



Blessed Theresa, foundress of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, quotes the Gospel of Matthew and reminds us:

“Let your light shine so that all may see it and praise your Father who is in heaven.”

Matthew 5:16 / March 3, 1863

Can You Lose Your Vocation?

- Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI

Recently I received a letter from a man who shared that he was still deeply haunted by a story he'd heard in grade school many years before. One of his religion teachers had read them a story about a priest who went to visit a childhood friend. While staying with his friend, the priest noticed that, while his friend was cheerful and affable enough, he seemed to be harboring some deep, residual sadness. When he asked his friend about it his friend confessed that he “had lost his salvation” because he had felt a call to priesthood when he was young but had chosen instead to marry. Now, he felt, there was no existential redemption from that. He had had a vocation and lost it and, with that, also lost for good his chance at happiness. Though happily enough married, he felt that he would bear forever the stigma of having been being unfaithful in not accepting his God-given vocation.

I was raised on stories like that. They were part of the Catholicism of my youth. We were taught to believe that God marked out a certain vocation for you, that is, to be a priest, a sister, a married person, or a single person in the world, and if you didn't accept that, once you knew your calling, then you had “missed” or “lost” your vocation and the consequence would be an abiding sadness and even the danger of missing heaven. Such were the vocation stories of my youth, and, truth be told, I went to the seminary to become a priest with that lingering as a shadow in my mind. But it was only a shadow. I didn't enter religious life and priesthood out of fear, though some moral fears did play a part in it, as they should. Fear can also be a healthy thing.

But it can also be unhealthy. It's not healthy to understand both God and your vocation in terms that can have you missing out on happiness and salvation on the basis on singular choice made while you are still young. God doesn't work like that.

It's true that we are called by God to a vocation which we are meant to discern through conscience, through community, through circumstance, and through the talents that we've been given. For a Christian, existence does not precede essence. We're born with a purpose, with a mission in life. There are many clear texts in scripture on this: Jesus, praying for entire nights to know his Father's will; Peter conscripted on a rock to led by a belt that will take him where he would rather not go; Paul being led into Damascus and instructed by an elder as to his vocation; Moses being called to do a task because he saw the suffering of the people; and all of us being challenged to use our talents or be stripped of them. We're all called to mission and so each of us has a vocation. We're not morally free to live our lives simply for ourselves.

But God doesn't give us just one chance which if we miss it or turn down will leave us sad forever. No. God opens a new door every time we close one. God gives us 77×7 chances, and more after that, if needed. The question of vocation is not so much a question of guessing right (*What very specifically was I predestined for?*) but rather a question of giving oneself over in faith and love to the situation that we've chosen (or which more often than not has by circumstance chosen us). We should not live in unhealthy fear about this. **God continues to love us and desire our happiness**, even when we don't always follow to where we are ideally called....

... None of us should be haunted, long-term, by sadness and fear because we feel that we've missed our vocation, unless we are living a selfish life. **Selflessness rather than selfishness**, a life in pursuit of service rather than a life in pursuit of comfort, not guessing correctly, constitutes one's vocation. Our Christian vocation is to make what we are in fact living – married, priest, religious, single in the world – a life of selflessness and service to others. Happiness and salvation are contingent upon that, not upon guessing correctly.

Vocation Reflections is a monthly newsletter for those interested in learning more about discernment, prayer, and other topics related to the consecrated/vowed life. For questions, comments and [subscription information, please contact sisters@ssnd.org](mailto:sisters@ssnd.org)

Looking Ahead:

National Catholic Youth Conference

November 21-23 2019

Indianapolis, IN

Note: If you're headed to NCYC, stop by to say hello to Sr. Bridget at the *Inspiration Nook*, near the thematic village!

Twin Cities Nuns & Nones

6:30-8:30 p.m

December 4, 2019

St. Jane House, 1403 Emerson Ave. N, Minneapolis, MN 55411

<https://www.facebook.com/nunsandnonestwincities/>

Candlelight Advent / Christmas Novena

December 20, 2019 6:30-8:30 p.m.

Our Lady of Good Counsel, Mankato MN

Carpooling to Mankato provided

sspandi@ssnd.org

Advent / Christmas Novena

December 22, 2019

Notre Dame of Elm Grove

Elm Grove, WI

Youth in Theology and Ministry Retreat

January 3-4, 2020

St. John's University

Collegeville, MN

Life Awareness Retreat

January 10-12, 2020

Cordis Marian Retreat Center

San Antonio, TX

bwaldorf@ssnd.org

Looking Ahead to Advent:

First Sunday of Advent: December 1

Second Sunday of Advent: December 8

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception: December 8 is the Second Sunday of Advent which takes precedence, so the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception is transferred to Monday, December 9 – not a holy day of obligation

Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe: December 12 (Thursday)

Third Sunday of Advent: December 15

Fourth Sunday of Advent: December 22

Solemnity of the Nativity of Our Lord (Christmas): December 25 (Wednesday)



Did you know?

Each of our *Vocation Reflections* is available on-line at our website:

<https://ssnd.org/become-sister/vocation-resources/>

This month's resource:

The SSNDs celebrated 186 years since being founded in Germany. Check out these videos of today's sisters thoughts on why they love being a religious in this congregation.

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL7V8NxG8mEfVjOGpP3nE_CNSKEDnbJhp