

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

April 5, 2014

Spiritual Ponderings

Exploring Vocations

For the month of April, I would like to take a closer look at what the Church means by vocations. As we enter into this month's reflection, please note that I will not be writing about any one specific vocation in the Church but rather working on this radical idea that God chooses to let us be his co-workers.

As we begin our pondering of the idea of vocation let us look at Luke's story about how Peter, James, and John became disciples of Jesus:

**While the crowd was pressing in on Jesus and listening to the word of God, he was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret. He saw two boats there alongside the lake; the fishermen had disembarked and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, he asked him to put out a short distance from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. After he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch." Simon said in reply, "Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets." When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come to help them. They came and filled both boats so that they were in danger of sinking. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at the knees of Jesus and said, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." For astonishment at the catch of fish they had made seized him and all those with him, and likewise James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners of Simon. Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." When they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him. (Luke 5:1-11)**

The first thing I would like to do is point out that when Peter first encounters Jesus, he does not have a real clue to who Jesus truly was. Jesus probably appeared to Peter as somewhat of a jerk because the Lord barges into Peter's boat and somewhat of a know-it-all because he instructs Peter in fishing despite the fact that Peter was the expert fisherman and Jesus was not. It turned out though that Jesus was more than he appeared because He was God. A true Christian vocation comes out of the realization that God knows better than us and that God's "pushiness" comes from his desire to be with us. Secondly Peter realizes that he is a sinner and begs Jesus to leave. Jesus chooses not to leave but rather calls Peter to follow Him. Only when we realize like Peter that we are not perfect and that we need a savior can we then follow a savior. The fact that Jesus did not walk away lets us know that none of our sins will prevent us from becoming his coworkers. Finally Peter is at a moment in his life where he has everything he could ever dream of including wealth beyond imagination with the great catch of fish but Peter must have sensed that this wealth would not make him truly happy and so he decides to leave all of this wealth behind in order to follow Jesus. While we may never have all the wealth that we want like Peter at a certain point in our lives we have to decide to follow Jesus because we believe Jesus alone will lead us to happiness.

As Catholics we believe that there are three levels of meaning to the word "vocation". The first level is what Catholics refer to as the Universal Call to Holiness. The call is universal because it is a call that everyone receives from God. To put it simply, Every Catholic is called to love like God loves. No matter what our state in life we believe that God has called us to bring and manifest his love in the world.

The second level of the vocation refers to how God desires us to manifest His love in the world. We are called to love in the world in one of four ways: priesthood, religious, married, or single. Each of these vocations is equal but each is different.

Finally the third level of vocation could better be defined as our career. What does God want me to do with my gifts and talents? Should I teach, enter the business world, or be a doctor? It is important not to get the second and third level confused. No one should ever say, "I do not want to be a priest, because I want to be a doctor," because priests can become doctors. No one should say, that "I want to be a teacher therefore I should be a religious."

**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**

**April 12, 2014**

**Spiritual Ponderings**

**Exploring Vocations**

As we continue our look at what Catholics mean about vocations this month, let us look at the three stages of a vocation. The first stage of a vocation is what we might call the discerning or searching stage. This stage is important because it is at this stage that we ask ourselves "What does God want me to do with my life?" or "What did God create me to do?" It is here that we realize that our lives are not our own. Just as Jesus laid down his life in service of the Father's will, we are called by God to lay down our lives in the service of God's kingdom. As Catholics we know that if we do things are way, we will only end up in trouble and so discovering God's will for my life, is not always easy, but is worth it for it will lead us to true happiness.

The second stage of a vocation is called the probation stage. For a young couple who are feeling called to marriage they began to explore the possibility of marriage. The question that they must ask themselves is "Am I willing to change into the person that the other person wants me to be and I am willing to tolerate the imperfections in the other person." Am I willing to tolerate the fact that he talks with his mouthful or that she does not empty the dishwasher. In the seminary and religious life a person enters into formation (a program that includes, academic, spiritual, emotional, and physical training to help shape the person into the person the Church needs him or her to be.

The final stage of a vocation is called the oblation part and this is where the person commits him or herself to living out one's vocation to the best of his or her ability. Like jumping out of a plain they are all in.

The following Discernment Tips are from Vocation.Com.

### **Discernment 101**

Have you felt a certain stirring in your heart that you know you must investigate further? Has someone told you, "Have you ever thought about being a priest" or "Have you ever thought about being a nun"? You want to put God first in your life and find out what his plan is for you but you don't know where to begin. The below outline will help you to take the first step in discerning God's will and give you some additional insight into your true vocation.

**First**, look at Christ's love and see what that stirs in your heart. When you stop and think about his sacrifice, are there times you want to follow him, to be totally his and give yourself to him without reserve, and to put everything you have into bringing him to others?

