

National Vocation Awareness Week
January 11, 2009
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Three Ingredients of a Religious Vocation

Is 42:1-4, 6-7
Psalm 29
Acts 10:34-38
Mark 1:7-11

Today marks the beginning of the National Vocations Awareness Week. It is a great opportunity for us to remember the importance of religious vocations within our Church and within the world. It is a time for us to remember that it is our responsibility—each and every one of us—to promote religious vocations. And, this week is the perfect time for me to share with you the three key ingredients of religious vocations—love for God, love for life, and love for others.

The first ingredient is love for God. As an elementary school kid, my love for God manifested itself in my love for 1) the Church and the Sacraments, 2) music, 3) my parents, and 4) priests who were role-models. Some of my fondest memories of childhood are connected with the music at Mass. I loved singing the hymns and I would sing them all week long. I also have memories of the priests who my parents invited over to eat with us—Fr. John Marconi, Fr. Mark Wood, and Fr. Lawrence Fredrick to name a few. Then there was Fr. Stephen Barham, who did a mission at our parish when I was in 6th grade. He was the first priest to say to me—“Have you ever thought about being a priest?” He planted a seed that germinated years later.

The second ingredient for a religious vocation is love for life. Without a great appreciation for the gift of life and a zeal for living it fully, vocations wither. Many famous authors throughout history have stated that to fully live life means being constantly aware of death. I don't exactly know how it happened, but at a young age I had an awareness of how short life is and I wanted to make the most of it.

Psalm 90 states, “Seventy is the sum of our years, or eighty, if we are strong; Most of them are sorrow and toil; they pass quickly, we are all but gone” (Psalm 90:10). While some people might find this verse depressing, I find it challenging and inspiring! Even as a child, I desired to make an impact on the world in a way that would touch individual people's lives, which leads to another ingredient.

Someone called to a religious vocation is called to love others in a particular way. Many people think that the hardest part about priesthood or religious life is celibacy. What these people don't understand is that celibacy is not a restriction on life, but rather an acceptance of a calling to love many people. It is about acknowledging one's desire to not focus love on a single individual, but to enjoy many friendships and relationships in healthy and holy ways.

I knew even in junior high and high school that I enjoyed hanging out with many friends more than just one. Later, in college and graduate school, I learned that I also

enjoyed quiet time by myself. All of these things helped to me understand how I could best love people, which helped confirm God's call for me to be a priest.

When we see in other people such ingredients as love of God, life, and others, it is our responsibility to point out to them that they might have a vocation to the priesthood or religious life. Parents and grandparents, you have an added responsibility to ensure that your children and grandchildren understand all of the vocational options that are open to them. My parents not only made sure that priests were at our house for dinner, but they also took me to retreats, missions, concerts, prayer meetings, etc. These were treasured moments to spend with them and times to reflect on what God wanted me to do with my life.

There is not a single day that I have ever regretted my decision to become a priest. It has provided me with meaningful challenges, loving relationships, and daily encounters with God. Let us continue to pray that people's hearts will be open to discerning a vocation to the priesthood and religious life!