

Answering God's call

"To live means to be desired and loved by God, moment after moment." ("Jubilee of the Consecrated Life," Appendix IA)

Of all the ways one might define human life, that brief and startling statement says everything. I wonder what kind of definition each of us would write were we asked to define "to live."



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I have a suspicion that many of us would begin, "To live means that I..." Our definitions would continue with a list of things that I would accomplish, achieve, feel, think, know, do.

But the true definition does not begin with anything that I set as a goal for myself. Instead it begins with recognizing that the only reason I am alive is that I am "desired and loved by God." By desiring and loving me, God brought me into being and sustains me. I am neither the source nor the goal of my own life. I am one who is desired and loved by God, moment after moment, and therefore I am alive. My existence is evidence that God exists!

Taking that definition seriously means letting a revolution happen in our hearts. If the reason I am alive is that I am a desire of God, the beloved of God, a thought of God, an object of God's favor, then nourishing a relationship with God brings me even more to life. Making myself the center, the point of it all, only lessens me.

Surrender to truth

It is the revolutionary irony of the Gospel that in forgetting myself I find myself, that in surrendering myself to God as his instrument I come alive.

That upside-down logic is emphasized by the gospels as a key to Jesus' teaching: "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. What profit is there for one to gain the whole world yet lose or forfeit himself?" (Lk 9:24-25).

One obstacle to serious consideration of a religious vocation is that we begin by asking, "Should I do this?" In other words, we approach a vocation as we would a career change, when, in fact, it has much more to do with our willingness to leap into God's arms. It has to do with surrendering ourselves to the truth — even though we do not fully understand it — that no matter what I have already accomplished, the reason I am living is that I am desired and loved by God.

"What does God call me to do?" That is the proper question to ask oneself when contemplating a vocation. Discerning a vocation means allowing myself to be defined by God's desire and love for me, to want to become an image of God's love and desire for everyone. That is no easy task, but it is precisely what the church — the world — needs.

Discerning a vocation means putting myself at God's disposal, so that when he calls I will not respond, "I have something better to do."

Am I afraid of falling? God will catch me. Am I too weak? Yes, but God is strong. Will I miss my former life? Perhaps, but I will gain something more. Will I abandon what I have built up? No, I will give it to God. Will I lose

my family? No, I will grow even closer to them, and God will even expand my family. Will I limit my future choices? Most definitely yes, but in giving myself to God I will gain everything.

Alive in God's desire

Over the past six months I have had the privilege of getting to know the large number of religious women and men who serve the Archdiocese of Seattle, and I am often struck by their heroic history in the Pacific Northwest.

Many of their forbears set out into the wilderness, far from home, like Abraham, because they trusted in God's promise and believed in the mis-

sion he had given them. The results of their pioneering spirit can be seen everywhere in the archdiocese, as sisters and brothers continue to serve God faithfully.

This Saturday I will have the awesome privilege of ordaining five new priests for the archdiocese, men who have been called by God from a variety of backgrounds. Last Friday they spent the day with me, and we enjoyed our time of prayer and reflection. I was reminded joyfully that God is calling fine men to be priests, and I am deeply grateful.

Please join me in prayer for those in the archdiocese who are considering a vocation to the priesthood or religious life (and for those who are not considering a vocation but should be!). Pray that they will come alive in

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God's desire and love for them, that they will give their "I" to God for his sake and ours. Pray that they will have the courage to stake their lives on what it means "to live." Pray that they will hear his call and answer, "Yes!"

I would like to make a request of everyone who reads this column — lay, religious and clergy. Think of at least one young man or woman who you believe would be a good priest or religious. Pray for that person's intentions, cut this column out of the newspaper and mail it to him or her with your personal words of encouragement.

Part of our vocation is to extend the call of God.



The Calling of the Apostles Peter and Andrew (Duccio di Buoninsegna, 1308)