

What is Our Vocation?

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Dominican Laurie Brink says that, according to St. Francis de Sales, we carry the Lord on our tongues, recounting His deeds and praising Him. We carry Him in our hearts with tender love and affection. But these two ways do not amount to much unless we carry the Lord in our arms by living the ways of God clearly and concretely. We are to listen for God's voice. We are to then contemplate what we hear. And then we are to share the fruits of our contemplation by living Jesus so clearly that others point to us and say, "Behold, a follower of Christ, the Lamb of God!"

It should come as no surprise when I tell you that today's readings are about our vocation in life, our calling. Some have a vocation to priesthood, diaconate or religious life. Some are called to married life and some to the life of a single person. No matter what our call, our vocation, God calls us to live that call as best we can. And sometimes the call changes during the course of our lifetime. Let me give you two examples from my own experience.

When I was in the minor seminary, I met and became very good friends with a man from Colorado. Carl was a year behind me but we seemed to hit it off right from the start. He always complained about our winters. His favorite line was, "I hate this state. Every time the sun comes out, it gets colder! At least in Colorado, when the sun comes out, it warms up. I hate this state."

Well, he lasted 2 years in minor seminary and then went on to 2 years of major sem. In his diocese, the bishop requires that, between the 2nd and 3rd years, the men take a pastoral year and live in a parish, an immersion of sorts. The men get a real feel for what parish life and being a pastor are like. Well, soon after Carl started his pastoral year, he dropped out of formation.

He said, "If I have a call to be a priest, the call will always be there. But if I have a call to be a different kind of father, I will never know unless I take some time to discern what God is asking of me." As a result, during that all-important discernment process, he found that God was indeed leading him in another direction.

About a year later, I was privileged to be standing alongside a bishop and five other priests as Carl married Wendy, a friend from college. They now have 2 beautiful children. Obviously God was calling him to a different way of life than priesthood.

The second story is about a man familiar to most of you, Fr. Al. Backmann. He is a classmate of mine and a dear friend. In fact, he will be at all the Masses next weekend. He was married for quite a while and, with his wife, raised 5 children. When she died after losing a battle with cancer, Al decided God was calling him to live out the rest of his life as a priest. So Al is one of the few men who have experienced both married life and priesthood.

So, what are WE to do with our lives? Msgr. Ralph Kuehner suggests the answer comes as we are busy about other things, much as it did for John's two disciples in the Gospel. One morning they woke up staunch disciples of the Baptist and by suppertime of the same day, they were following someone referred to as the Lamb of God. How does one know what instincts to follow?

Kuehner says that we get an idea from today's first reading. A call can come in the darkness – sometimes of night but also the darkness of our living and uncertainty. We shouldn't run from the darkness – we dare to live there. Second, Samuel needs the silence of night to hear the call. If we're unsure of our calling, we need time for quiet and day-dreaming.

Third, we have to be willing to go where the call leads us. We need to assure God we, His servants, are listening; that can be scary but also exciting. Lastly, just like Samuel, we need to find a master to assist in the sorting out of the voices. Samuel had Eli as a prophet; during my own discernment, I had Helen as my spiritual director.

Author Annie Dillard once observed that each morning is like going to a cottage for summer vacation. When you open the screen and unlock the door, at that moment we have all the vacation ahead of us that we are ever going to have. So what are we to do with this slice of future life that we find ourselves juggling like a hot roll from the oven? I would answer Annie's question by saying, "We ask God."