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Holy Father

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"On the Pope's Prayer Requests"
excerpt from May 3, 2009 Address
Pope Benedict XVI

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Because of this, today is celebrated the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. In my annual message for this occasion, I have invited reflection on the theme: "Faith in the Divine Initiative -- the Human Response." In fact, trust in the Lord, which continuously calls to sanctity and, for some in particular,

to a special consecration, is expressed precisely in prayer. As much personally as in community, we have to pray a lot for vocations, so that the greatness and the beauty of the love of God attracts many to follow Christ on the path of the priesthood and the consecrated life.

It is also necessary to pray as well so that there are holy spouses, capable of indicating to their children, above all by example, the horizons to which they should tend toward with their liberty.

Q & A

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"God Made Us Free"
with Fr Anthony Bannon LC

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Q. Dear Fr Anthony,

As I read the e-mail I just received, I am again reminded of doing Gods' will. I am always asking myself, "Is this God's will?" I have read many articles that seem to imply that everything that happens in your life, down to the smallest detail, is Gods' will. Are we supposed to believe that everything that happens on a daily basis, day by day, is Gods' will and we should say yes to everything? That doesn't make sense to me. I can think of many things I should say no to. Since we can't see past even the next minute, how do we know that the decision that is facing us, however small, we should say yes to and know that it is right? What if we said no instead of yes and found out we were wrong. It doesn't make sense to me that in following Gods' plan, you would regret doing anything. Regret only means you did something you shouldn't. We know that God is perfect and so is His timing, so there can be no regret in following His plan. Are we to assume that no matter what we do, in trying to follow His will, that everything will be according to His plan?

-Josh

A. Dear Josh,

Let's see if I can shed a little light on your question.

It is not enough to say that everything that happens is God's will, and all we have to do is accept it passively. That is more like fatalism. When we ask about God's will in our lives, we are talking not just about what happens to us but also about doing what he wants us to do. God made us free. We are active and responsible individuals, not just passive accepters.

So, when we ask about God's will in our lives there are several levels to distinguish between:

- the things that God has done (the family he gave you, your Baptism, etc...) are all God's will and cannot be changed.
- then we have his commandments, the things he tells us to do or avoid. It is up to us to do them, and if we don't the results are not his direct will but his toleration of our freedom. His will in that case is that we repent, learn a lesson, pick ourselves up and go on, making sure to try not to fail again
- there are also those situations in which we can figure out God's will by looking at the circumstances: if you are a student, it is his will that you study and develop your mind, for example
- then there are the things that seem more optional: the choice between vocations for example (marriage or priesthood). The choice doesn't simply happen; it has to be made by us. He makes his will known (or knowable) through often indirect invitations and what we have to figure out is what those mean, and then

have the generosity to do them.

-Fr Anthony

Q & A

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"Wanting a Perfectly Clear, Fool-Proof Answer"
with Fr Anthony Bannon LC

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Q. Dear Fr Anthony,

I thank you for spending time to read my question; I really need help. I have been reading the majority of discernment questions on this site for a while now. Several times in your responses you mentioned signs that show you're NOT called to the sisterhood. What are these signs? Right now I'm fifteen years old, and hope that God is calling me to the sisterhood. I want to do his will, but it's hard. I try to figure out what he wants, but I can't seem to find out. I don't have a spiritual director, so the only advice I ever seem to find is here. Can you show me anything to look for that would point me either to or away from the sisterhood? Thanks for the help!

-Crista

A. Dear Crista,

You can be sure of my prayers as you continue with such openness of heart to search for God's will.

In answer to your question, I would first like to put you on guard against wanting a perfectly clear, fool-proof answer. Not that you have said you are looking for one, but it is simply a tendency we all have and we have to be aware of it. Only in exceptional vocations does this absolute certitude exist, and even then it is based on faith and left in God's hands, if it is his will.

The main obstacles or impediments to a vocation fall under the four headings of the usual signs of a vocation (sufficient health, intelligence, maturity/freedom, and proper spiritual motives). When there is not enough of one or another of these, we have an impediment. Some impediments are temporary (for example, you can develop spiritually and acquire the proper motivation even if it wasn't there initially) and others may be permanent (an incapacitating physical handicap). But to answer the question, how much health or how much intelligence is necessary, you have to be thinking of a concrete vocation in order to know. For example an order dedicated to the medical apostolate will have different minimum requirements to one dedicated to teaching in grade schools.

I think you may find it helpful to get to know particular orders, read about them or go visit them if you can, and sooner or later you will come across one that attracts you in a special way. That is when, speaking to the vocation directress, you will be able to see if you are called there or not.

Right now my advice would be to talk a lot with Christ about what he wants you to do, how you want to give your life to him, and tell him you trust him and put all your hope in him. Keep your friendship with him and your conversation with him tops on your list of priorities, and don't let anything get in their way. If you do this and start looking into orders you can be sure he will lead you where he wants you to go.

God bless.

-Fr Anthony

"Proclaim"
Mk 16:15-20

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And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it.

Introductory Prayer: Lord Jesus, thanks to the fidelity of your Apostles to mission you entrusted to them, and the fidelity of many others in between, the gift of Baptism reached me. I believe that through Baptism you have made me your child, a new creation, blessed with the grace of being able to hope for heaven, and able to love my neighbor as you loved us.

Petition: Let me be your messenger to many others so that they will receive these same gifts of knowing, loving and serving you. Give me especially the gift of hope, trusting in your promise of salvation, as I work to spread your Kingdom.

