



Hearing God's Call

30 Days of Vocation Discernment

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Acknowledgments

I am grateful to so many people who have made this book with me for the last forty years of my life: to God for calling me and sending me as a Redemptorist missionary, especially as a vocation director; for my parents, family and relatives who always love me and encourage me; for my teachers, vocation/formation directors, and Redemptorists who have inspired me and believed in me; and for my friends and people whom I have the privilege to know and serve. They have embraced my vocation and made it more meaningful. Last but not least, I'm grateful to Fr. Joe Dorsey, CSSR; Jim Mascolo; and the Liguori Publications team for their work.

Introduction

Why does our caller keep calling? Because God loves us so much he wants us to constantly discern our vocation wherever we are, whoever we are. God is the original caller. God would like each one of us to be holy, happy, and healthy. Many laypeople, religious, and priests find themselves overworked and locked into a daily routine that doesn't leave much time for spiritual succor. This thirty-day, personal retreat will help you make time to refresh your spiritual life while discerning, or rediscerning, your vocation.

What Is a Vocation?

A vocation is a sacred call heard within our beings. It is uniquely and carefully created by God for us. Therefore, each person has a right and responsibility to discern and to explore his or her vocation. Saint Alphonsus Liguori, the founder of the Redemptorists, was convinced that if one could discover a true vocation for himself or herself, he or she would have salvation and eternal life. There are three vocations that the Church encourages faithful people to discern and reflect on: priesthood or religious life, marriage, and the single life outside of a religious community.

It is up to each one of us to discern wisely and act generously to build a better world. Our deepest joy comes from sincere gratitude to God and the willingness to follow God's path for us.

What Is Discernment?

Discernment is a combination of prayer, study, decision making, and trust. Discernment is not the process of discovering something totally new but the process of realizing our gifts and our responsibilities to use those gifts to serve others, especially the poor and abandoned.

The discernment process has seven basic stages: habitual, awakening, acting, encountering, interacting, giving, and receiving. These seven steps of vocation discernment are based on the seven stages of decision making and action of Zacchaeus in the Gospel of Luke 19:1–10. This process applies for discernment of the religious life, priesthood, single life, and married life. While you may already be at one of these stages, this reflection will take you through each stage in more detail as you progress through this thirty-day, self-guided retreat. As you begin, ask God to give you the four important virtues of courage, knowledge, wisdom, and humility to discern your vocation.

And remember: Be patient! Be patient! ***Be Patient!***



Day 1

Made in the Image of God

God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

GENESIS 1:27

Who am I? We ask this question constantly throughout our lives. Many times, we answer it casually or informally: “I’m Daniel.” “I’m Mary.” “I’m eighteen years old.” “I’m single.” “I’m a student.” “I’m American.”

But, “I’m made in the image of God.” What does that mean? It means *you* were created by God out of love and for love. Often, as we discern our vocations, we forget about our own origins, our own selves. We aren’t here by accident. We exist through the love of God and the love of our parents. Unfortunately, some of us lose sight of this truth. We think, “I’m ugly,” “I’m stupid,” “I’m not good enough.” We don’t dare to embrace our true selves.

The first step of vocation discernment is claiming that you are created from God and by God with dignity and love. God loves us, and wishes us to be happy and loved. If you are discerning your vocation to marriage, this theme is equally important and relevant in your life. If you don’t acknowledge yourself as a unique and beautiful creature of God, you can easily overlook those qualities in your loved one.

Do you see yourself as an image of God? I hope you say “yes.”

Practice: Pay attention to your breathing.

Prayer: Lord, my God and my all: You give me everything: food, air, family, and creation. Most especially, you give me myself, made in your image. I try to fix the flaws I see in myself so often that I lose sight of my original image created by you through love, with love, and in love. Sometimes I expect others to be the image I want them to be. I lose sight of your love. Thank you for creating me in your image of love. Bless me. Teach me. Guide me. Amen.



Reflection Questions

How do you see yourself?

Name two or three characteristics you are proud of about yourself.

How do you see other people?

What is the image and likeness of God for you?



Day 2

God's Beloved

After Jesus was baptized, he came up from the water and behold, the heavens were opened [for him], and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove [and] coming upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

MATTHEW 3:16-17

At his baptism, Jesus was called and affirmed as "my beloved Son." God the Father was "well pleased" with his existence and actions. Jesus' baptism became the foundation for the sacrament we celebrate today: "Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit, and the door which gives access to the other sacraments" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1213).

As a Christian, you were called and blessed as a beloved child of God on the day you were baptized, and God is well pleased with you. As part of your call, you are sent to proclaim the good news to all nations, becoming a witness of hope, faith, and love. Look around you. Look inside yourself. You are beloved by God.

The beloved is filled with love, friendship, and trust. A discernor of priesthood or religious life should humbly feel this love, friendship, and trust when she or he prepares for the spiritual journey. A disciple of Christ is called to be Christlike. A beloved

person is beautiful in the eyes of his or her lover. A beloved person shares his or her radiant joy and freedom with others.

Practice: Say “thank you” to God three times today with all your heart, your mind, and your soul.

Prayer: Loving and gracious God! You created me and you blessed me. You have treated me with reverence, love, and care. You are so patient with me. You always forgive. Thank you for calling me your beloved. Bless me. Teach me. Guide me. Amen.



Reflection Questions

How is your relationship with God?

How do you see yourself in relation to the whole Church?

What does it mean to be God's beloved?

Discerning your vocation is a process that can take you to unexpected places. As you spend time with God in prayer, you also spend time with yourself, discovering who you are and who you are meant to be. As you follow that universal call to sainthood in whatever direction it takes you, you might feel some resistance. What

Fr. Tat Hoang, CSsR, was born in Saigon, Vietnam, in 1972. He and his family came to the United States as refugees in 1993. He professed as a Redemptorist in 2002 and was ordained to the priesthood in 2006. He served as an associate pastor at Holy Ghost Catholic Church in Houston, Texas (2006–2008), and then became a co-director of vocation ministry for the Redemptorists of the Denver Province (2008–2015). He has conducted many retreats for adults, youth, and young adults across the country. Currently, Fr. Hoang works with Life Directions in Chicago to promote and build a strong community of fraternity, social justice, and peace.

God is calling you to do may not be easy. You may be afraid. You may wish you were called to do something else.

Throughout this thirty-day, self-guided retreat, you will be asked to look at yourself, your relationships, and your spirituality as you approach the vocation God has in mind for you. Using Scripture, reflection, activities, and questions, this retreat will help you make time to hear God's call and offer you spiritual strength as you prepare to answer it.

Prayer of Vocation Discernment

Lord, my God and my all:

Strengthen my courage to say "yes" to you.

Increase my willingness to learn more about others.

Expand my wisdom to connect the dots of life.

Deepen my humility to constantly need you.

Lord, lift up my dreams,

So my dreams become yours, and yours become mine.

That is the purpose of my life.

That is all I strive for.

Amen.



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