

21. Vocation & Discernment.

All the baptised are called to holiness – this is the foundation of all vocations within the Church. Vocation therefore is the path [call] that God has uniquely set out for each soul to love God and serve his people.

Discernment [through prayer] is the process through which we recognise that call.

Key terms:

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| Vocation: | From the Latin <i>vocare</i> meaning to call. 1) The call from God to love and serve him; 2) the call from God for a specific kind of love and service in the married state, the single state, or in Holy Order or the consecrated life. |
| Vow: | A free and solemn promise before God. |
| Discernment: | The process of learning through prayer and counsel the will of God in one's life. |
| Celibacy: | A freely chosen state or condition to remain unmarried for the sake of serving God and to enable an individual to give himself or herself fully to God and the service of others. |
| Consecrate: | 1) To make holy or set apart for God; 2) through a priest praying the words Jesus said at the Last Supper and the power of the Holy Spirit, to change bread and wine into Jesus' Body and Blood. |
| Evangelical Counsels: | Voluntary poverty, unmarried chastity, and obedience undertaken for the purpose of perfecting Christian charity. |

GOD THE FATHER'S CALL (Is. 6:8, Eph. 2:10)

- Our vocation is how God the Father desires each of us to reach our goal of holiness and salvation.
- Each of us is called to a major state in life: marriage, Holy Orders, Religious Life, or single life.
- Our vocation is how God the Father intends to fashion us by grace in the image of his beloved Son.
- We seek holiness within the ordinariness of daily life.
- Through the Holy Spirit, grace is given to live out one's vocation. (1Cor. 10:13)

DISCERNING THE FATHER'S CALL

- **Who I am called to be** – the core of my identity, as created by God and baptised in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit;
- **How I am called to live** – my commitments of lifestyle and relationships, whether marriage, parents, the single life or vowed celibate life;
- **What I am called to do** – the work, service or activities that fill my daily life.

THE CALL TO HOLY ORDERS (Mt. 19:11-12)

- Some men are called to be deacons or priests.
- The Church determines if the call is genuine, and summons some priests to become bishops.
- In the Latin Rite, religious order priests make vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience to God in the presence of their religious superior; diocesan and secular priests make promises, not vows, of celibacy and obedience to their bishop, as well as a promise of prayer.
- Men in Holy Orders are called to build up the Kingdom of God in complete service, most importantly in bringing the sacraments to the faithful.

THE CALL TO MARRIAGE (Eph. 5:21-23)

- Marriage is a vocation that stands at the service of building up the Kingdom of God.
- The husband and wife are called to be the instruments of each other's sanctification.
- Parents are called to the service of life through the procreation and education of their children.
- The principal duty of parents to their children is to lead them to God.

THE CALL TO RELIGIOUS LIFE (Mt. 19:27-29)

- Some men and women (both laymen and those in Holy Orders) serve the Kingdom of God through the taking public vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.
- Religious Life is lived within a religious order under a rule of life with a specific spirituality and apostolate:
 - 1) Contemplative apostolate of prayer for the world's salvation.
 - 2) Active apostolates include missionary work, preaching, teaching and works of mercy.

THE CALL TO THE SINGLE STATE IN THE WORLD (1Cor 7:32-35)

- Some are called to the consecrated life of a hermit: solitude, silence, prayer and penance.
- Some are called to be virgins or widows, publicly consecrated to Christ while living in the world.
- Some are called to live a consecrated life of a secular institute dedicated to sanctifying the world.
- Some are called to join societies of apostolic life whose constitutions do not call for the Evangelical Counsels but who seek the perfection of charity.

All vocations call those within them to a life of sacrificing, dying to self, striving for holiness, all for the sake of a loving response to Jesus' self-gift on the cross (1Jn. 4:7-18)

STEPS IN THE PROCESS OF DISCERNMENT

- Personal relationship with Christ
- Pray for guidance
- Listen
- Pay attention to the gifts and talents you have been given by God
- Seek advice – spiritual director
- Look to Jesus as the model for all decision making
- Know God, know true peace

EXPLORE!

- Discuss: When you hear the word “vocation”, what do you think about? Can you define vocation in your own words?
- Explore with the candidates their understanding on God’s mission/plan/vocation for them. How do they know God’s presence and movement in their life? Have there been patterns or ways the Lord has revealed something to them?
(1Sam 3:1-10; Jer 1:4-9; Jer. 29:11-16; Rom. 8:37-39)
- What things about the candidate’s relationship with God do they want to share with others?
- Prayer is an essential tool in the process of discernment. How important is prayer in the candidate’s life?
- Explore with the candidates the various ways they can listen to God’s will?

