chain of the proclamation of the gospel can not end with them. The message must survive the messenger. Hence, each priest feels called by the same God to transmit the torch of faith

and the vocation that he himself has freely received.

### To Cultivate New Vocations

In the message that Pope emeritus Benedict XVI addressed to the whole Church, in preparation for the 47th World Day of Prayer for Vocations (April 25, 2010), he already underlined this urgency to cultivate new priestly and religious vocations in the Church. To carry out that mission, he suggested some paths especially necessary at this time.

The first of the means to "cultivate" priestly vocations is the same testimony of a priest's life. His human attitude and his life of faith must be - and they are in reality - the first call addressed to young people who seek a religious meaning for their lives. Freedom from the pressures and ideologies of this world and the serene joy of the priest can reveal to young people today the greatness and beauty of a life fully dedicated to the Lord and his brothers.

Secondly, we must always remember

the value of prayer. A vocation is a free gift of God to his Church. In fact, the prayer of priests can and should be oriented frequently to the promotion of vocations to the priestly life and consecrated life. This affirmation and this desire is valid for the priest's private prayer. But it is also valid for the public prayer of the Church. Within the ecclesial community the priests ask the Lord of the harvest to send new workers to the fields of evangelization.

And thirdly, the ecclesial nature of the priests must be attractive to those who remain open to the Lord's call. As Thomas Merton wrote, "no man is an island." Nor is the priest. He comes from his community and his life is oriented every day to the service of such community. Now, the joy experienced by the priest in knowing that he belongs to the family of the Church, that he is called to collaborate with her and in her to the spreading of the Gospel message can not be indifferent to the children of the Church who seek to serve all the sons and daughters of God.

## A Testimony of Life

Nowadays, the entire Church is rightly concerned about the scarcity of vocations that is observed in some countries with a long Christian tradition. And, at the same time, she tries to devote her attention to the formation of priestly vocations that are born in countries of recent evangelization.

Priests, for their part, must pray and strive to share a testimony of life that reflects the dignity and beauty of their vocation and their priestly ministry.

In his recent apostolic exhortation *Christus vivit* (25.3.2019), addressed to young people and to all the people of God, Pope Francis dedicated the eighth chapter to a reflection on the theme of vocation. In this context, he wrote that if we truly believe that the Spirit continues to inspire vocations to the priesthood, we must be willing to "cast the nets" in the name of the Lord. Every priest should dare to propose to each young man that

he asks himself the question of his availability to listen and follow the call of Jesus (ChV 275).

However, in the ninth chapter of this same exhortation, Pope Francis briefly introduced a topic that is more current than is commonly thought. After the Second Vatican Council the question of the identity of the ordained priest has often been debated. Well, Pope Francis writes that it is a waste of time to stop and ask: "Who am I?" The real question would have to be: "Who am I for?"

Thus, the question about the identity of the priest is resolved and answered in the consideration of his mission and of his surrender to all the sons and daughters of God. In the formulation of that question and in the sincerity of the response of the personal dedication to God and to his Church is the key to his priestly vocation. And in that question is also the key to the vocations that priests are called to arouse and promote in the people of God.

The priests are a humble echo of the voice of God. They have been called to call. They have been anointed to anoint, they have been blessed to bless others.

It is true that in these times, social media often magnifies the faults of some priests. The whole Church is concerned with preventing and eradicating those unworthy behaviors of the Christian life. However, the whole Church hopes that in the bosom of Christian families, children and young people will perceive concrete signs of esteem and affection towards priests, so that the seed of vocation can find a land prepared to grow and give an abundant, healthy and nutritious fruit. ■

*Translated from Spanish by Monica J. Llerena*



**FR. JOSÉ-ROMÁN FLECHA**

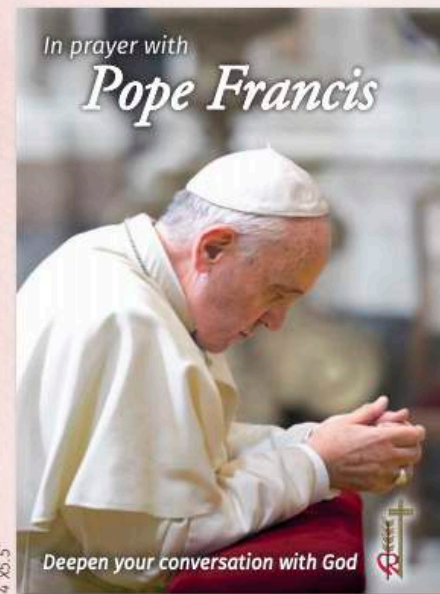
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# Following a Supernatural Desire

