

What is a vocation

In Chapter five of *Lumen Gentium*, every member of the Church is called to holiness. Holiness is seen within the context of love and can be love itself on display to our brothers and sisters. We show that we love God through those we see and interact with daily. Our vocation is the particular way we live out that call to holiness.

Vocation comes from the word “vocare” meaning to call. The call comes from God who created each human person in his image and likeness. The particular call can be in the form of single life, marriage, priesthood or consecrated life. The decision of vocation is left up to each individual, but we must recognise that the decision is a response to the invitation made to us by God.

God has an interest in you personally and he calls you personally. In Scripture, both the Old Testament and the New Testament, we see God calling men and women to his will not only for themselves but for the people. We have such examples in Abraham, Moses, Elisha, Mary, Peter and Paul. Pope Francis explains that when God calls, he is saying you are important to him, he loves you and he counts on you. It is in this call we find our joy, an abundance of joy, that great joy that God wants for you personally.

St. Catherine of Sienna, it is believed once said: “Be who you are meant to be, and you will set the whole world on fire”. Your vocation according to St. Catherine is who you are, your very being. It is a genuine expression of who you are, your very identity.

What will make you happy? We focus on the call that God invites us to because it is that call that will bring us happiness. God knows us better than we know ourselves. Therefore, he also knows what will bring us fulfilment. God calls me to this way of being because he knew that in his service, I would be happy.

On the surface the vocations of priesthood, religious life, married life, and single life seem quite different. St. John Paul II explained that love is fundamental and innate vocation of every human being. Despite the beautiful diversity among vocations, at the very centre of all of them is a commitment to love. It is because of this love, which God is himself, that God does not force a vocation on us but allows us to respond freely to the invitation to love and grow in holiness according to our particular call.

Sometimes, it takes years to discern where God is inviting us to go but once we have discerned where, we cannot delay the response even using the most reasonable and valuable of excuses. The invitation is always now and so the decision must always be now.

Priesthood

Priesthood is a call to love others. St John Mary Vianney, patron of priest said: a man is not a priest for himself – he is a priest for others. In the same way Jesus invited and appointed men to follow him, God invites men in our day so that others may have live. The priesthood is a way of being. It is a life of sacrifice and service. It is not something that is deserved but an unmerited gift from God. God invites men with different backgrounds, personalities, temperaments, gifts and talents to be priests. The common ideal shared is the one priesthood of Christ.

A priest is a spiritual father, mediator, provider, teacher, spiritual warrior, means of God's mercy, bridegroom and brother. The priest is given a sacred power to serve God's people, to lead them to union with God. He does this principally by teaching the people, shepherding them through leadership, offering pastoral care and spiritual guidance and sanctifying them through the Sacraments (CCC 1592). A priest can experience in just one day what some experience in their whole lifetime.

The Ministry of the Priest includes:

Preaching the word of God

Baptizing

Offering the Sacrament of Confession for the forgiveness of sins

Offering Mass daily

Praying

Providing pastoral guidance and spiritual direction

Marriage preparation for couples and celebrating the Sacrament of Marriage

Visiting and Anointing the Sick

Leading the community in serving the poor

Commending their souls of the departed to God at the funeral Mass and accompanying the bereaved

A Diocesan Priest Vs A Religious Priest

A man can become a diocesan priest or a religious priest. A diocesan priest is ordained to serve a particular diocese, pledging obedience to the bishop of that diocese. At his ordination, he pledges obedience to his bishop and his successors, and chastity, as he is called to live celibate as a sign of the Kingdom to come and his giving of total self to God through the people he serves.

The religious priest on the other hand, belongs to a specific order or congregation of priests and vows obedience to the superior of that order or congregation. He also makes vows of chastity and poverty as life is lived in community with those who belong to that specific religious community. Their religious order or congregation will dedicate themselves to specific charisms or works. The religious priest can be called to work wherever they are needed and is sent by his superior. For those religious priest (monk) who are called to live in a monastery, they also make a vow of stability, professing that they will live in this one place (monastic community) for the rest of their life.

How is it different from a career

An invitation from God to serve does not mean a career or job. In other words when we speak of vocation in Christianity, we do not mean a career. Vocation is the way God invites you to love and give of yourself to others, the giving of your entire self as a way to gain holiness.

A career may only mean the way you use your skills, services, and expertise. Of course, priests can have careers, but their careers must never be seen as their vocation. Their vocation is their primary invitation from God to love and grow into holiness. Their career will be secondary in that this is the way they use their skills, expertise and talents. Therefore, a priest can also be a doctor, a teacher, a principal, a nurse, a lawyer, among many other career paths.

The Seminary

A place provided for men to discern the invitation of God within a community setting to serve and grow in holiness. When one decides to accept God's invitation to priesthood, it is no means final. There is continued discernment even as that man begins formation geared towards the priesthood. This is especially important during the first few years of seminary life. The seminary is a place for deeper growth spiritually and to ask God if this is what he is being invited to.

There are four areas of formation one undergoes when they enter the seminary:

- 1. Human formation.** This helps seminarians to grow into mature, well-balanced men who are capable of relating to all different kinds of people and displaying good personal qualities such as sensitivity, patience, responsibility and organisational skills.
- 2. Spiritual formation.** This guides the seminarian in cultivating a deep personal relationship with God through a committed life of prayer and allowing the Holy Spirit to guide his decisions. Therefore, a seminarian is given a spiritual director who makes this journey with him.
- 3. Academic formation.** This area involves studying philosophy, theology and other humanities, which prepares the seminarian to preach, communicate Church teaching, pass on the truth of our faith and evangelise.
- 4. Pastoral formation.** Seminarians learn how to be shepherds after Jesus' own heart. This means having compassion for all people, regardless of class, race or religion. Seminarians are given experience in this area by weekly engaging in pastoral work and ministry such as parishes, hospitals, schools and working the deaf.

Seminarians experience life in community, working, studying, praying together and sharing meals and leisure time as brothers in Christ. In their free time they might play sports – tennis, football and volleyball or even cricket, work out or visit friends and family. The friendships they share with each other are a great source of joy, support and encouragement as they journey towards the priesthood. These are friendships that last a lifetime.