

What is Single-In-The-World Permanently Vocation?

The Catholic Church acknowledges four vocations: marriage, religious life, the priesthood, and the single in the world permanently vocation. Single in the world permanently is what is addressed here though some comparisons and/or inferences will be made in regard to the others.

Note: Everyone is single at some point as a transitional phase until they choose their vocation. The following addresses those who ultimately choose to stay single permanently for religious reasons.

No matter our vocation, the awareness of it is a result of clarity, clarity that for whatever reason comes over time. When a man realizes he is called to be a priest for instance we often hear how he had wanted to be so since an early age, or a young woman who says that her entire life she dreamt of meeting her Prince Charming and marrying him. Similarly, we who are called to the single in the world vocation come to realize that we have been “single in the world” all along. God has known us “since we were in our mother’s womb” (Ps 139:13). This means that God has been preparing us since our conception and perhaps even before. Single in the world is our natural state.

The single in the world vocation is, as the name says, a REAL vocation. The single in the world vocation is NOT a glorified volunteer any more than marriage, religious life, or priesthood. It is a vocation. A vocation means that we experience a fountainhead of grace that lovingly carries us deeper into God who is all love. This grace flows as the Father provides and we cannot fully enter into Him any other way.

Unfortunately, the single in the world vocation is often regarded by others as persons who could not readily marry, like a severely disabled person or a person who has the care of an elderly parent who doesn't want them to marry. It can also be associated with those who lack the social skills to be in an intimate relationship and have no intentions of doing what is necessary to obtain and develop the necessary basic skills. In other words, single in the world is often associated with those who are single by default. This is NOT truly the single in the world calling (vocation). However, that is not to say that perhaps someone called to the single in the world vocation has not at times struggled with the above issues. The only way to know, like in any vocation, is to deal directly with who we are as individuals and to do all we can to prepare for our vocation. Often times this includes the objective input of others like therapists and/or spiritual directors.

The single in the world vocation is much like the prophets of old. They are alone with God in a non-public way, which is to say, without official status or legal contractual documentation. They are without titles or juridical decree acknowledging the single in the world state. Part of the call is the desire to remain hidden to some degree.

Single in the world can be difficult because financial, spiritual, and emotional sustenance often comes from wherever mercy can be found like the birds and the flowers, whereas those in religious life or priesthood might experience a slightly more predictable framework of providence through the order or diocese. The same with marriage, validly married persons may feel slightly more secure in some ways because they have the help and committed companionship of a spouse but the single in the world person dances with God often moment to moment with little foreknowledge regarding the next step, that is to say, the source of one's

“daily bread”. This is both exciting and scary at the same time, exciting because of the knowledge that the creator of the universe is our spouse in all ways yet scary until we learn how to flow in the providence of our loving heavenly provider (spouse). We eat directly from His hand and no one will take His place as a conduit like a superior, bishop and fellow priests, or marriage partner. Because of this intimate union with God alone, a single in the world vocation in a very real way becomes a child of the universe. Others who come in contact with a true single in the world vocation may sense the need to provide for them in whatever way they can in some singular temporary way though they may not realize why. God works through many instruments.

We do not envy those that have the channels of providence that an order, diocese, or marriage partner has though in the past we may have wanted to fit in. Wanting to “fit in” is a holy virtue and the single in the world vocation fits into creation by God’s design and by this way: hidden, heard, loved, though no one knows our state publicly. We are like the wild flowers laughing, giggling, childlike, and most importantly unspoiled because God as our all is all we have ever known.

We accept our state with a raw natural earthiness in union with plants, animals, and all of creation. Christ in creation is our all. We also have an acute awareness of Christ in others as members of our true family. The “faithful” are our mothers, brothers, husbands, sons, etc., we have in common a type of “spiritual DNA” as Jesus said, “Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers” (Matt 12:49).

A single in the world person enjoys a very real sense of belonging to the family of God, that is to say, the Church militant, Church suffering, and Church triumphant (i.e. the communion of saints). This awareness of eternal spiritual hospitality brings great joy, happiness, and

fulfillment to those that are called. Yet at the same time, the heightened awareness that all persons are our family can cause a sense of greater concern for those that suffer (as do all true vocations). Though we enjoy a keen awareness of connectedness, this wonderful gift comes with an increased sense of obligation to ease suffering and death as much as possible in all its forms or to at least “be” with those that suffer offering compassionate support. **Be aware that prayer may be the primary support offered by some due to necessity or choice.**

Additional Note: I purposely challenged readers in the past in regard to the single in the world vocation and presented marriage, religious life, or the priesthood as the most fruitful and common. Scriptures like, "It is not good for man to be alone . . ." and "Two are better than one so that when one falls the other is there . . ." and also the fact that God Himself is in a community called the "Holy Trinity".

I think that many people say too soon "I am single in the world permanently" because they have a situation that others do not want to readily get involved in like a mental or physical health issue, or obligations often referred to as “baggage”. They may find that they have more courage than others who are reluctant to marry someone with challenging circumstances. Know that if marriage is your happiest state of life, God will provide a spouse that can embrace your circumstances and help you so don’t give up.