**Second**, take a good look at all he has given you: the gift of life, the gift of faith, your health, the opportunities you have had, possibly your conversion. See if there are some things that might point in the direction of a vocation, like the difference between the way you look on life to the way your friends do...

**Third**, get some advice from a good priest in Confession. Go over your life with him and be frank about the good and bad you see there, and ask him if he believes anything in your past might be a definitive obstacle to your having a vocation. If he doesn't, it is one more reason to look more closely at the vocation.

**Fourth**, visit a seminary or community that attracts you and see what God stirs in your heart while you are there. That would also be a good time to have an in-depth talk with the vocation director, similar to the one you had in Confession. See if based upon what you tell him he recommends that you take a further step. If both he and your confessor encourage you to follow up on it, these as well as the interior attraction you feel would be the main signs pointing toward a vocation.

**Fifth**, some advice regarding your feelings: they are fickle, they change on the shortest notice with or without warning. One day they can be so positive that you find it impossible to doubt a thing, and the next they can be so negative that you can see nothing for sure. Your response to a vocation can't ride on that roller-coaster; it has to be on the level of your will and not your feelings. This means basing it on reasons and motives that are more solid and lasting, more based on reality (supernatural reality-grace, God's love, god's fidelity, the needs of souls...) Christ's love was not based on feelings, even though positive feelings can help to begin the journey. But the journey has to bring us to the level of love, of total surrender out of love. That is what a priestly or consecrated vocation is about.

Parallel to taking these steps, you will need to develop and follow a program of spiritual growth. It will be a great help to have a spiritual director for this. Our spiritual progress depends upon God's grace, and any program we set for ourselves is simply a plan based on our self-knowledge to remove any obstacles to God's grace and put in place those actions that can help it bear fruit. Some points to include are:

1. Daily personal prayer (A daily "quiet time" or meditation time, rosary or a part of the rosary, evening examination of conscience, etc. Be realistic, don't overload but do include these elements.)
2. Increased attendance at Mass and reception of the Eucharist (Communion) and of the sacrament of Confession
3. Attention to your duties (study, family, work, etc.),
4. Involvement in evangelization Some examples: helping start a discussion group, a prayer group or a Bible study, helping in a youth group, doing door-to-door evangelization ([www.ytm.org](http://www.ytm.org) might give you some ideas) helping in pro-life work, etc.
5. A key virtue or two that you need to work on, depending on what you realize is your weak point. (For example: patience, responsibility, charity, self-control etc.) Choose just one! We all need to work on all the virtues, but choosing one actually helps us to work on all of them, almost without realizing it.
6. A healthy social life; avoiding of course friendships or atmospheres that go against Christian values.

The true key to discerning through all this is of course listening to Christ and telling him that you trust him totally and simply want to do whatever he asks of you. Insist on this in your prayer. Tell him often that you love him. Strive to bring him to others more and more each day. Little by little things will begin to get clearer, and you will be preparing yourself in this way for whatever he has in mind for you.

**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**

**April 19, 2014**

**Spiritual Ponderings**

**Exploring Vocations**

Over the last two weeks, we have been exploring what exactly the Church means by vocation. We have learned that there are three levels of vocations: Universal Call To Holiness, Priesthood/religious/married/single, and what we would call a career or job. We have also learned that there are three stages to each vocation: discernment, probation, and oblation. For the last two weeks, I would like to turn to Edward Hahnenberg in his book: *Theology for Ministry: An Introduction for Lay Ministers* points out that God usually (not always) calls people to their vocation through a similar pattern. Quotes from his book will be in bold.

The most famous call story (vocation story) is the Annunciation: the moment when the Angel Gabriel on behalf of God asked Mary to be the Mother of His Son. Each vocation has six parts. **God called Mary. And in that call were all the features of a genuine vocation. The call came from God. It deepened a relationship. It led to transformation. It gave a mission. This pattern of call can be found again and again in the Bible. It extends over the course of Christian history. And it continues in our own lives.**

The first part is a simple idea that we might miss it. If we are receiving a phone call that means there must be someone doing the calling and someone who the call is for. Our God is not sending out random messages hoping anyone will hear

them. He is sending out a specific message intended for a specific individual. God did not send Gabriel to find Him a woman to be the mother of His son but rather He sent her the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The second part is that it is God doing the calling. As Catholics we believe that there is a divine order to the universe. Our God did not simply create the universe, set it in motion, and leave like a clockmaker. Our God remains intimately involved in human history. What is even more wondrous is that our God asks human beings to be His co-workers. We are not independent contractors or mercenaries, we are sons and daughters of God and our Father expects great things out of us.

