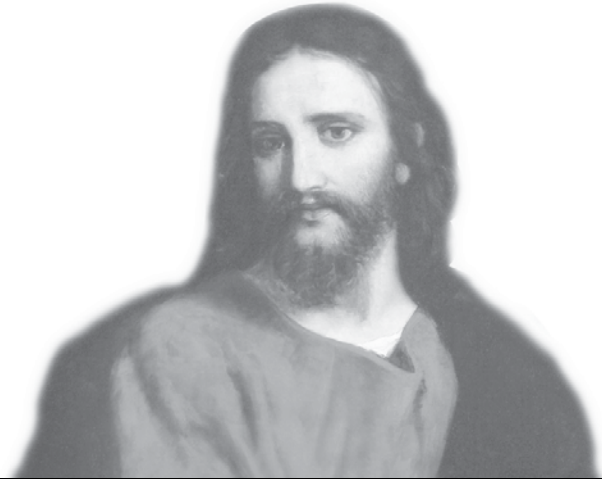


DISCOVER

the Joy of Christ



How Can We Know Our Vocation?

It is very important that we pray for vocations to the priesthood, consecrated life, and to marriage. Sunday, April 26th is the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. In addition to prayer, it is also essential that we help young people discover God's call on their life through being a disciple of Jesus Christ.

What does it mean to be a disciple? The word disciple literally means "student." A disciple is one who sets out on a life-long journey of learning about, coming to know, the Person of Jesus Christ. Discipleship involves following God's plan for our life. The reason we want to follow what the Lord has for us is because God created us with specific gifts and talents and He knows what will give us the greatest joy and peace in life through serving others, whether in the priesthood, consecrated life, dedicated single life, or marriage.

Discipleship means to follow Christ, to listen to Christ, to seek Christ, to love Christ. There are four key words that help us to live out "discipleship." The first one is "**prayer.**" Prayer is falling in love with Jesus Christ. No man will be ordained to the priesthood if they do not fall in love with God. It is a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, in which we grow in that love with Him and His love for us. Who would ever commit to a life-long marriage; or who would ever make all the commitments that a seminarian makes when he becomes a priest just for some abstract philosophy or a bunch of impersonal, meaningless words strung together in the name of "prayer." No. That kind of prayer changes no one. That kind of prayer does not shape a marriage. What shapes a marriage is when a married couple is able to say to one another, "As much as I love you, I love God more." When a married couple falls in love with God, in a life of dialogue, of listening, then the beauty of what we call the "spiritual life" blossoms. Prayer!

The next word is "**conscience.**" What does it mean to follow my conscience? We live in a world today in which people say, "Well, I follow my own conscience, thank you. I don't think my parents, or the Church, or anyone should tell me what to do. I follow my conscience." St. John Newman was a Cardinal in the 1800's in England. He wrote about this problem. He said, "We have the Englishman who says, 'I will follow my conscience. Whatever I see is right, that is what is

right for me.' That is not conscience! That is self-will."

Conscience, as a Christian and as a Catholic, means: "I have my preferences sure, but I say, 'Father, what have You revealed as Your plan? Jesus, what is Your will for me?'" We discover God's will in a number of ways but mainly we discover God's will reading and pondering the Scriptures. The most challenging moral teachings are not simply found in the Catechism. They are found in the Bible itself. But somehow we excuse ourselves because "I am following my conscience." No! Conscience as a Catholic and as a Christian means I take seriously what the Lord reveals to us through the Scriptures, through the Catechism, through the teachings of the Church for over 2000 years. We can't say, "I take this, I toss that out." No! Being a Catholic disciple is something very different.

If we are going to live a life of discipleship there has to be that life of prayer, falling in love with God. There has to be conscience formation in which we listen to and conform our thinking to what God has revealed as His teaching, as His truth – not redefine it, but to live according to it.

The third key word is the "**moral life.**" A moral life means I take the teachings and I live them, in my own life – my thoughts, my feelings, and my desires. There needs to be a consistency between what I believe and what I practice. We live in a world today in which there are more and more people who say, "I will not get married in the Church. I will live a life of cohabitation." People say, "Well, I feel no need to get married in the Church" - ignoring a teaching that comes to us straight from Scripture itself, from Jesus Christ Himself. It is impossible to live a life of discipleship if our moral life is in contradiction to what God is teaching us.

The fourth word is "**mission.**" There is a mission that God has for us: for our career, and more importantly for our state in life – whether we are married, single, a priest, or a religious. There is a threshold of maturity in young people when they go from spiritual childhood to spiritual maturity.

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It happens when they realize they are not masters of their own life. It is beautiful to hear young people say, "When I pray, I realize that my life has been given to me by God. I have some preferences. I have lots of things that I would like to do, but I know that these are not of upmost importance. The most important question is what does God want of me, realizing this will ultimately bring me true joy."

A lot of times people will ask superficial questions, "What do I want? What's in it for me?" If we stay there, these questions will lock us in as spiritual children. A spiritually mature young man discerning priesthood says, "It is not my life. I want to give myself to God completely and I am listening to His call." We can see a spiritual maturity when we hear a married couple or a couple preparing for marriage say, "We really want to live according to that which Christ is calling us. And that means we want to pray together, grow in our faith, and also make spiritually mature choices about sexuality and family planning." These choices have such deep moral and spiritual implications and carry immense consequences, necessitating that we take these matters very specifically to the Lord.

When a young person says, "I feel that I'm being led to be a teacher, or I feel that God is leading me to be a doctor, or I feel that God is calling me to be a farmer," then there is an obvious spiritual maturity operating because they understand their life not as "master" but as "steward." They only come to this level when they ask the deeper question of stewardship, of discipleship, in which they say, "Lord, what is it that You want of me? Do You want me to be a priest or a consecrated person, a religious sister or brother? Do You want me to be married? Do you want me to be single?"

Let us keep young people in our daily prayers, that with great courage and humility, they will choose to be disciples of Jesus Christ and seek to know His plan for their lives. We can trust that our prayers will be answered.