I have met people who say they are called to single in the world when in actuality they have a serious difficulty with trusting people to the point of isolation, leaving them without Christian intimacy. Isolation is not the single in the world vocation or any other valid vocation. There are some who are embracing singlehood because they love God “instead” of people. A

person truly called to single in the world feels more closely united to others on a spiritual level, as in any true vocation.

I have had many conversations and experiences with singular people who described themselves as self-absorbed. In other words, living outside of community or marriage was not bearing good fruit. They discovered that they were basically caving in on themselves. When someone expressed feelings or opinions differing from their own they plugged their ears and/or they turned the tables with something shameful implying that they did not deserve to have their opinions (and/or feelings) honored. When we honor the perspective of others (even if we do not hold the same) we hear the special needs of Christ the way Jesus heard the special needs (circumstances) of the woman at the well.

A person truly called to "single in the world" is growing more deeply in intimacy (deep listening) as is anyone who is truly in their vocation (and/or willing to grow in their vocation). It is possible that single in the world permanently is as rare as the hermit life. St. Benedict rarely favored monks leaving communal life to abide alone as a hermit.

If someone feels depressed or disappointed regarding a possible call to the single in the world vocation (or in any of the other vocations) they should lean towards that which makes them happy or brings hope for happiness. God sometimes ask for sacrifices but not for one to sacrifice his or her own happiness permanently. If someone is called to be a nun for instance, the day of her vows is the happiest day of her life, the same with married couples on their wedding day, and the day of a priests' ordination. God wants us to be happy in our vocation.

Those called to be single permanently experience it as the most empowering state of being culminating in a consistent flow of happiness. That is what all vocations are, the greatest channel of happiness building on our baptism and other sacraments. Out of this empowering joy we bring hope to others and serve to the fullest degree possible in this life.

The single in the world person owns and commits to the calling the same as a married person, religious, or priest. Though there is no ceremony, signed documents, public title or outward official garb, the single in the world person makes (seals) their commitment because the freedom gained by serving God in this way is sufficient in itself. Also, the single in the world person enters the calling without looking back. That is to say, we do not entertain the possibility that the Lord might send us a spouse anymore than a person who is already married, already a priest, or already a religious would. Far too many single persons whom I have observed discerning mentioned that they will stay single unless the Lord “surprises” them with a spouse. A single in the world person’s commitment is unwavering.

Though we might have at one time thought or even prayed to be married persons, religious brothers or sisters, or priests if we are truly called to single in the world permanently we will one day “thank God for unanswered prayers”. We will eventually come to realize that single in the world is truly our happiest state drawing us deep into loving union with Christ in ourselves and others. The ultimate proof we are called as single in the world or any other vocation is that we progress and eventually abound in the fruits of love. “**22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control . . .**” (Gal 5: 22-23). We experience levels of self-control and maturity we never dreamed possible.

And lastly, never forget the very real gift of all baptized Catholics which is our initiation into the common priesthood. We, as common priests, have the same obligation and high moral standard of virtue to uphold as the ordained. The ordained priest is a priest of the common priests (which is us). We offer a sacrifice of our lives to rain down the Kingdom on earth to overcome death on all levels. Alleluia! Stay close to your peers. All vocations rely heavily on peer support to persevere in holiness. Allow yourself the support by humbly sharing your inner strengths and weaknesses with others who are faithful and serving in a similar fashion as you.

In our vocation we become perfectly us. That is to say, when we merge our love for God first and foremost with His powerful grace we are perfectly serving him as Jesus said, “**48 You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect**” (Matt 5:48). That is the best that any vocation can do for anyone in this life. What joy to know that through Christ perfection in loving service is possible.

Be open and objective towards marriage, religious life, priesthood, or single in the world as you are gathering information. Have compassion with yourself by acknowledging and listening to the movements of your heart as you experience the possibilities. Take note to that path that gives you a sense of freedom for greater service in love. Take the vocations test at TestYourCalling.org or fill out the application at: VocationsPlacement.org. Visit religious communities, your local diocese, or date more if need be. Be objective without compulsion. Make a decision and move forward.

Note: The men and women who commit in their hearts to remain single permanently for religious reasons are not to be confused with those of the world who embrace the life of a perpetual bachelor or bachelorette. The single in the world person is such because they have

determined that this state of life is the one that best enables them to bear fruit for the Kingdom. Every baptized Catholic person is expected to be fruitful because living the eternal life, living the resurrected life now, is the goal for the entire human race for which Christ the Savior died. Jesus expressed this very real obligation when He cursed the fig tree for not producing in due season (Mk:11:12). Also in the parable of the men with the talents (gold), those who wisely invested their resources “according to each one’s ability” were commended and the one who was “lazy” was outcast (Matt: 25:14-30). There is no such thing as partaking of spiritual wealth without giving back freely “according to one’s ability”. As with Ananias and Sapphira the withholding of our capacity to be fruitful for Christ can produce tragic consequences in this life and the next (Acts 5:1-10).

Joy to serve our wonderful Jesus!
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