## My Vocation Story



Photo by Samuel Zeller

By ANDREW HEDSTROM

It was 1997, and at 10-years-old I returned to the Church for the first time since my First Communion. My parents were never terribly religious, but both sets of grandparents attended Mass weekly, if not daily. One Sunday my maternal grandparents had brought me to church. I remember the moment well; we sat in the back and the music began playing, the procession started down the central aisle of the nave, the altar servers were in cassock and surplice, the priest in his Sunday vestments. As they processed towards the steps leading up to the altar, a single thought made its way to my consciousness, “I want to do that.” I expressed these sentiments to my grandparents, and by that Wednesday I was back at church training to be an altar server.

Fast forward to my senior year of high school. I was asked to help teach Confirmation after receiving the sacrament the year prior. I began to delve more into the

teachings of the Catholic Church to prepare to lead classes with the confirmation students. The more I read and learned, the more I hungered and thirsted for the wisdom of Holy Mother Church. From the Catechism of the Catholic Church to papal documents, there was such a depth of truth that I had never seen in my religious or secular education. It was as if all the questions and ailments of the culture and society at large were answered before my eyes. The more I learned, the more I shared, not just in confirmation classes, but also in my public-school classes.

During a World History class, the teacher, who was anti-Catholic, asked, “Do Catholics even believe in the Real Presence anymore?” A fellow Catholic piped up, “We attend Mass every weekend, but most Catholics don’t think it’s actually Jesus. It’s just bread and wine.” Because of all I had read and studied I knew that wasn’t true. I couldn’t just let it go. Now, I was a very shy

kid in high school, but I raised my hand (something I never did) and corrected him. “Actually, Catholics still teach and believe in the Real Presence. It’s not an easy concept to understand, but transubstantiation is real.” I went on, with a shaky voice, to talk about Aristotle, his distinction between accidents and substance; it may look like bread and wine, but as Catholics we must hold that the substance does change, that it really and truly becomes the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. After this, the teacher and fellow classmates asked me a question directly related to my vocation: “Andrew, are you going to be a priest?” My reply was, “Absolutely not. I like girls.” It was a ridiculous response, but what can you expect from a 17-year-old in public school?

While my outward response was no, my conversation with God was different. With God it became a negotiation: “Okay God, only if you appear and tell me to be a

priest." But I realized that was unfair; the Father isn't going to come down to earth to tell me to be a priest. So, then my response became, "Okay God, if your Son comes down." Again, unfair. "Okay, if Mary comes down, then I'll be a priest." I figured a Marian apparition wasn't out of the question, as those still occur with some regularity; the negotiation stayed like that for some time.

My first year in college I started taking the question of priesthood seriously while remaining open to marriage and family life. I attended Mass more frequently and began to visit the Blessed Sacrament in a local adoration chapel. As my prayer life increased, so did awareness of my vocation along with the fear of committing myself to the priesthood of Jesus Christ. So, I ran. Before the end of my second year of college I joined the Military Police Corps in the US Army. I didn't realize it then, but I was running away from a deepening awareness of a potential vocation to the priesthood. It was easier to commit to an 8-year contract with Uncle Sam than it was to commit myself to a lifetime of service to Jesus Christ and His Church.

The next 6 years saw my discernment ebb and flow. Some months I was gung ho about entering seminary, and other months I was scared at the prospect of doing something so outside of societal norms; I still struggled with the idea of marriage and family life. On a deep level, I still very much wanted and was attached to the idea of having a wife and kids. It took many visits to the Blessed Sacrament before I was finally willing to accept even the possibility of a life without them.

Shortly after enlisting in the Army I was introduced to a priest of Opus Dei, he became my spiritual director. I expressed my dual desires to him: family life, and priesthood. He explained it like this, "At the natural level we desire a wife and kids, but at the supernatural level we desire the priesthood. If you find that you have two competing desires, then the supernatural desire should win out, as not everyone finds themselves with the desire to the priesthood." After listening to my spiritual director, I realized he was right; it then

became easier to accept a life dedicated to Jesus Christ. It was okay to choose one desire over the other; my spiritual director brought clarity to a confused mind.

