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"Faith in the Divine Initiative - The Human Response "  
*excerpt from the World Day of Prayer for Vocations 2009*  
*Pope Benedict XVI*

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The vocation to the priesthood and to the consecrated life constitutes a special gift of God which becomes part of the great plan of love and salvation that God has for every man and woman and for the whole of humanity. The Apostle Paul, whom we remember in a special way during this Pauline

Year dedicated to the Two-thousandth anniversary of his birth, writing to the Ephesians says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him" (Ef 1:3-4). In the universal call to holiness, of particular relevance is God's initiative of choosing some to follow his Son Jesus Christ more closely, and to be his privileged ministers and witnesses. The divine Master personally called the Apostles "to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons" (Mk 3:14-15); they, in turn, gathered other disciples around them as faithful collaborators in this mission. In this way, responding to the Lord's call and docile to the movement of the Holy Spirit, over the centuries, countless ranks of priests and consecrated persons placed themselves totally at the service of the Gospel in the Church. Let us give thanks to God, because even today he continues to call together workers into his vineyard. While it is undoubtedly true that a worrisome shortage of priests is evident in some regions of the world, and that the Church encounters difficulties and obstacles along the way, we are sustained by the unshakable certitude that the one who firmly guides her in the pathways of time towards the definitive fulfilment of the Kingdom is he, the Lord, who freely chooses persons of every culture and of every age and invites them to follow him according to the mysterious plans of his merciful love.

Our first duty, therefore, is to keep alive in families and in parishes, in movements and in apostolic associations, in religious communities and in all the sectors of diocesan life this appeal to the divine initiative with unceasing prayer. We must pray that the whole Christian people grows in its trust in God, convinced that the "Lord of the harvest" does not cease to ask some to place their entire existence freely at his service so as to work with him more closely in the mission of salvation. What is asked of those who are called, for their part, is careful listening and prudent discernment, a generous and willing adherence to the divine plan, and a serious study of the reality that is proper to the priestly and religious vocations, so as to be able to respond responsibly and with conviction.

## Q & A

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"The Priestly Character of the Soul"  
*with Fr Anthony Bannon LC*

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**Q.** Dear Fr Anthony,

What is the difference between a consecrated priest and a consecrated religious person, concerning apostolic work and the general works?

-Javier

**A.** Dear Javier,

The difference is in the priesthood.

In the first place, the consecrated person who is not a priest obviously cannot do priestly ministry (principally the celebration of the Eucharist and hearing Confession). But even when doing the things that others can do (preaching, teaching, ordinary administration, etc.) the priest is different. This is because of the priestly character on his soul. His actions are united to Christ's in a special way due to his priesthood, and have a special value in that priesthood. You can also say that since he is a priest, for many of the faithful with whom he will work, even though it is in ordinary, non-sacramental things, his example and action will have a special impact and force.

God bless.

-Fr Anthony

## Q & A

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"The Wonderful Truth About the Vocation"  
*with Fr Anthony Bannon LC*

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**Q.** Dear Fr Anthony,

How can I as a mother best teach my sons about a vocation when they are only in preschool and younger?

-Cheryl

**A.** Dear Cheryl,

There is a wonderful truth about the vocation, and it is that God had his plan for us even before he created us, and the first great step in that vocation, after the gift of life, was the moment of our Baptism. The kernel of our ultimate vocation is already there present in Baptism.

When you look at it like that, you and your husband have already contributed hugely towards your sons' vocation by being open to God's gift of life, by bringing them to Baptism, and now by educating them in the faith and wanting to cooperate even more with God's action in their souls. It is a question now of giving continuity to a work already well started and well underway.

I think two ideas can be of help to you, based on the awareness that you are not going to give your sons a vocation, you will simply prepare the ground, and while you do so you can also pray for their vocation.

The first idea is this: that the vocation or rather our response to the vocation is a choice, an act of love. So, a very important element of the education and formation you give your boys has to be this education for love, for a well ordered love, love that is not squandered on useless, selfish or base things, love that is a free act of giving oneself.

The second is that this love is, of course, centered on Jesus Christ, a relationship with him that is personal, direct, immediate, full of faith and trust. It is cultivated in prayer and knowledge of him. It is inspired by the example of others, especially the saints. When we live this relationship, every detail of our life is connected with him, he is present in everything we do, we spontaneously speak to him and take him into account. For boys it is especially important to place before them the heroic and manly nature of love for Christ. The lives of missionary saints and martyrs are priceless in this regard, from St. Paul all the way to Damian of Molokai and down to our times.

So, lead your sons along the path of prayer, a love for Christ in the Eucharist, a sense of heroism and a sensitivity to the needs of souls. At the same time, make sure that all the other aspects of their lives are taken care of, their physical health, their sense of adventure, their bumps, scratches and scrapes and their minds and memories.

