

## **Priestly Discernment**

Making **any** decision can be a vehicle for the Holy Spirit to manifest guidance and special graces in your life if approached prayerfully. To consider the possibility that the Lord is calling you to be a priest, brother, sister or any professed life requires time, prayer and deliberation. But, discerning if the Lord is calling you to serve him and his Church through a priestly ministry is really no more complex than any other vocational choice. After all, decisions have consequences. Vocational discernment reaches beyond the realm of a religious vocation. Oftentimes, when a new job opportunity, the possibly of a promotion or other major change in their life becomes available, people will spend some serious time with our Lord. When you are considering the implications of any major decision, a strong process of discernment is needed in order to make a spiritually sound, morally certain decision. The grace of the Holy Spirit is paramount to this process, and we look for signs from our Lord which will help guide us in our decision.

The discernment of a vocation to the priesthood can be thought of as a building project. No matter what you are doing, you don't just leap into the project - buying supplies and materials, hiring extra help and beginning work on the very first day. First one must take measurements, weigh out your different options and decide what will work best before you can even begin to think about the actual work that the project entails. When a person discerns a vocation to priesthood, he examines God's call from all perspectives - he should spend time in prayer before our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, it is helpful to consult family members and close friends and invite them to offer feedback on your urgings, and you may also talk with your parish priest or a member of a religious community to help you inform your decision.

Discernment is a natural process, and everyone considering a call from our Lord experiences, to some degree, a time of discernment. It's good to ask questions, to observe, to listen, and to dialogue with those whom you love - most importantly, our Lord in prayer! If you are considering the possibility of priesthood or religious life, please allow us to aid you in your process of discernment – the Sioux City office of Vocations would be very happy to answer any questions or concerns that you might have.

We've provided some helpful resources below which will aid you in your discernment. Review these suggestions, and spend time in prayer while you are actively discerning our Lord's call. Jesus says, "The harvest is plenty; the laborers are few." Is our Lord calling you to reap a rich and bountiful harvest? YES, He IS! It is our job - through discernment - to help you discover how best you will answer the Lord's call.

## **How do I know if I may have a priestly vocation?**

Look for signs from God! Have you noticed any of the following things taking shape in your life?

- ✦ **Growing Faith** – When thinking about the priesthood as a vocation a person experiences an increased awareness of God in his life and a developing appreciation of Jesus, His way of life, His mission, His holy people the Church, His Body and Blood in the Eucharist, and His Sacraments.
- ✦ **Growing Zeal** - A person's developing friendship with Our Lord will lead him to desire more and more to share in Jesus' mission of saving the world, saving people and saving souls.
- ✦ **Growing Joy found when serving God and others** - A person's increasing sense of fulfillment and satisfaction when engaged in religious studies and charitable works.
- ✦ **Growing Interest in the life and work of a Priest** - A person's growing wonderment at what it would be like to give themselves completely to the Lord and the works of the Lord - being Jesus for others, gathering all people into God's family, preaching the Word, celebrating the Holy Eucharist and Sacraments, and organizing people for service.
- ✦ **Growing Desire to Lead People** – A person finds themselves exhibiting leadership skills in school, community and church, and experience a growing satisfaction in their life by doing so.
- ✦ **Growing Sensitivity to the Needs of People** - A person finds themselves being approached by others for assistance, guidance and advice and they enjoy being around people and leads them to a caring attitude toward all.
- ✦ **Growing Sense That God Has Something Great Planned for You** - A persons growing sense that there are more important things in life, and that God is calling them to be part of these deeper mysteries.

## **What's going on in your heart?**

Our hearts serve as a kind of "compass" to help us connect our activities with our feelings. When we do something good, our heart tells us. When we do something that we're not proud of, our heart tells us that, too. What moves your heart? Reflect and pray over that question. Perhaps your heart is moved by the same things that moved Jesus' heart.

The gospels tell us that Jesus' heart was moved by the world's pain. He was moved with compassion for the sick, for the blind, for those in the grip of demons. He could not see someone who suffered without longing to ease their pain. He longed to comfort and give strength to people weighed down by the burdens of this life. Jesus was moved by the world's hunger and poverty. He knew that we should not be

content to have too much while others have too little. He was moved by the world's confusion. He announced the truth of God's reign to an often disbelieving world. Jesus also desired to celebrate the joyful moments of life. He came to show the way to the Father, the way to true happiness, so that people might experience the joy and fullness of life that God intended for them.

In priesthood, a man accepts a call to be a sacrament of Jesus Christ in a profound way. When we look upon the priest, we ought to see the love of Christ reaching out to everyone. We ought to see a forgiving and healing presence of Christ. We ought to see a presence of Christ who is not afraid to speak the truth in the midst of a disbelieving world. We ought to see the Christ who single-heartedly works for the Kingdom of God. We ought to see the sacrificing presence of Christ who gives his life for the sake of many.