In 2012, towards the end of my enlistment, I was attending a local Catholic hospital for daily Mass. It was December 12th, the feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Immediately after receiving communion I was back at the pew, kneeling in prayer. I hadn't thought about the priesthood for 6 months, maybe a year. But out of nowhere the word, "priesthood," popped into mind. The Hound of Heaven had pursued me since I was 10-years-old; after having run so far for so long, I finally relented. The fact that this happened on a feast day of Our Lady wasn't lost on me, either. It immediately called to mind my earlier negotiations with Our Lord. God had finally caught me, and I was happy that He did!

I sat with this for a few months to make sure the desire to join seminary and begin my journey towards the priesthood didn't disappear like it had before. When I finally met with my spiritual director, I told him that I was ready, and that I wanted to enter seminary. I remember fondly his words to me, "Oh, I've known for a while now. I've just been waiting on you." Applying to seminary felt right; there was no question in my mind about my readiness to enter, there were no doubts about what I might be called to do. I was all in. And so, after a year of living in LA County while I was working the Port of Long Beach doing Anti-Terrorism with the Army, I applied to seminary with the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. And I haven't looked back since. ■



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# Mission Impossible

## Far from my Comfort Zones

By DEACON MARK ROBIN DESTURA

### A Family that Prays Together

From the beginning of my life's journey, I was blessed with the gift of a God-fearing and loving family. We prayed together the rosary every night. My parents became active members in our parish, my father as a minister of Holy Communion, and my mother as a member with the charismatic movement. Also, both of them were part of the Marriage Encounter ministry. I was brought up in a serene environment and my childhood was filled with fun and adventure. Our parents sent my siblings and I to Catholic schools to learn Christian values and the Gospel. The Daughters of Charity taught me their way of simple living and their active involvement in the life of the poor.

I realized how blessed I was and wished to dedicate my life to help the poor. I surrounded myself with good friends who were by my side as I grew up. I became adventurous, easy going, and living a life with fun and humor. In the midst of difficulties, I ran to my father and mother where I found a listening ear and unwavering help. They assured me of their confidence and support as I continued to grow and mature as a young man. They raised me to stand on my own, gave me a proper education, and supported me in whatever I wished to do with my life. They taught me to pray, to have an encounter with God, particularly the Eucharist, and the devotion to the Blessed Mother.

### A Search for Meaning and Purpose

Growing up my priorities were to get to know myself better and to embark on a journey filled with adventure and meaning. A school friend who applied to several religious seminaries invited me to take the entrance test to the Rogationist Congregation. I passed. Having no idea I wanted to become a priest or religious, and just out of curiosity, I told my parents I would enter the seminary for one year. I would decide then if I would continue or not. Two of my brothers were in college at the time, and I knew my parents could not afford to help all of us. During the first months at the seminary, I stayed inside my room and did not purchase a snack to save for my seminary's tuition.

God's providence came when the Ambassador of the Philippines to the Vatican, Leonida Vera, was looking for scholars. I was selected to become one and received a scholarship for eight years. I study really hard to show gratitude to the many people helping and supporting me.

My experience at the seminary fulfilled me, especially as I became interested in promoting vocations and working with poor children. I have always been passionate about learning, developing new skills, and exploring interesting fields. I made my first profession and continued my life's journey with the community of the Rogationists, friends, and an apostolate filled with challenges and difficulties. The vocation that I received was sustained by the support of my family and also the Family of the Rogate (an association of the families of seminarians, religious and priests). We gathered together to pray for vocations, to promote and animate vocations, to reach out for the poor, but most importantly, we gather together to support and strengthen each other in whatever problems that we had.

### A Life on a Mission

After I finished my theology studies, I was assigned to a remote and rural area. At first, I felt I could not stay there for a long period of time. However, I began to challenge myself and to learn simple and practical skills: to plant rice and vegetables, to raise chickens, to beg in the stores for food, to repair things at the church, to deal with people living in rural areas, to cope with the slow pace of time, and to persevere with the little that I had. To save money, I traveled for nine hours to give recollections and retreats to high school students, college students, and teachers for many years. I taught Philosophy and Theology in college for three years and recommended many poor young people from our parish to enroll in the seminary. In addition, I would personally travel with young students from poor and rural areas to the city to apply for full scholarship programs that would help them go to college. I worked primarily with young people and children, giving them recollections and retreats, and keeping them active in the ministry of the church. I

organized youth activities for them and at the same time taught them how to organize things by themselves. For many years, I was thankful that some of them pursue priesthood and religious life. It was a humbling experience.

I strived to share whatever God has given me. With the help of my friends, I organized skills development training for young and old alike. We offered them guitar, piano, and drum lessons, Google-related classes, computer assembly and repair, social communication, and many other skill-building lessons. Most importantly, we taught them Christian values and prayer. I persevered encountering Jesus constantly in the Blessed Sacrament, the celebration of the Eucharist, and the devotion to the Virgin Mary.

