



Pastor's Column

St. Peter Catholic Church

March 11, 2018 ~ Fourth Sunday of Lent

The Second Stage of Discipleship Formation

We have begun reflection on nine stages of discipleship formation. The first stage was recognizing that the main prerequisite for discipleship is faith in Jesus Christ, Who is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Because faith means (among other things) surrendering oneself entirely to Jesus Christ – repenting, being converted, and walking in His way (for He is the Way).

The second stage: recognizing that discipleship begins with vocation. One's vocation is one's "calling" in life, given by God and received by us, which we discern in prayer and reflection.

The word "vocation" is derived from the Latin *vocare*, which means "to call." As in: "to invite," or more accurately, "to summon." Each of us has a God-given vocation in life, to which each of us must respond if we are to do our part in building up the Kingdom of Heaven here on Earth for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls. For most of us, that vocation is to Holy Matrimony – that is, marriage and family life (should God bless that marriage with children); for others of us, that vocation is religious life; for others, consecrated single life; for myself (and, God willing, for Peter), that vocation is Holy Orders – being ordained deacon, priest, or bishop.

We consider each of these vocations in turn, briefly. Holy Matrimony is marriage (and, again, God willing, family life – that is, with children conceived and born of the marital embrace), and while Matrimony is by far the most common vocation, it tends to be the most forgotten, for the general attitude easily (and sadly) can become that one is called to marriage if one is *not* called to the consecrated single life, religious life, or Holy Orders. As if the only fundamental dignity to that gift and vocation of marriage only is found in that marriage is *not* any of the other vocations. But this is incorrect to the point of absurdity! If more people would understand marriage as a God-given call, as a *vocation* in its own right, then undoubtedly married couples would be happier, healthier, holier, and just way better in general. Marriage is not a "default setting" that must be denied or upgraded for the attainment of a "higher" vocation; marriage is in fact its own vocation to which God calls certain specific people. Sadly, there are some people who get married who were never even called by God to get married in the first place. Now, this does not mean that if somebody "misses" their vocation that they have sinned or are going to be miserable forever; after all, God can make a good come from any missed opportunity another good – and God's will be done regardless of whatever missed opportunity or even outright, intentional frustration to that will ends up happening. Even so, it is a sorrow when somebody "misses" his or her vocation in favor of another lot in life: the potential for wondering "what if...?" might always be present.

In any event, marriage is a vocation. So, too, is consecrated single life. Now, simply being in the single state is not actually a vocation; it is more of a blank slate. All of our children are single by default; that hardly means that their God-given vocation is automatically to *remain* single. But at the same time, there *are* those whom God does end up calling to remain single, and they are invited then to engage in a formal consecration of their singlehood to God. They take up no religious vows; they do not live in a community necessarily of other singles; they simply consecrated their singlehood and pledge lifelong celibacy in witness to God's greater glory, and they go about living their lives as they otherwise normally would, working normal jobs and so on.

Religious life is a vocation to which God calls men and women: men may become monks of the Benedictine order, for example, or Franciscan friars; women may become cloistered nuns, never again leaving their convent, or active sisters (such as our own Sr. Margarite Marie and Sr. Christiana Marie). Often, their primary work in this vocation is prayer, and these prayer warriors sustain all the world that otherwise truly would be headed you-know-where in a handbasket! Such religious orders receive countless prayer requests from all over the world, and undoubtedly, they are praying for us here at St. Peter even now.

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Holy Orders is the vocation begun at the Last Supper when Jesus made His twelve Apostles the first priests and bishops of His nascent Church. There are three ranks of Orders, which we see throughout the New Testament (specifically in Acts and in the Epistles): deacon, priest, and bishop; as for archbishops, cardinals, and the pope, they are all classes of the ordained Order of bishop.

In summary, the bottom line is that discerning our particular God-given vocation in life is a primary means by which we become disciples of Jesus Christ, and then having discerned whatever is our vocation, actively engaging in that vocation keeps our discipleship alive and strong. Regardless of our particular vocation, it remains the truth that embracing our vocation is our most certain path toward happiness and our surest means of doing our part in building up the Kingdom of God here on Earth.

~Fr. Lewis