

**A message from Luke Theobald
at the Venerable English College, Rome
Sunday 18th Feb**

Could God be inviting me to the priesthood or religious life?

I hope it is a question that every young person asks, men for the priesthood and women for religious life. My experience, and other men in the seminary, is that vocational calling is very gentle because it is always an invitation and never forced. Also, if it is from the Lord it never quite goes away (I thought about it for 10 years before starting seminary). I therefore encourage young people, perhaps as you think of your future and the good things you may look forward to: education, work and making a difference to society, to also consider God's plan for you to either family, single or religious life. Most are called to family life, but for those who are called to religious life what are the signs?

Unfortunately it's unlikely to be anything as dramatic as St Paul's conversion, but from speaking to the men in seminary the common signs are: a sense of joy when thinking about the priesthood, the idea just keeps returning periodically and perhaps for those who are a little older, other paths in life haven't quite led to the fulfilment that was hoped for.

What should you do if the idea of priesthood or religious life does linger in your mind? I would like to suggest three things: pray, talk and be courageous. Prayer is the natural response to any vocation, religious or otherwise and it will create space to dialogue with the living God and listen to his voice. Talking is essential, when a person thinks they have a religious calling they can feel like the only person in the world who is thinking this! This is not true, many people are thinking and discerning and this journey is best walked with others. I would recommend speaking to a trusted family member, a parish priest or contact the vocations director <https://www.vocations.org.uk/> and begin speaking out loud and know that you are not the first person to think about these things.

Finally, I encourage you to be courageous. It can be a scary thing to email the vocations director or mention it to a priest or family member, but remember this; you are not committing to anything except to know God more. Even now in my 4th year at seminary I am free to leave at any time, all the Church asks is I am serious in using this time to discern, pray and prepare for possible future ministry.

I really want to encourage others to be courageous and trust that God and the Church will show how much they love you by supporting you in this journey. Should anyone want a first step I would suggest reading the book 'To Save a Thousand Souls' by Fr. Brannen, which the vocations office has copies of. I found this a deeply encouraging book which both acknowledged my concerns and fears, but left me with a profound sense of hope and joy in a potential priestly ministry.

Next week I will conclude with what communities can do to foster vocations.

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Prayer For Vocations

Let us pray:

O God, Who chose the Apostles to make
disciples of all nations
and Who by Baptism and Confirmation
has called us to build up Your Holy Church,
we implore You to choose among us,
Your children,
many priests and religious
who will love You with their whole heart
and will gladly spend their entire lives making
You known and loved by all.
Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

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