### **Asking questions about your vocation**

Have you ever wondered if you might have a calling to the priesthood? Are you curious about what's involved in being a priest? God may be calling you to a vocation to the priesthood. To help you in your discernment, ask yourself these questions about your vocation:

- Do you consider a personal relationship with God an important part of your life?
- Do you desire to serve others and make a difference in people's lives?
- Do you want to help people get closer to God and to know the Truth?
- Do people see you as someone they can approach and talk to?
- Do you enjoy life and people, and do you have a sense of humor?
- Can you work with people of all ages?
- Is going to Mass and receiving Jesus Christ in the Eucharist very important to you?
- Do you have healthy relationships with other people - men and women?
- Do you feel good about yourself and have good physical, mental and emotional health?
- Does the idea of becoming a priest keep going through your head?
- Have people told you that you would make a good priest?
- Have you been afraid to ask questions that might show family and friends that you're interested in the priesthood?
- Do you want to make a difference in the world?
- Is Pope John Paul II one of your heroes?
- Have you been visiting vocations websites and/or picked up a few vocation materials?

If you answered YES to more than 10 of these questions, then there is a strong possibility that God may be calling you to the diocesan priesthood. Priesthood isn't

just for someone else. Have you really let yourself be open to God's calling for your life? Don't be afraid to open yourself to God's deepest call within you. It's the call of God's love!

### **How do priests live their vocation in our world?**

To live in the midst of the world with no desire for all its pleasures;  
 To be a member of every family, yet belonging to none;  
 To share all sufferings; to penetrate all secrets, to heal all wounds;  
 To daily go from men to God to offer Him their homage and petitions;  
 To return from God to men to bring them His pardon and hope;  
 To have a heart on fire for charity and a heart of bronze for chastity;  
 To bless and to be blest forever.

O God, what a life, and it is yours, O Priest of Jesus Christ!

*Thou Art a Priest Forever*  
 by Jean-Baptiste Henri Lacordaire, OP (1802-61)

### **How do I come to a decision?**

The decision to dedicate one's life to the service of God is a much different one than that of choosing a career. Selecting a career field – in most instances, a job or occupation – involves decisions about education, personal skills, preferred work characteristics, desired income levels, and often geographic location. Career decisions address the question, "What will I do with my life?"

The more important decision in life is, "What will I be?" Everyone is called to live their life in relationship with God, whether married, single, clergy, or religious. Some people are called to live in relationship with God as a priest, brother or sister. A vocation is not a calling to do anything, go anywhere, or become something. It is first and foremost an identification of who you are and your relationship with God, not what you do.

### **Commitment**

Commitment to the priesthood flows from one's whole being. This commitment is rooted in the core of your heart, and it affects and involves the totality of you as a person. Priestly vocations are not about taking on 'church' jobs and living your life doing pious or religious things, a vocation to the priesthood enables you to adequately express who you are and what you love most.

At this point one may ask: "What then is the essence of a priestly vocation? What makes it what it is? What gives it its particular identity?" That answer is very simple; the priesthood is a very specific dedication, it is a consecration to do 2 things: First, to witness to the truth of Jesus Christ and his call to follow him in all of your words, thoughts and deeds. And secondly, to accomplish that witness by living your life in a

prayerful and open relationship with Jesus and his Church. To become a priest is not a ritual of self-gift to God, nor is it man-made. It is a precious gift from God which we respond to.

### **The Need for Prayer**

Individuals will be aided in their vocational discernment through prayer. The person considering a priestly vocation is seeking to make a visible what is hidden, and touchable that which is unreachable. Prayer and the great power of grace will help eliminate those things in your life which are contradictory to the great principles upon which moral decisions are made. A person considering the priesthood must be personally convinced that prayer and faith are the things that give purpose and meaning to his life. Pursuing the priesthood involves a great deal of effort and work. The individual pursuing such a vocation should pray, seeking to know and gain direction in that regard. Reading is important.

### **Personal Characteristics Needed**

Those pursuing a priestly vocation should possess self-confidence, the ability to make hard decisions, and a willingness to accept criticism and listen to people. They must be tactful, have personal drive and ambition, but yet be tolerant of other's shortcomings. An ability to work under pressure, to live up to moral standards, and get along with others is also very important. Other predispositions are also looked for.

Good health is necessary as a good and healthy body aids in the development of a good and healthy mind. A good mind is necessary, as one must be able to combine the spiritual and the intellectual. One must be able to relate meaningfully the theoretical dimensions of the Catholic faith to the practical realities of the world. The well-trained priest is thus aided in thinking deeply about important things that are necessary parts and applications of our faith to our daily lives.