

Vocation *Reflections*

August 2023



School Sisters of Notre Dame

Blessed Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger, SSND Foundress, reminds us:

Composure is quiet of mind and heart amid all external restlessness. . .

It is founded on humility of heart and love, on trust in divine providence and on living faith in his holy and intimate presence. (Letter #2:

Listening

In the process of discernment, in addition to listening through prayer and spiritual direction, it is important to reflect on identity and lived experience. It can be helpful to keep coming back to these foundational elements, especially when the next step is not yet clear.

Parker Palmer is the author of numerous books and articles on various topics, including spirituality and social change. He writes from the perspective of his religious tradition, the Religious Society of Friends (Quaker). As you read the following quotes from his book, ***Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation***¹ simply notice what attracts you, and what you resist as you “listen for the voice of vocation.” These quotes are from the preface and first two chapters.

- **Listening.** “Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it, listen for what it intends to do with you. Before you tell your life what truths and values you have decided to live up to, let your life tell you what truths you embody, what values you represent.... Vocation does not mean a goal that I pursue. It means a calling that I hear. Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am.” (pp. 3-4)
- **Vocation.** “Vocation does not come from willfulness. It comes from listening. I must listen to my life and try to understand what it is truly about—quite apart from what I would like it to be about – or my life will never represent anything real in the world, no matter how earnest my intentions.” (p. 4) “Vocation does not come from a voice ‘out there’ calling me to become something I am not. It comes from a voice ‘in here’ calling me to be the person I was born to be, to fulfill the original selfhood given me at birth by God.” (p. 10)
- **Authenticity.** “I must listen for the truths and values at the heart of my own identity, not the standards by which I *must* live—but the standards by which I cannot help but live if I am living my own life.” (pp. 4-5).
- **Humility.** “My life is not only about my strengths and virtues; it is also about my liabilities and my limits, my trespasses and my shadow. An inevitable...dimension of the quest for ‘wholeness’ is that we must embrace what we dislike...about ourselves...as well as what we are confident and proud of.” (pp. 6-7)



- **Callings.** “We find our callings by claiming authentic selfhood, by being who we are...The deepest vocational question is not “What ought I to do with my life?” It is the more elemental and demanding “Who am I? What is my nature?” (p. 15)

Reflection #1

God interacts with us through the people we encounter, through the circumstances of daily life, through the church and the world, and by God’s movements in our hearts. As you reflect on your life in light of Parker Palmer’s insights about vocation and call, what do you notice? What resonates? What do you resist? Is anything becoming more clear? Is there a next step?

Reflection #2

Sometimes art, prose or poetry can help us touch into our hearts in a different way. Rainer Maria Rilke was an Austrian-German poet and novelist. Reflect on the following paragraph, from “**Letters to a Young Novelist.**”² What feelings arise? Do any questions or insights surface?

“Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.”

Prayer—Thomas Merton³

“My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it... I will not fear, for you are ever with me...”

¹ Quoted material from: *Let your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* by Parker J. Palmer. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000.

² Quoted material from: *Letters To a Young Poet* by Rainer Maria Rilke, and M. D. Herter Norton. 2004.

³ Quoted material from: *Thoughts in Solitude* by Thomas Merton. New York, N.Y: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1958.

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