### Keep Going and Persevere

Without any planning and after many unexpected events, I ended up in the United States. It has been a life-changing experience. I brought with me the passion for learning and the openness to new things, entrusting everything according to His plan. It was hard for me to be far from my family, confreres, close friends, hobbies, and my comfort zones. I needed to adjust into a multicultural community and to learn new ways of communication, relationships, and ways of doing things. However, with the help of my Rogationist confreres, and little by little, I have gotten familiar with my new environment and have tried to help as much as possible. I always remember the words of my spiritual director: "When God calls the only answer is generosity and availability in whatever situation you might be." With God's help and mercy, I persevere. God has not finished his work with me yet. He has a beautiful plan for you and for me. ■



MARK ROBIN DESTURA

Is a transitional Deacon from the Philippines with the Congregation of the Rogationists Fathers of the Heart of Jesus. He is currently assigned in St. Jane Frances de Chantal Parish in North Hollywood, California.

# Gospel Guns

How “the Word,” weaponized, wounds the most vulnerable among us



Photo by Andrew Neel

By DR. BRUCE L. THIESSEN, PH.D.

Jesus said that “The meek shall inherit the earth,” but when confronted by the not-so-meek, the meek often feel like all they’ll ever inherit is the hurt.

Hiding behind the notion of “speaking the truth in love,” all too many among us, adopt a very selective, hand-picked version of “truth,” and forget, altogether about the “love” part of that speaking activity. That’s the biggest omission of the great commission.

In 2 Timothy 2:15, we are given these instructions, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.”

Do you accurately handle the word of truth, or are you reckless—preferring to cherry-pick specific verses that, in your mind, give you permission to judge your brothers and sisters in Christ, or to render uninviting, an “invitation” to a non-believer to accept Christ, under the threat of eternal condemnation, essentially offering a Hobson’s choice?

If you are among the latter, I don’t want to point fingers, and be the very judgmental person I am in the process of warning people about. But I do want to introduce to you, the power of the gospel, to either lift up, and encourage our brothers and sisters, or to do psychological harm, that, for the meek among us, could take years of therapy to even begin to ease. For the accuser, I offer a word of caution. For the accused, I will

try to be an advocate.

God allowed me, (somebody that some may wish to be more of a Dr. Phil), to be a wounded healer, at the receiving end of some peoples’ misplaced judgment—just enough to be able to feel some of the pain that many of my meek brothers and sisters in Christ, have had to endure.

Much to my chagrin, I was also, at one point in my life, the instigator of that some sort of word-weaponry, though, one could argue, I was too young to be wholly responsible, and merely mimicking older adults—fellow congregants, if you will.

Yes, at the tender age of 11, I was learning, through modeling, and prac-

ting the art of weaponizing scripture, for the purpose of casting judgement on others, and to scare kids my age into the kingdom, shooting out scriptures such as "Depart from me, I never knew you," from my brand new gospel gun. I was like a young Saul lite—that is St. Paul, before he was Paul, when he was persecuting believers.

However, instead of persecuting believers, I was "persecuting" unbelievers. Yes, persecuting may be an exaggeration, but, by being at the receiving end of those weaponized words from the scriptures years later, I would understand, on a very personal level, the destructive power of "the word," weaponized.

According to the unvarnished, un-weaponized words of the Bible, Jesus also was at the receiving end of the weaponization of scriptures, during the 40 days in which he wandered about, in the wilderness. According to the scriptures, Satan weaponized scripture for his own purpose, to trap Jesus into sinning, and thus, relinquishing his status as the sinless one, who would bear the sins of the world, and take our place on the cross. Jesus felt the weight of that temptation, just as those who are

condemned by scripture-quoting so-called "believers," feel the weight of the guilt and shame that is projected upon them by their accusers.

Since Jesus has been the victim of weaponized scripture, what greater advocate to turn to, when struck by the Bible bullets of a loaded gospel gun? Of course, depending on the extent of the damage done to you, Jesus may also call upon a mental health professional, or two, to be his healing hands.

"The accuser of the brethren," is a term reserved for Satan himself, so it is no longer a term I would want attached to my reputation. Likewise, I would urge you, the reader, to also reconsider when tempted to cherry-pick verses, weaponize them, and then shoot down a brother or sister with you gospel gun. As Jesus once said, "Let him, who is without sin, cast the first stone." By the same token, "Let him who is without sin," be the first to load the gun with Bible bullets, take aim at the meek, and then take the first shot with the gospel gun.