**Surely Jesus knew the Father's love his whole life. When he met John the Baptist at the Jordan River, this love washed over him in a powerful way. As Jesus came up out of the water, he heard his heavenly Father say, "You are precious to me. And I am so proud of you." For the rest of his life, Jesus would share with others the love that he so deeply experienced himself.**

When the devil tries to prevent Jesus from starting His public ministry it is this experience of being a child of God that the devil attacks: "If you are the Son of God..."

The next insight is that the Father always call us through His Word.

He does this calling through his Son. **If Jesus preaching shatters our old worldview, his actions help us move toward a new one. If Jesus described the reign of God in his teaching, he enacted it in the rest of his ministry.** Salvation history is something that continues to progress. The Pharisees, Scribes, Chief Priests, etc in the Gospel get focused on trying to appease God like the Greeks and Romans were trying to do. They offered sacrifices in order to avoid divine punishment. Jesus' life on earth is all about telling us that true religion has more to do with developing an honest authentic relationship with God than with appeasing an angry God.

**Jesus was a servant to others. As we have seen... , his ministry was a life of teaching, healing, and self-sacrifice that revolved around what he called the kingdom of God. This kingdom was good news—the special presence of God bursting into the world, promising to make all that is wrong right. Jesus' vision of God's reign can challenge our assumptions and our prejudices. It can threaten our selfishness and self-centeredness. But at the same time it can be profoundly liberating—drawing us into a freedom that is the path to genuine joy. Jesus' whole life—what he said, what he did, how he died—points toward the joy that comes through serving others... The first step in developing a Christ-centered ministry is to strive to serve as Jesus served.**

**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**

**April 26, 2014**

**Spiritual Ponderings**

**Exploring Vocations**

Throughout the month of April, we have been reflecting on the idea of Vocation – receiving a call from God. We have discovered that there are three different levels of meaning behind the word vocation: the first level is the Universal Call to Holiness; the second level is what we refer to when we talk about priesthood, religious life, married life, and single life; and finally the third level refers to our careers (are we a student, doctor or mother.)

In addition to the three levels of vocation, we know there are three stages to each person's vocation: discernment, probation, and finally oblation (the total giving of oneself to one's vocation).

We have now turned to an insight from Edward Hahnenberg's book "The Theology For Ministry: An Introduction to Lay Ministry to look at how God has called people through the Bible and we have come to realize that there are six key aspects to each vocation call. The first being it that it is a call, the second being is that it from God, and third that the Father does this through His Son Jesus Christ. Today we will reflect how each call takes place in the Spirit, with others, and for others. The words from Edward Hahnenberg book will be in bold.

It was the power of the Holy Spirit that allowed the Blessed Virgin Mary to conceive Jesus in her womb. Each and every act of love is like a little annunciation because by our “yes” to God we bring a little bit more love into the world just as Mary did when she cooperated with the graces of the Holy Spirit.

**It sounds conceited to say that out loud, but discerning our gifts for ministry begins with dropping a false modesty that hides what time, experience, and other people keep trying to tell us is true.**

We are blest by God with many gifts and talents and to some extent our last judgment will depend on how we’ve developed those talents.

**In fact, the value of a charism lay not in its power to dazzle, but in its ability to build up the community.**

As ministers of the Gospel we are not lone rangers or kamikaze pilots. We are co-workers with Christ. We can do everything right but in the end if we have not helped build up the kingdom of God then we have failed. Jesus sent the twelve out in sets of two. He sent the seventy-two out assets of two. Finally even after He was rose He sent Paul out to preach to the nations only after He had given him Barnabas as a companion.

**The Catholic tradition is a communal one. AS the late Fr. Andrew Greeley once put it, “Catholics cluster, they bond, they converge, they swarm. Catholicism in James Joyce’s happy phrase means “Here comes everybody!”**

As Catholics we accept anyone who truly wants to be Catholic. It does not matter what their race, ethnicity or economic level – all are welcomed.

**At the very start, it is helpful to distinguish Christian ministry from Christian discipleship. To be a disciple is literally to be a “learner” or a “listener”. It is to follow the teacher, Jesus. Discipleship begins in baptism. It encompasses the whole of the Christian life. It takes palace within the community called the Church. It entails nothing less than living out the reign of God—a life of loving relationship with God and with other people.**

**Ministry also flows out of baptism and membership in church community. But it involves something more than living the Christian life. It involves taking up the mission of Jesus. It involves doing something to advance the kingdom of God. Christian ministry is any activity, done on behalf of the church community, that proclaims, celebrates, and serves the reign of God.**

God could have chosen angels to call to build up His kingdom; instead He calls us (gives us a vocation). May we do our part so that at the end.

All vocations we are (1) a called (2) by God (3) through Christ (4) In the Spirit (5) with Others, and (6) for Others. .