

How to Choose Your Catholic Vocation

A man discerning a possible call to the priesthood mentioned a book to me with an intriguing title, *Saving A Thousand Souls*. Though I have not read the book the title sounds a lot like what I have observed (and experienced) which is that a vocation is ultimately a decision that we consciously make to create and embrace that state of life which best enables us to be most fruitful for Jesus, that is to say, “to save a thousand souls”.

Sometimes discerners are waiting for a divine push in order to enter religious life, priesthood, or holy matrimony but that will not happen because vocational choice has to be an act of our freewill in order to be valid. God will not manipulate our freewill by sending a wave of consolation because we ultimately decide our vocational path. He may send waves of consolation with the initial attraction or invitation (and afterwards when we are in our vocation during challenging times) but ultimately He will leave us free to answer Jesus’ decisive question, “What do you want?” (Mark: 10:51).

We also have to honestly look at our reality concerning celibacy. Honestly evaluating what is reasonably possible for us concerning celibacy is a big part of our discernment process according to St. Paul: “**7 I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. 8 To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain single as I do. 9 But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion**” (1 Cor 7:8-9).

Sometimes people want marriage and children with a passion so they marry while others, though they thought they wanted marriage and children, often come to realize they can experience greater rewards of family closeness “a hundred fold” (in fruitfulness for God) by not marrying, as in: “**29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life**” (Matt 19:29).

Here are just a few thoughts concerning romantic passion and vocation. Sexual energy is very powerful, and it can take awhile for celibate people to learn how to channel their energy to create consistent good on the earth. Sometimes, because people have hormones as we all do, they mistake hormonal impulses for a call to marriage. In actuality, many simply need to learn how to be aware and channel their energy.

Important vocation tip: When considering which community, diocese, or spouse with which to nurture a potential vocation go where the love is and do not waste time with those who do not reciprocate. Do not analyze why they are not reciprocating. Go where there is an invitation extended to you in your present reality with expanding hospitality, welcome, and warm regard for you.

Jesus wants us to go where the joy and the freedom are. A person called to the priesthood or religious life ultimately has a greater sense of inner liberation as a priest or religious. The deepest aspect of themselves is born out into the open, while others feel freer within marriage to focus on “saving a thousand souls” through spouse and children. Only you will know by the fruit these choices birth in your heart and life.

The problem often is that people make discernment more “complex” than it actually is by self-doubt and over-thinking. Discerners can experience “paralysis of analysis”.

The Fruit Of Our Decisions Speaks For Itself

This article is saying, “Look at the fruit that your vocation choice bears”. Almost always, the moment we decide or firmly resolve to embrace the course of greatest harvest for Jesus, we experience astounding grace. As a result, we pour blessings into the lives of others almost immediately so much so that when we see the fruit of God’s ingenious plan for us unfolding we say with relief, “Thank God I said ‘yes’!” We come to see clearly the huge significance of what would have been lost if we had not trusted in faith.

Advancing For Christ By Shutting The Door To Self-Doubt

Once we say “yes” there is little if any fruit to be had by looking back by needlessly calling into question our own good judgment and the providence of God. When we keep looking back and doubting ourselves we become like Lot’s wife who became a pillar of salt (neutralized) unable to move forward (Gen 19:26).

Note: Our true vocation gives us a sense of being “stabilized” to advance the heavenly kingdom for Christ. A false vocational impulse nurtures within us an unhealthy contentment with the temporal that actually “neutralizes” our ability to foster that which is eternal. Make (and trust) a fertile vocation decision and don’t look back. Keep scaling the mountain of God reaching higher (expanding our trust). You will be glad you did. You will be the spiritual athlete you were created to be (1 Cor 9:24). Your experience of the eternal will become so real through your vocation that you will actually sense the Saints who have passed (“a great cloud of witnesses”) cheering you on. **“1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us (Heb 12:1).**

Unfortunately, as perplexing as it is to understand, some people apparently refuse to be fruitful as Jesus taught in the parable of the fig tree that bore no fruit in due season or the “lazy” man with the talents that refused to invest them (Matt: 21:19 and Matt 25:24, respectively).

And of equal importance, we certainly do not want to ultimately choose a vocation simply because someone else says we should. Vocation is only valid if we choose it by use of our own freewill and not because someone else coerced us.

On Celibacy, Chastity, And Self-control

Celibacy is really not any more difficult than the fidelity (chastity) a man must show to only one woman in a lifelong marriage or that a married woman must show to only one man, her husband. Self-control and chastity are required whether one is married or celibate. In this sense, the celibate is not the only one who is called to grow in self-control. There isn't much, if any, difference as far as our common obligation as married persons or celibates to grow in self-control. **"22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control"** (Gal 5:22).

On Marriage

Obviously many persons throughout history have chosen Holy Matrimony and lived a devout life. Many persons have had a strong desire to become "one flesh" creating a common life with a spouse on all levels as the Scripture says. **"24 Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh (Gen 2:24 and Eph 5:31)**. Many persons truly desire this oneness with another and that is a valid God-given desire. Holy Matrimony is a sacrament and marriage is virtuous. Even the blessed mother was married (though even in marriage she was celibate). Please know that if you ultimately choose marriage (entered into validly) you are not sinning. St. Paul said, **"28 But if you marry, you do not sin, and if a girl marries she does not sin"** (1 Cor 7:28).

