



Tips for Discerning AND PROMOTING VOCATIONS

MYTH #1

“I’m just not attracted to the religious life”

“If you knew the gift of God...” (Jn 4:10) Every so often, God finds pure souls who perceive the attraction of renouncing the world to live totally for God. Yet in the vast majority of vocations today, He calls men and women who from their youth had their hearts set on something else; marriage, a career, or simply an ordinary private life. For such as these, the religious life is rarely appealing, at least initially, for it means the sacrifice of their plans. But those generous enough to respond soon discover that “Better is one day in house of the Lord than a thousand elsewhere” (cf. Ps 84:10)!

MYTH #2

“I feel called to marriage instead”

Surprise: all men and women are, by nature, ordered to marriage. “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Gen 2:24). It is only natural that a young person experience a powerful attraction to the opposite sex and a desire to start a family with one who will love them. Nevertheless, God invites those who wish to follow His Son more closely to sacrifice this natural vocation to pursue a supernatural vocation of consecrated celibacy. It goes without saying that only by the grace of God will one find the strength to forgo the powerful urgings of nature: as Jesus taught, “Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given” (Mt 19:11). Even so, it is a grace that you can pray for!

MYTH #3

“But I can love and serve God just as well in the world.”

No one denies that one can lead a godly life and do much good as a lay member of the Church in the world—the universal call to holiness expects as much, and God wills that many serve Him thus. Yet “as a way of showing forth the Church’s holiness, it is to be recognized that the consecrated life mirrors Christ’s own way of life” (St. John Paul II, *Vita consecrata* 42). For God is not glorified so much by what things we do as by how closely we follow the example of His Son who “did not please Himself” (Rom 15:3) but rather came “to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mt 20:28). Ask yourself, then, if God may be inviting you to live in closer conformity to Christ, to leave behind “houses and brothers and sisters and father and mother and children and fields” (cf. Mt 19:29) in order to follow the Lamb wherever He goes - *Vita consecrata*.

PRINCIPLE #1

Put God first

Because of original sin, our natural inclinations and desires are not always trustworthy indicators of God’s will. Moreover, loving God above all things implies putting His will before our own and trusting that “all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28). “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope” (Jer 29:11).

PRINCIPLE #2

Primacy of Prayer

An attraction to prayer is one very good sign of a vocation, and without prayer it is very unlikely that one will hear the voice of God at all. “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me” (Jn 10:27). Successful discernment, therefore, takes place in the context of a life of frequent and familiar conversation with God.

Moreover, vocations are a fruit of prayer. Pray for vocations, and do all you can help those you know—especially young people—to develop solid habits of prayer.

PRINCIPLE #3

Prayer is not enough

Don’t think you can just “pray your way” to discerning God’s special will for you. A vocation is not an intellectual Rubik’s cube that one can “solve” provided he or she think about it enough. Rather, a vocation is a loving look from the Lord (see Mk 10:21) which comes at a particular moment in our lives in the form of an invitation or an opportunity “to be with him and to be sent out to proclaim the message” (Mk 3:14). Therefore, pay attention to “the signs”, the objective circumstances of your life: your talents and opportunities, the needs of the Church of which God makes you aware, and especially to the counsels of His representatives, priests and religious, through whom the Church will discern and confirm God’s call. Lastly, offer yourself! Be generous!

PRINCIPLE #4

Sow seeds!

Ask young, faithful people whether they have considered the religious life. Your question might disquiet them—and that’s often a sign that they are sensitive to the possibility! Speak about the religious life with reverence and admiration; convey to others something of the nobility of this high calling. Help young people “be anxious to please the Lord” (1 Cor 7:32), rather than the affairs of this world. And make sure your children know that you would not be opposed, but rather supportive and even overjoyed, were they to consider and pursue a religious vocation.