1. "Go into All the World and Proclaim the Good News to the Whole Creation." The word "Christ" means Messiah or anointed. Those anointed in the Old Testament received a mission from God. Jesus was the anointed one of God called to bring about the salvation of man, and he fulfilled this mission perfectly (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #436).

Essential to every Christian vocation is the aspect of mission. Christ directs his command to the apostles and through them to every Christian: Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. He wants us to actively spread the Gospel message of God's love to all around us: in our families, in the workplace, at school, etc. We must ask ourselves if we are living this mission, reflecting God's love first of all in our own lives and behavior, if we are identifiably Christian. This means first of all in our mind and attitudes, and secondarily in our actions. It is a mistake to reverse that order, and be content with appearing to be something we are not really on the inside, and that is why the world around us does not change through our presence.

2. "Jesus Was Taken Up Into Heaven and Sat Down at the Right Hand of God." Christ is the new Adam of the new creation brought about through his redemptive sacrifice. As Christians called to follow him, we too must pass through the cross, but always focusing on the glory to come. Christ was received into heaven at the right hand of God, and we, as members of the mystical body of Christ, are also called to share in his inheritance. Our home is heaven. The problem is heaven does not always mean all it should to us.

The virtue of hope, however, is necessary, because until the second coming of Christ, the Church will still undergo the struggle with evil in the world. That is why we say during the Eucharistic celebration, Come, Lord Jesus (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #671672).

3. "They Went Out and Proclaimed the Good News Everywhere, While the Lord Worked with Them." Two complementary elements are clear in this sentence. In the first place, they did as Christ told them. The mission was placed squarely in their hands, whether it would be fulfilled or not depended on them

actually leaving aside any other option in life and going out to do as Christ said. He gave them no plans, no blueprint beyond his example and the promise of the Holy Spirit. It was a risk. In the second place, they did not go alone, the Lord worked with them. This is our great strength and our great consolation. He wants to work in and through us. So we can never say it is too much or we are unable to do his will, because we are only the instruments and he has promised he will be with us always (cf. Mt 28:20). This is precisely what the Apostles did: they went out, and the Lord went with them. Most of them offered the ultimate sacrifice of martyrdom.

Conversation: Lord Jesus Christ, I give you my feet to follow your footsteps. I give you my hands to serve those for whom you have died. I give you my tongue to speak your word. I give you my heart to love all those you put in my path. I am weak, but with your grace all things are possible.

Questionnaire:

1. Am I really making a difference for the better in my circle of friends? What should I be doing? Have I focused on bringing my internal attitudes toward everything more in line with Christ's, or am I trying to change others without changing myself first?
2. What idea do I have of heaven? Why do I think it is worth sacrificing other things in order to gain heaven?
3. Have I taken responsibility for my own actions, knowing that this is an essential condition for Christ to be able to work with and through me?

Spirituality

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"God is Love"

God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him (1 Jn 4:16). This means that the fundamental conviction on which we must build our whole spiritual life is the fact that God has loved us first, the initiative in our life and vocation came from him, and we must build all our efforts for holiness upon this immovable rock. When we do this, our surrender to God becomes a response to his love and not a search for our personal perfection out of selfish motives or a blind sense of obligation without motivation. Thus our interior life will be a loving dialogue in which we alternate listening and responding. Absent this positive focus, our interior life easily descends into routine formalism and pharisaical severity that are a cover for our own pride and self-centeredness.

Special

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"The Mary Month of May " *Tom McFeely*

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From Pope Paul VI's 1965 encyclical *Mense Maio* (The Month of May) about prayers offered for the preservation of peace during the month devoted to honoring Mary:

Throughout this month of May, let us offer our pleas to the Mother of God with greater devotion and confidence, so that we may obtain her favor and her blessings. Even if the grave sins of men provoke God's

justice and merit His just punishments, we must not forget the he is "the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort," that He has appointed Mary most holy as the generous steward of His merciful gifts.

May she who experienced the cares and hardships of earthly life, the weariness of daily toil, the hardships and trials of poverty, and the sorrows of Calvary, come to aid the needs of the Church and the human race. May she graciously lend an ear to the devout pleas of those all over the world who beg her for peace. May she enlighten the minds of those who rule nations. And finally, may she prevail on God, who rules the winds and storms, to calm the tempests in men's warring hearts and grant us peace in our day. What we seek is true peace grounded on the sturdy foundations of justice and love — on a justice which recognizes the legitimate rights of the weak as well as those of the strong; on a love which keeps men from falling into error through excessive concern for their own interests. Thus each person's rights may be safeguarded without the rights of others being forgotten or violated.

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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Northeast

- Retreats for Men
- Retreats for Women

LEGIONARIES OF CHRIST

Mark Your Calendars! Test Your Call Weekends for the 2009 Calendar Year. Experience the novitiate in Cheshire, CT with retreats for young men ages 16-27 sponsored by the Legion of Christ. These weekend retreats combine time for personal reflection, preached meditations, conferences, and opportunities for confession and spiritual direction with the experience of the day to day life of the seminarians. For more information, please call Br. Francois at (800) 420-5409 or email vocation@legionaries.org. Dates in 2009: May 22-25, June 19-21, July 3-5, July 24-26, August 14-16, September 4-6, October 23-25, November 25-29, December 19-23, and December 26-30.

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 or 401-949-2820. 2009 dates: May 22-25, and July 10-13

ShoreLines welcomes your questions and comments at questions@shorelines.org. If you do not specify otherwise, your question may be posted in the Vocations Q&A section.

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