And to the gospel-gun-Bible-bullet

wounded, I would say, don't let anyone judge you for being human, and for making mistakes (even profound ones); or for going through periods of doubt and questioning of your faith (something that an accuser may easily misconstrued as open rebellion against God).

If someone else cherry-picked verses to condemn you with, you much counter that selective harvesting with a little cherry picking of your own. I'd recommend "cherries" like "There is, therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," (Romans 8:1) or "As far as the East is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." ■



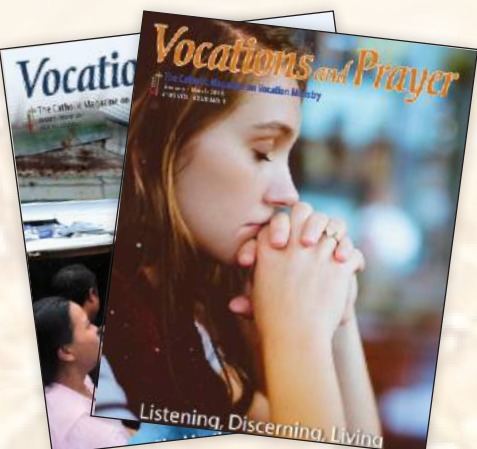
**DR. BRUCE L. THIESEN, Ph.D.**

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## "Encuentra Tu Vocación" Promoting Vocations in Social Media

"Encuentra tu Vocación" is a live weekly broadcast on Facebook hosted by Fr. Antonio Fiorenza, Director of the Rogate Center in Van Nuys, California, and Socorro Cruz, renowned news anchor and television reporter.

The Spanish live stream program seeks to spread a culture of vocations through insightful discussions about how to follow our vocation in life. Father Antonio and Socorro welcome every week special guests who share their vocation stories and engage in a lively and meaningful conversation.

Please follow Antonio Fiorenza on Facebook every Thursday at 6:30 PST.

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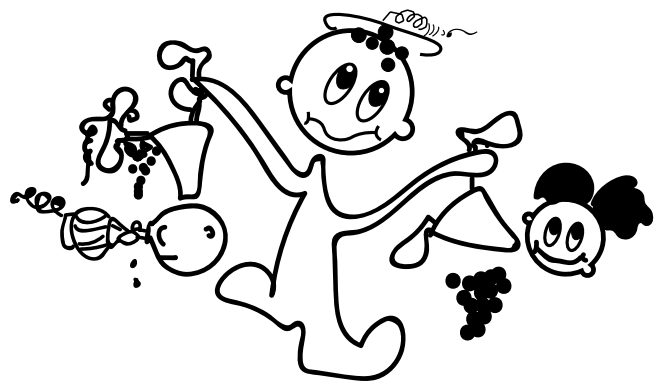
## Called to Become a Voice for the Voiceless Catholic Day of Action

A coalition of Catholic priests, sisters, brothers, and lay people gathered at the nation's Capitol on July 18, 2019 to protest against the treatment of immigrant children at the Southern border. Many activists were arrested for participating in the nonviolent civil disobedience protest, among them, Fr. William Critchley-Menor, SJ, a young Jesuit priest from St. Louis, and 90-year old Sister Patricia M. Murphy from Chicago.

In a video posted in the Jesuit News Twitter account, Fr. Menor, right before his arrest, stated that "the treatment (the children) are receiving is completely incompatible and contrary to the message of Jesus Christ" and reminded us that the "Holy Father calls us to a 'revolution of tenderness.'" Authorities released Father Menor and Sister Murphy hours after their arrest.

CORNER MESSAGE

Remain in me...



Inspired by Sister Maria Rosa Guerrini

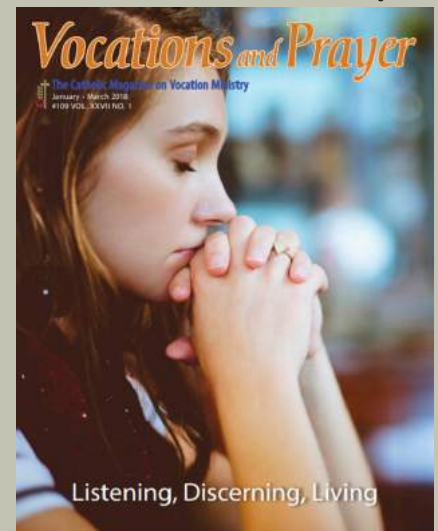
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