

**A message from Luke Theobald
at the Venerable English College, Rome
Sunday 11th Feb**

I first thought about the priesthood as teenager when a priest asked if I had ever thought of the priesthood. The question never left me although I spent a long time avoiding answering it. Fast forward until after university, I began working in London as a trader in the financial markets. Now in my mid-twenties, I would occasionally meet a priest friend for a catchup. One time he asked me; *'Luke are you living life to the full? For Jesus promised that his disciples would have life to the full if they followed him.'* There was silence after this question as we both knew that I was not living life to the full. However, I was unwilling to change because my life was good; I had a great job, my friends all lived nearby and I greatly enjoyed life in London.

Shortly after, I was promoted and transferred to Sydney, and life became even better; I was now running a global franchise for the bank, lived a stone's throw away from the waterfront and the quality of life in Australia was unparalleled. However, that question from the priest lingered and as my material circumstances improved a restlessness was growing within my heart.

Two things happened in Sydney. Firstly, a girlfriend questioned how important my faith was to me. As she put it I *"talked the talk but didn't walk the walk"* She was right, with the busyness of work I had allowed my personal relationship with God to decline with no daily prayer and just habitual attendance at Mass and confession. After her challenge and with her support I began to prioritise God again, rather than my job. This began by simply starting each day with 10 minutes of prayer, but its impact was profound. Slowly this daily prayer moved my priorities from a self-serving, selfish life to one that began looking out, attempting to serve and love others (this is still very much work in progress!). As this interior transformation was happening, the sense of restlessness kept on growing. I was very happy yet deeply unsatisfied.

One day sitting in Sydney Cathedral I looked up to a stain glass window, which was of the last supper. In that moment, I knew that the priesthood, something that I had been thinking on and off for many years, was a path I had to pursue. I then began my discernment journey more formally. First by talking to my parish priest, then the vocations director, attending a retreat after which I resigned from work and returned to the UK before entering the seminary. The journey, from that moment in the cathedral, has been one marked by an ever-growing sense of peace replacing the restlessness in my heart. Next week I will talk about responding to the call.