

## REFLECTIONS UPON CHRISTIAN VOCATION

### Vocation

It comes from the Latin *vocare*, to call, and means the work a person is called to by God.

There are all different kinds of voices calling you to all different kinds of work, and the problem is to find out which is the voice of God rather than of Society, say, or the Superego, or Self-Interest.

By and large a good rule for finding out is this. The kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of work (*a*) that you need most to do and (*b*) that the world most needs to have done. If you really get a kick out of your work, you've presumably met requirements (*a*), but if your work is writing TV deodorant commercials, the chances are you've missed requirement (*b*). On the other hand, if your work is being a doctor in a leper colony, you have probably met requirement (*b*), but if most of the time you're bored and depressed by it, the chances are you have not only bypassed (*a*) but probably aren't helping your patients much either.

Neither the hair shirt nor the soft berth will do. *The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.* (italics mine) ~ Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC*, (1973), p. 95

There is only one problem on which all my existence, my peace, my happiness depend: to discover myself in discovering God. If I find Him I will find myself and if I find my true self I will find Him. ~ Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, p. 36, Finley, p. 144

"If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now – when?" ~ Hillel

"Your vision will become clear only when you look into your heart. Who looks outside, dreams. Who looks inside, awakens." ~ Carl Jung

Anything less than a contemplative perspective on life is an almost certain program for unhappiness. ~ Fr. Thomas Keating

### SOME MARKS OF CALL

- Pay attention to discomfort. If you are having a tempering, melting-down, something-is-not-right uncomfortable feeling, it may indicate a change in call. (Comfort is the enemy of growth.)
- When feeling "nudges", experience these as "good news" – especially if there is an excitement/energy from talking about it/praying about it/ wanting to do it.
- Call is transcendent: we know it isn't us. It comes from outside of us. There is an inner knowing. It is not an ego trip. (You can tell if it is NOT transcendent because you will get tired or bored. The task will feel like a chore, a burden, or it will lose it's appeal, be short-lived and empty of joy.)

- It is impossible, which is why we initially don't pay attention to it. It seems beyond us – because it is. If it were possible, we wouldn't need God. We must depend upon God's grace.
- It is persistent. It won't go away.
- Call is risky. It is costly. We are called to let go of other things in order to respond. To leave. To 'let go'. To choose. It is not 'safe'.
- We can never be sure we have heard it right. There is always some doubt, some uncertainty. (Again, we have to depend on God.)
- It is not fear-based but faith-based. It is not a response that sounds like, "We must do this or that horrible thing will happen." We are not called to save the world, or even part of it. Rather, it is from the lens of the kingdom of God. This is the way God is moving the world and so we join God in the process, allowing God to use us for the divine reconciling. We may be afraid of failure, but we are not called to be successful – only faithful and obedient to God's call.
- It is an evolving process. We don't get the full plan. Things are revealed to us day to day. We must to trust God in our 'guts', for that is how we will discern the next step. The abundance of God – and God's guidance – keep pouring through.
- It is growth producing. It stretches us and moves us out of our comfort zone, and continues to move us out of our comfort zone.
- Call is counter-cultural.
- God gives us what we need to respond faithfully. We can trust in God to provide all that is needed to meet the call. There will be enough money, enough people, enough energy, enough time. That is not to say that it will be easy or without struggle. It will always be 'on the edge'.
- It is visionary. It can (and will) set up jealousy, anger, resentment in others – often from those you least expect. (Sometimes those nearest and dearest to you.) The powers and principalities resist God's work in this way.
- At the same time, it will inspire those who are also seeking God's call in their lives. For those who have eyes and ears to see God's work in the world – it will be seen and heard.
- Do not depend on results. Work may appear worthless, or even foolish, or we may even get the opposite results from what one hoped. But one learns to count on the value of the work itself – not the results.
- It will connect with our point of deepest pain.
- We will feel a sense of great excitement, generosity, and wholeness. Our lives (and our life together) will feel 'all of one piece'. The work will give us energy. We will be full of life, serenity – whole and generous. (As we open to the Spirit, we become a conduit through which the Spirit moves to others.)
- It will draw us deeper into community. It does not isolate. We are not called alone. There will be others who will join us in our journey. ("It is not good that human beings be alone.")

Compiled from the writings, sermons, and teachings of Gordon Cosby at Church of the Saviour, Washington, D.C.

Special thanks to The Rev. Philip Dougharty for sharing these insights in the Diocese of the Rio Grande