

## SIGNS OF A VOCATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD

For many of us, it is not immediately clear who God is calling us to be and what path he wants us to follow. Finding the right path takes patience, time, prayer and discernment. The thoughts of priesthood will not come and go in a matter of minutes if that is the way of life God is calling you to embrace. But you might ask: how do I know if God is calling me to be a priest? Here are a few signs that suggest He might be:

- If you feel a desire to be a priest or to at least to consider it. If you do feel this desire, don't be afraid of it or ignore it. Talk to someone you trust about it. In the words of St John Paul II: 'It is Jesus who arouses within you the desire to do something beautiful with your life' (World Youth Day, Rome 2000).
- If you are attracted to the person and message of Jesus Christ. His remains the greatest story ever told. His life and death contain human categories that speak to the story of our lives today and indeed human existence. We recognise our story in his story and his story in our story. His resurrection teaches us that God's love is the greatest power in the world and because this is true, we dare to hope. The priest is someone who stakes his whole life on this and encourages others to do the same. This is what we call faith. The priest is a man who burns to make Christ known and loved and to lead others to friendship with him. He prays and works for unity, justice and peace – and to establish the kingdom that Jesus came to build.
- If you love the Church. Despite her failings - mine and yours - the priest is a man in love with the Church – not just the institutional Church but the Church as the Body of Christ and the people of God. Loving the church means loving her saints, her Tradition, her wisdom and all that is good, true and beautiful in her heritage – all that Christ has left us to enrich our lives and save us from evil, sadness and despair. Loving the Church means loving her woundedness, being conscious of her failings and having a desire for healing, justice and holiness. For the priest, the Church is his bride. Love for her captures his heart and he lives every day to be with and serve the community he serves.
- If you love people. If you love God's people and want to help them in his name. If you do not want to live for yourself but for others. If you want out of the rat race and have become tired of the moral poverty of what the world offers as the keys to happiness. If you have an interest in people and feel a deep desire to help people and serve them – especially those who are most in need. If you can recognise yourself in these, perhaps God has created you to be a priest.
- If you love to pray and lead others in prayer. Have thoughts of priesthood coincided with a deepening of your prayer life? If so, then this is good. Prayer is the time when the Lord reveals himself to us and nudges us towards a greater clarity of his will. Apart from private prayer, of particular importance is the Mass and the sacrament of Reconciliation. At the Eucharist we hear his Word and receive Him intimately. Also in the Confessional where we are transformed by his mercy. The best penitents make the best confessors.

- If someone mentioned the possibility of you becoming a priest and what they said impacted on you. If this happened, then how did what they say rest with you? Perhaps they see something in you that you can't see yourself? Among those young men in seminary, a high percentage attribute their presence there to someone speaking to them about the possibility of them become priests. That was the first seed that was sown. If the invitation of someone else to consider the possibility has persisted in your thoughts, don't ignore them. Find someone you can trust, perhaps another priest, and share with him your feelings. And when you do, fear falls away and courage replaces it.

These signs may bring the possibility of a vocation into sharper focus. To sum up what these signs are –

- if you desire to be a priest;
- feel an attraction to the person and message of Jesus Christ;
- if you love the Church;
- if you love people;
- if you love prayer;
- if someone has mentioned the possibility of a vocation and it struck a chord.

Six signs that the Lord might be calling you. Be open and do not be afraid!