Something you may not know: There are those who, though they are married, live as brother and sister, that is to say, they both agree to forego sexual intimacy. There have even been married men who chose celibacy (as their wives agreed to do also) after marriage and then joined the priesthood (their wives entering the convent). Their marriages were still recognized as valid by the Church though they became priests and religious. It is just that there is no marriage in heaven. Religious and priests (all celibates) live that reality on the earth and therefore bring the "kingdom of God to earth" in an expanded literal sense. **Jesus answered, "30 For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven"** (Matt 22:28). We can live the resurrected life in all its aspects by freely choosing celibacy.

A Scriptural perspective for not marrying:

Many people come to realize that they simply do not want the marriage and family lifestyle. Many, though they could be married, ultimately do not have the desire to give a spouse the time and attention they would deserve and desire because their focus is on serving Jesus in a constant, public, and overt state. Many come to love the spontaneity of going with God in every moment without having to check with a spouse (or to "please" a spouse) as Scripture says: **"33 but the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife, 34 and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman or girl is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy**

in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please her husband” (1 Cor 7:33-34).

Let’s not assume that lifelong celibacy requires a huge act of sacrificial heroism for all persons. There are many, including young adults, who do not experience an almost irresistible urge to have sexual relations that drives them to consider marriage mainly for sexual reasons. Many persons experience a high degree of sobriety in regard to hormonal impulses. They consciously realize these impulses are a result of natural creative chemistry that can be channeled for eternal good. In other words, they have the capacity to rule over their own bodies not the other way around.

Warning in regard to marrying primarily for sexual reasons: Many persons experience a significant cooling around the two year mark in a romantic relationship. Around this time the “infatuation” phase or “honeymoon” phase often begins to wear off. This is when a deeper “friendship” can evolve, or the opposite, the realization that one was actually lust-blind and did not truly know the person (or even like the person) when they married. Needless to say, one need not marry for the experience of deep friendship. In realizing that hormones and infatuation cool down over time one needs to strongly consider the temporary motivations that may play an exaggerated part in the decision to embrace a lifelong spiritual (and legal) commitment such as Holy Matrimony. A free exchange of hearts between two baptized persons capable of making a lifelong marital commitment is the primary sign of a valid marital union. Make sure the heart, the character, of the person you are marrying is one which you wish (and intend) to embrace for life.

A Personal Decision:

Ponder deeply in quiet this article’s opening sentence and answer the question:
“Vocation is ultimately a decision that I consciously make to create and embrace that state of life which best enables me to be most fruitful for Jesus. The vocation of _____ enables me to be more fruitful for Jesus’ kingdom?”

Focusing On The Greatest Praise Of All: Gratitude

There is little need for relying on “will power” when we realize the incalculable generosity and mercy we have been shown through the gift of our vocation. As we get a closer glimpse of the eternal (which is the result of all valid and true vocations) we are engulfed in an unexplainable gratitude and surety that all is well. We are traveling far into the eternal realm though we never left the earth. Yay! Joy floods in and this joy is the source of indestructible strength (Neh 8:10). Don’t allow your mind to dwell on what you may be giving up, the temporal. Rather succumb to the peace-filled state of eternal mystery that can neither verbalized or analyzed. Simply enjoy the goodness of God in all creation by use of this Scripture: “8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Phil 4:8).

The devil is a liar coming to “kill, steal, and destroy” your vocation (your influence, your legacy) through discouragement. If your mind or the devil comes to tempt you to think on an ill thought of self-doubt or discouragement (or with thoughts that you are wasting your life) shut the door of your mind and heart. Turn your face to the Lord’s gifts at hand in gratitude. Let’s resolve firmly to “run the race to win” with unyielding fortitude (focus) as did Our Wonderful Savior Jesus: **“7 For the Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been confounded; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame”** (Is 50:7).

Shut the door to self-doubt, unbelief, and with an ecstatic heart of gratitude live the “abundant life” Jesus died for all to experience. **“10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly”** (John 10:10). By our unwavering loyalty to Christ, we will live out our “greatness” the greatness that Jesus recaptured for us by His death and resurrection. **Jesus said, “12 Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father”** (John 14:12).

We are champions for Jesus!

Have compassion for yourself by acknowledging and listening to the movements of your heart as you experience the possibilities. Take note of that path that gives you a sense of freedom for greater service in love. Take the test at TestYourCalling.org or fill out the application at: VocationsPlacement.org. Investigate the meaning of the four Catholic vocation choices; marriage, religious life, priesthood, or single-in-the-world permanently. It should not take more than two years to gather sufficient information and to visit a few orders, diocese, have dating experience with good Catholic potentials if need be. Then choose because choosing our vocation is not an end it is a threshold through which we pass to an exciting new beginning. Be objective without compulsion. Make a decision and move forward.

Plea from those who suffer: Like the Israelites needlessly circling in the desert on the way to the Promised Land, too many persons have become stuck in the desert of indecision and valuable time is wasted. The Promised Land for us is the perfect place to serve, to bring healing and to end suffering with the Love of Christ. The suffering souls that we will minister to in our vocation are waiting for us to decide.

Joy to serve our wonderful Jesus!
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