

Brothers and Sisters, what do you want to do when you grow up? I often hear grown-ups ask this question, usually to kids. And I can't help but think that many of the grown-ups who ask this question do so, not so much because they are interested in the child's ambitions, but because they are looking for ideas.

I am often asked how I knew I wanted to become a priest, or why I wanted to become a priest. And I really dislike this question. Not because I mind talking about my life or my own vocation story, but because I really don't have an answer that is satisfactory. You see, I did not wake up one morning, look at a brochure and say, hmm...long hours, low pay and no sex, where do I sign up. So, for me, the answer to the question why do you want to be a priest is that I don't. What I want is to respond to God's call for me. And I believe that God has called me to priesthood. This may seem like I am merely playing with words, but I what I am describing is the difference between a career and a vocation. A career is something that we choose to do, for any number of logical reasons. Maybe because we are interested in a particular field or maybe because it pays well. But a vocation is something different. Vocations do not answer the question "What do *you* want to do?" but "Who is God calling you to be."

In reflecting on the notion of vocation, one of my friends wrote the following in her blog.

"I think it is so important for people to consider their vocation (married, single, religious) before making life-changing decisions. It seems odd to me that people plan to marry someone before they prayerfully and seriously consider if they should marry at all! Then again, people do that in many aspects of their life: choose a major without deciding if college is the right course for them, buy things without calculating if it fits their budget"

What my friend's blog reveals is that rather than choosing our own vocation, we need to pray about whether our choice is in line with God's call for us.

In today's readings we have three stories that can help us understand how to enter into the process of discerning how God is calling us.

The first thing that is common to all three readings is that the vocational call comes from some action on God's part. Isaiah did not choose to become a prophet. No, he was simply in the temple praying when all of a sudden the doors shook, smoke filled the room, and angels appeared singing "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts," a prayer we will sing with them in a few minutes. St. Paul did not want to become an apostle and a Christian apologist. In fact, he was off persecuting the Christians when God struck him to the ground, and gave him a mission. Simon Peter did not decide on his own to become a fisher of men. No, he was quite content with his life as a fisherman, that is until Jesus stepped onto his boat, and gave him a different calling.

In my own life, I did not want to become a priest, and believe me, I tried to resist that calling. I even tried dating someone three months before entering the seminary. But God was calling me to something quite different. As Jesus reminds all his followers, "it was not you who chose me, but I who chose you." My life experiences led me to understand that God was calling me to something. I was beginning to see how God, the light who is light itself, was shining upon me, calling me to my fullest potential.

Our vocational call does not end when that light shines on us. No. That is just the beginning. To borrow an image from St. John of the Cross when that light shines on us

we are like a window with all its imperfections exposed. When we stand in the presence of God, our own sinfulness become more apparent.

Isaiah recognized that he is in God's presence, and the light of God suddenly makes his imperfections visible. "Woe is me," he says, "I am doomed! For I am a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips;" St. Paul's sinfulness was made known to the extent that he actually declared himself unworthy to be an apostle. When Simon Peter recognized that he was in the Lord's presence, he said, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man."

When the light of God shines upon us it does not justify us or validate our life. No, when that light shines on us we become deeply aware of our own sinfulness. G.K. Chesterton says that a Saint is a person who recognizes that they are a sinner. In other words to be in the presence of God is to know with greater certainty that I am a sinner.

But then we learn that God can work with our imperfections, with our sinfulness. "Do not be afraid", he tells Simon Peter. "Your wickedness is removed, your sin purged," he says to Isaiah. You see, when the great light shines upon us and exposes all of our imperfections, it does not do so to put our sins on display for the world to condemn. No. The light that shines upon us is a healing light. It's like a spiritual laser that removes those varicose veins marring our soul.

Often times in my own life I recognize my own sins, and I begin to say, how can I preach the Gospel or how can I continue in ministry given my own history of sin. But then I experience the healing power of God. I learn that my weakness does not limit God. This is why we Christians should not be afraid to bring our sinfulness before the Lord. Many people claim that we Catholics are too depressing because we are always talking about sin, and confession. But we believe that when our sin is placed in the light of God, we are not condemned by the light but rather we are healed by the light.

But our own healing does not yet complete our vocation story. Now we must ask that question "who am I going to be?" God does not simply heal us so that we may sit around basking in his glory. After cleansing Isaiah of his wickedness, God seeks someone to spread the Word to the nations. He asks, "who shall I send?" Isaiah answers "Here I am, send me!" Paul, although not worthy to be called an apostle, recognizes that the grace of God has come upon him, and therefore, he preached the word to the gentiles, and they believed. Peter, leaves everything at once to become a fisher of men. I made promises of fidelity to the Church and to pray for and on behalf of the Church daily.

You see, once we have been healed, God calls each one of us to carry out some mission. For me, responding to that mission, that is why I "want" to be a priest. It is the response to a specific call that was initiated by the living God. It is a response that I could only give after spending much time in prayer, listening to God and to the Church. My call, is unique to me. My friend, she had a call, one to be a wife and mother. A call that she could only realize by stepping into the light, and listening to God as he spoke to her in prayer. You too, have a specific call from God. One that requires you to set aside your own ambitions, and step into the healing light, so that you can stop asking the question "what do *I* want to do when I grow up?" and start asking "who is God calling me to be?"

Peace to you, brother and sisters.