God bless,

-Fr Anthony

"Drawing Love from Mary's Heart"  
John 10:11-18

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*Jesus said: "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd is one who lays down his life for his sheep. The hired man, since he is not the shepherd and the sheep do not belong to him, abandons the sheep and runs away as soon as he sees a wolf coming, and then the wolf attacks and scatters the sheep; this is because he is only a hired man and has no concern for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for this fold, and these I have to lead as well. They too will listen to my voice, and there will be only one flock and one shepherd. The Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me; I lay it down of my own free will, and as it is in my power to lay it down, so it is in my power to take it up again; and this is the command I have been given by my Father."*

**Introductory Prayer:** Mother, my faith is centered on God, but I also know that no-one can lead me to Jesus like you can. Today I want to offer you my heart, my mind, my all to you with absolute trust so that you can take me under your maternal protection and lead me to him. May I love Christ totally and may everything I do today be pleasing to him. May I honor your Son by imitating your virtues, the surest path to giving him his rightful place in my life, the center, as he was in yours.

**Petition:** Lord Jesus Christ, give me the graces I need to follow you by imitating you with the same love and joy as your mother did.

**1. "The Good Shepherd is One Who Lays Down His Life for His Sheep" - Fidelity of Mary.** The good Shepherd is Christ, but we find that Mary reflects his attitudes in her life, and can help us apply them to ours. Mary did not die for us, but the moment she said "Let it be done unto me" God's Handmaid effectively laid her life at the feet of God to be used any way he saw fit in order to redeem us from our sins. Never once did she turn back or second-guess her decision. And it cost her many sufferings. We can be sure that at the foot of the Cross she would willingly have died in Christ's place, so much did she love her, and us.

Mary is not only faithful to Christ, she is our faithful mother. In difficult times good friends may be hard to come by, but our Mother is always there. She is the first to be at our side in our joys, triumphs, shortcomings, and sorrows. Mary was always there throughout her son's entire life: from the elation of Elizabeth's greeting at the Visitation to the ignominy of the Crucifixion, when few friends were to be found, not even the twelve apostles. Precisely because she is our Mother, we too should never doubt that our concerns are her concerns; moreover, could any concern of Mary ever be unheard by her son, Jesus? Our prayers to her will never go unanswered.

**2. "I Know My Own and My Own Know Me" - Love for Her Children.** A mother of eight was asked, "Which do you love the most?" She answered, "I love them all, but I love most the one most in need. The one who just fell and bruised a knee, the one who was left out of the group, the one who is sick today...." Mary has each of us constantly in mind; each and every step we take is watched over by her. She knows us, and we have to make sure that we know her for the Mother she is. Knowing her means turning to her when in need, when troubles have brought us down, when we are confused and the way forward is not clear. Mary will not force herself into our life. We have to recognize and invite her in. She knows our heart and our life even better than we do, because she sees what we don't always see: the splendor of God's plan for our life unfolding.

Take the hand of Our Mother, and she will lead us through the valley of tears.

**3. "They Too Will Listen to My Voice, and there Will Be Only One Flock and One Shepherd "- Where Mary Takes Us.** Mary's role can easily be misunderstood, but it can also easily be understood, and used well. Her only goal is to bring us to Christ, to heal our divisions, our lack of charity, so that we can truly be united as children of the Father in Christ. Mary is interested in healing the internal division of sin in our lives, which separates us from others and from God – and she knows that only Christ's grace can do that. So she will always lead us toward the encounter with God's grace in the Sacraments, in the Church and in prayer. She will help us make that grace effective in our life by living real and effective charity, and serving others. Truly, if we "listen to her voice" he will lead us to enter into the one flock under the one Shepherd. The world will make many promises, but cannot give us life everlasting. The one true guarantee of the true happiness we all desire is Jesus Christ himself, and that is where Mary leads us, a sure beacon in the midst of many attractive but uncertain promises. Our Heavenly Mother has only one interest: that we find our way to her Son and gain the eternal happiness for which we were created. Let us bring her into our life, and she will bring us into the fullness of her Son's life at the end of our sojourn here on earth.

**Conversation:** Mary, as we approach Mother's day, I ask you to be particularly present in my life. I pray that in good times and hard you will always be at my side. Help me never to doubt your fidelity and your personal love for me as your child. Ask of your Son the grace I need today to be another Christ to all those around me, and for the gift of persevering in love.

#### **Questionnaire:**

1. What do I think is the measure of Mary's love for me?
2. What shows that I have truly given Mary her rightful place in my live?
3. How much do I trust in Mary? Am I confident that she will lead me to Christ and the changes I need to make in my life?

A vocation, then, is nothing other than God's call to serve him in a concrete state in life, and we can say that every person has his particular vocation – a concrete, personal way to reach God, very much his own and untransferable. By way of example, the specific vocation of a married Catholic is to be a Catholic Christian (many people are non-Christians, and many Christians are not Catholic) in the world (some Catholics are called to be religious or priests) rooted in a particular country and society, with a specific profession (engineering rather than others, for example) marked by an indissoluble reality (marriage to a particular woman) and given an apostolic dimension.

All of this makes up your vocation, different to that of your closest friends and relatives. You have to accept your personal vocation fully in all its dimensions. It would be a deception to say: I'll be a good husband and I won't bother about my faith; or I'll be a good career man and I will not be faithful to my marriage; or I'll be a good husband and a good career man but I'll forget about my Christian life and my commitment to God. It would be like an engineer who took arithmetic but skipped trigonometry, and thought he was a good engineer.

