

bring it upon ourselves. God is always much greater. For Him to make the best usage of your life, submit your plans and judgments and particular circumstances to His all-encompassing intelligence. All will turn out well; only trust in God.

There are untold numbers of men and women who have found their vocations by practicing simple trust in God. It requires patience to understand a particular circumstance in one's life. What can God be telling me through this ordeal or in this circumstance? Sometimes certain avenues of serving God may be closed to you. Do not get stuck by being attached to your own idea of serving God. Perhaps He has a better one. I've seen frustrated individuals uselessly spend their energies in working to pry open doors that God has lovingly shut for their own good. I've seen others pout because they can't open the doors no matter how hard they try. These people do not let God lead them to another door which He has opened for them. Such people will not find God's Will until they have the humility and freedom to let go of their own plans.

Prayer

It is always true that God is found on one's knees, much more than in books or human words. And finding God on a deeper level is how ultimately the vocation is discerned.

God wants to be asked for whatever you may need. Of course it should be understood that if you ask for something which is going to be harmful to you, He will, in His great mercy, deny that thing to you. And that's because He is a loving Father who freely gives to His child the things that are good and retains the things which will be dangerous to the child's welfare. So, as a precondition of prayer, avoid being a spoiled brat. I've spent untold hours speaking with stubborn individuals who want one vocation and one vocation only. They mean

well but lack an essential virtue necessary to be called by God: docility. Therefore, pray to know your vocation without, ahead of time, rejecting any vocation. Give God the opportunity to give you what is best for you.

Scripture

"Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ." Therefore...go gladly to the sacred text itself, whether in the sacred liturgy, which is full of the divine words, or in devout reading... Let them remember, however, that prayer should accompany the reading of sacred Scripture, so that a dialogue takes place between God and man. For, "we speak to Him when we pray; we listen to Him when we read the divine oracles." (Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, 25)

Reading the Scriptures - especially the Gospels - has been very instrumental in the lives of people looking for their vocations. Perhaps you already read the Scriptures frequently. That's good. Don't stop. But for those who are in search for the Divine Will, this is an additional means of understanding how God works in people's lives and how to recognize His Will.

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Theology of Finding Your Vocation

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Be a Saint

Before setting your heart on marriage or the priesthood or an apostolic ministry, you should first commit yourself to becoming nothing less than a saint.

Always put holiness first. Especially for young men, you should know well that to become a priest is not necessarily to become holy. In regards to the priesthood, which is often mistaken for holiness, be careful to recognize that it is primarily a ministry. Holiness is something very different, it's much more. The priesthood is not a requisite for entering heaven, but being united with God is. Your proper priorities in life must be clearly defined before your journey begins. The most essential goal and ideal in your life must necessarily be to unite yourself with God and develop an intimate relationship with Him. Holiness is union with God's will.

What is a Vocation?

Frequently, young people ask, "Does God really have a special, personal invitation for me?" Let me ask you a question. Why else did He place you here? Doesn't it seem unreasonable that the all-knowing Father would not have hopes and plans for His own child? Before creation itself God chose you not only to exist but to serve Him in a way different than any other living creature. He made you as a one-of-a-kind item, threw away the mold, gave you dominion over the plants and animals, and painted the stars and beauties around you for your enjoyment. He has a special way for you to love and follow Him.

By discovering your vocation, you enlighten the whole meaning of your life. You understand why God made you and how He loves you personally. Even more, like a puzzle fitting together, you understand more about God's providence in your past, present and future. Yes, God has a particular mission and purpose for you and as you fulfill it, you find your niche in His creation. His calling for you is a hand-fit remedy and solution for your particular needs and circumstances. He's a good father who provides for the future of all His children.

Different Paths to God

The calling to be a priest is a call to service. The Father calls some to pastor His flock here on earth. The first Shepherd and Priest of the New Covenant was Jesus Christ Himself, who came not to be served but to serve. Christ calls and enables some to be ministers in His own sacramental sacrifice. The calling to be a priest is a calling to act in the person of Christ. It is a special invitation to be the offerer of the victim and to be united to the victim Himself.

The calling to the priesthood is for the benefit of the community. Just as Jesus was sent to minister and to save man, so the priest is sent to do the same in Christ's name.

The calling to consecrated life, with the profession of the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, is an invitation to be an intimate companion of Jesus Christ. A person consecrates (sets apart for God) his or her life. This is done by vowing (promising to God) all that one is and possesses. Jesus Christ calls some to Himself not intending to share them with others. Consecrated men and women accept that invitation which Jesus made to the rich young man to sell all and follow Him: "There is still one thing you lack. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor,

and you will have treasure in heaven; then come follow me" (Lk 18:22).

Consecrated life is usually lived in the setting of a community. The purpose of the community life is to provide the support and guidance an individual needs to persevere in a spiritual and apostolic calling. Communities are real faith-families where occasions to practice virtues are plentiful.

How to Listen

God speaks to us through hard facts. God uses the realities around us to talk to us. So don't be distracted in waiting for wonders and signs because you'll miss what Jesus is saying, if you'll only look around and observe. Look at your own aptitudes, gifts, circumstances, etc... These are like a needle on a compass which points in the right direction. Didn't Jesus Himself advise us to observe the signs of the times to be able to make proper judgment? He scolded those who kept demanding signs for their lack of faith. He said that the only sign needed was Himself. Focus your attention away from yourself and onto Jesus and you'll come to know your vocation.

You see, God is calling you to something but He wants you to go through the work of thinking and praying and seeking to understand His will. In return God makes Himself known and reveals the best way to follow Him. But His voice is not heard in the same way by everyone. For example, those who are hard of hearing God may find it necessary to speak harshly. In such a case His invitation is given as a call to love although it may be quite a suffering ordeal for the individual to be called. God may reach a person through humiliations, as in the case of St. Alphonsus Liguori, or through injury, as happened to St. Ignatius Loyola. St. Ignatius discovered his vocation as he lay on a hospital bed asking for something to read. Nothing was available except *The Lives of the Saints*. Its

reading prompted an entire conversion of life in St. Ignatius. God used the turmoil of his illness to call.

God Uses Instruments to Call

The vocation of St. Paul shows how God uses others to direct His chosen ones. Being jolted from his horse, St. Paul (at that time called Saul) suddenly found himself immersed in light, in the presence of Jesus of Nazareth. Some people dream that such a situation would be an ideal one for learning their vocation. But notice what Jesus does. He does not tell Saul what to do with his life or how to serve Him. Jesus merely says, "Now get up and go into the city where you will be told what to do" (Acts 9:6). It is obvious that Jesus wanted Paul to seek and find the will of God through the council of others. St. Teresa of Avila says that, "It is a kind of humility for a man not to trust himself but to believe that God will help him in speaking with those with whom he converses" (Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila, Ch. 7).

So keep your heart open to the wise counsels and challenges of others when they make an appeal to you. God may surely have a purpose in having other people tell you that you should commit your life to serving Him in a special vocation.

God Uses Circumstances to Call

Remember the saying "God makes honey out of vinegar"? Isn't it profoundly true? He takes things, which we frequently interpret as misfortunes and disasters, and transforms them into beautiful realities. Surely you have found yourself in circumstances which seem terrible. But somehow such situations frequently turn out to be blessings in disguise. It's because our vision is so limited that we get stuck and confused when things don't turn out exactly as our small minds have planned. It doesn't matter whether a calamity just happens or whether we