Vocation & Discernment — Suggested Questions for Discussion:

1. What is the difference between a vocation and job? Why do we need to discern our vocation?
2. Why is it important to pray for vocations to priesthood and religious life?
3. What would a call from God look like? How does God communicate with us? What message did God communicate to you? How do you know the message is from God and not your imagination?
4. Why can there sometimes be a tension between God’s call and our response?
5. What things help to make a good marriage and a happy family? What are the most important values for family life? What can make family life difficult?

PRAYER

Psalm 16 or Psalm 27

or

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| Gospel Reflection: | Year A | Mt. 17:1-9 |
| | Year B | Mk. 9:2-10 |
| | Year C | Lk. 9:28-36 |

The following format will be used for all Gospel reflections:

- Read the text aloud.
- Pause for a minute's silence.
- Read the text aloud again.
- Ask everyone to pick a word or a phrase that struck them. They just say the word or phrase without comment or discussion.
- Read the text again.
- Ask those present to comment on their word or phrase. What struck them about it? Why/how is it speaking to them?
- Continue with the discussion.

The following questions may be helpful:

What does this mean to me?

How does it make me feel?

Did I find the text disturbing/hopeful/confusing?

What images of God emerge for me?

What do I think that God is saying in this text?

What impact does this have on my life?

Scripture and Catechism Resources

Vocation & Discernment

Scripture

- Gen. 1:27-28 Vocation of our first parents to have children and fill the earth.
- Gen. 12:1 God calls Abram to lead His people to the land that he will show him.
- Ex. 3:10-16 God calls and sends Moses to lead his people from slavery in Egypt.
- 1Sam 3:2-18 God calls Samuel in the tabernacle. Eli helps Samuel discern the call.
- 1Kgs. 19:11-13 Elijah discerns the call of the Lord.
- Is. 6:1-8 Isaiah has a vision of Heavenly worship and bewails his unworthiness; his lips are cleansed by a burning coal and he eagerly responds to God's call.
- Jer. 1:4-19 Jeremiah was called by God to be his prophet even before his conception, and despite his youth, God will tell him what to say and give him strength.
- Ez. 3:1-4 God calls Ezekiel, nourishes him with His word and sends him out to the people of Israel.
- Mt. 5:48 Our call is to be perfect as God the Father is perfect.
- Mt. 16:24 Disciples of Jesus must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow him.
- Mt. 19:11-12 God calls some to perfect chastity for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven.
- Mt. 19:6-22 Jesus calls a rich young man to the perfection of poverty.
- Mt. 19:27-29 Those who leave everyone and everything for Jesus' sake will receive far more than they gave up, and will receive life everlasting.
- Mk. 10:21 Jesus invites the rich young man to sell everything and he will find his treasure in heaven.
- Lk. 9:59-62 The call to follow Jesus must be one of conviction, without conditions.
- Jn. 6:38 Jesus came from Heaven to be perfectly obedient to his Father.
- Jn. 15:16 The apostles were chosen by Jesus and appointed by him in their vocation.
- Rom 1:1-7 St. Paul is called to be an apostle to preach the gospel.
- 1Cor 7:32-35 Voluntarily unmarried men and women can devote themselves to the Lord.
- 1Cor 12:4-13 There are a variety of gifts with everyone called to different kinds of service.
- Eph. 2:10 God has prepared the path of each person; the good works that we are to do to please him.
- Eph. 5:21-33 The vocation of the husband and wife within Christian marriage.
- Heb. 5:5-10 God called Jesus to be our High Priest and he was perfected in obedience.
- 1Jn. 4:7-18 We love, because God loved us and calls us to respond to that love to be perfected in him.

Catechism

- 543 All people are called to the Kingdom of God.
- 863 All Christians are called to the apostolate.
- 873 Each of the faithful has his or her own assignment within the Church's mission.
- 898-900 The vocation of the lay faithful.
- 914-933 The vocation of consecrated men and women in the Church.
- 1547-1553 The vocation of men in Holy Orders.
- 1603-1605 The vocations of men and women to marriage.
- 1616-1617 Christian Matrimony as a sign of the love of Christ and his Church.
- 1618-1620 The value of voluntary virginity for the sake of the kingdom.
- 1721 We have been created to know, love, and serve God in this world, and to live eternally with him in Heaven.
- 1973-1974 The purpose of practising the Evangelical Counsels (poverty, chastity and obedience).