Now every vocation has a degree of difficulty and its own particular demands, granted that all are arduous and difficult. They are thus each one's path to God, and the cross that each one has to shoulder, whether we like it or not and whether we accept it or not. And among vocations, those that hold up for us higher and

more spiritual ideals are the most strenuous and demanding, since they ask more love and self-giving from us, which are purely spiritual values.

## Special

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"One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic"  
*courtesy of National Catholic Register*  
Mark Shea

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April 26-May 2, 2009 Issue

"We believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church," says the creed.

Roy Blount Jr. tells the joke about the Southerner who was asked, "Do you believe in infant baptism?" The Southerner replies, "Believe in it? I have seen it done!"

Some people might feel equal bemusement about the clause in the creed professing "belief" in the Church. What's to believe in? There it is, big as life!

The first three parts of the creed speak about the unseen realities of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But the Church is not unseen: It's extremely visible and tangible, perhaps a bit too tangible, what with all the warts. And yet, the creed insists that the Church is revealed. What's going on?

The Church is, says St. Paul, a mystery.

To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ and to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; through the Church, the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places (Ephesians 3:8-10).

Jesus chose to commend his revelation entirely to the Church: the Scripture, the sacraments, the common life, the way in which these things are to be understood — The whole deal was commended into the hands of the Church in such a way that we cannot get at him without invariably having to unite with the Church, as well.

Baptism into Christ isn't just baptism into the head, but the body, as well. Paul knew this profoundly, having been confronted by the risen Christ who demanded of him not "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting my followers," but "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

It is not too much to say that Paul's entire ministry consisted of unpacking the implications of those seven words and discovering the meaning of Christ's one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

The oneness of the Church is a Trinitarian, not a monolithic, oneness. It consists, not in being assimilated by the Borg (a fictional pseudo-race of cybernetic organisms in Star Trek) and made a parrot for a completely uniform life of exactly the same tastes, opinions, thoughts and feelings, but of becoming part of a community of fully human persons all sharing in the life of the community of persons that is the blessed Trinity, who is one: "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one." The Church, which is the body of the Lord Christ, is to be one in the same way.

It is worth noting that the writing of the New Testament was occasioned by stuff like pride, factionalism, sexual license, getting drunk at Mass, and various other things one does not associate with the term "holy."

Paul's moral exhortation to the Corinthians is essentially what the Catholic exhortation has ever been: "Become what you are!"

The curious thing about the Church is that, since it is the mystical body of Christ, it exists before it has any mortal members, since the soul of the Church is not you or me, but the Holy Spirit. It is he, not we, who makes it holy. Without him, we're just a bunch of schleps sitting in a room on Sunday morning.

And we are schleps with nothing earthly in common. Look at the people in line for Communion at your average parish: Young, old, rich, poor, every color and culture imaginable, every language, nation, people, tongue and tribe comes to the altar. This is by divine design.

Catholics, said Chesterton, agree about everything. It is only everything else they disagree about. That's because the Church takes 'em all. The members of the Church are "many" — not only quantitatively, but qualitatively, as well.

And the Church is immeasurably richer for it: a wild party, made one body in Christ. That's catholicity.

That wildly catholic body is also apostolic, simultaneously rooted in tradition and reaching out to bring in new members. The Church cannot make up new revelation as she pleases. She must guard faithfully what has been entrusted to her by the apostles. With their deaths, all public revelation ended till the Second Coming. So the Church is bound, by her nature, to be apostolic.

But to be apostolic is not merely to be conservative.

It is also to be creative because of Christ, whom the apostles proclaim is creative. And we are to be like him. But "creativity" is not a synonym for "novelty" any more than "orthodox" is a synonym for "conservative." The truly orthodox are, like St. Thomas Aquinas or John Paul II or Louis Pasteur, profoundly creative minds.

That is why the apostolic faith is the living faith of the dead, not the dead faith of the living, or the thrill-seeking faithlessness of the living dead.

*Mark Shea is the content editor for CatholicExchange.com.*

## Upcoming Events & Retreats

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(( Listed here are retreats directed by the Legionaries of Christ and Regnum Christi members. For a listing of diocesan activities and other events, click here to go to the vocation.com website ))

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## **REGNUM CHRISTI consecrated women**

**Come and See Weekends.** Spend a weekend with the consecrated women of Regnum Christi, learning about their life, spirituality and mission within the Church. Activities include: Talks/conferences about the Church, Regnum Christi, the Spiritual Life, and consecrated Life in Regnum Christi; a half-day retreat; opportunities for confession and Spiritual Direction; daily Mass and time for prayer, silence and reflection; sports and meals with the consecrated women; vocational panel: Questions & Answers with consecrated women. Ages 16-30. For more information, contact Jill Swallow at [vocation@inteducators.org](mailto:vocation@inteducators.org) or 401-949-2820. 2009 dates: May 22-25, and July 10-13

ShoreLines

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