

Vocation Journey

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My name is Olek Stirrat and I am a 4th year seminarian studying in Melbourne for the Archdiocese of Adelaide. People often ask me, how I know that God is calling me to the priesthood? And to be quite honest, I never really know how to respond. I don't know with 100% certainty that God is calling me to the priesthood. But, I don't think it's a question of certainty but of trust. I think most people don't know with certainty, when embarking upon a particular vocation, that it is God's will. The key is not knowledge or certainty but trust. In this regard, I often meditate upon how God called the biblical heroes, and how he sought trust and not necessarily understanding from them. God asked Noah to build an ark before there was talk of a flood, God called Abraham from the land of Ur, without explaining why, Jesus himself called his apostles by saying to come follow him, without articulating to them his mission.

This question of trust has been a daunting one for me. I'm the type of person who likes to know what he's doing and where he's going. I am quite impatient and like to be in control. After finishing high school I was studying chemical engineering and biotechnology. My life was set. I was in control of my life. I would finish university, get a good job and start a family. However, God seemed to have other plans. In my second year of university study, in 2014, I went to Rome for the canonisation of John Paul II, a personal hero of mine, and John XXIII. It was this experience that had a profound impact upon me, which motivated me to cease my university studies and begin applying for the seminary. It is my interior journey during this period that I want to speak about.

My realization that God was calling me to the priesthood was a slow and gentle one, more like a gentle breeze than thunder from heaven. Central for me was the recognition that a priestly vocation, in fact every vocation, always begins with God's initiative. As the apostle John says, it is not we who first loved God, but God who first loved us. In loving us, however, God has had to become vulnerable. The most exemplary form of this vulnerability of his is made visible on the cross. On the cross God has allowed himself to be made completely helpless and vulnerable. In fact the latin root of the word vulnerability is *vulnus*, which means wound. Thus on the cross God has expressed his vulnerability by exposing his wounds, his wounds of love.

It was this realisation for me, of God's unconditional, all-encompassing, sacrificial and total love for me that is the source of my vocation. I constantly try and remind myself, that my love for Jesus is not primary, but His love for me, his love for me which anticipates my response of love and vulnerability.

By why the priesthood in particular? I would like to conclude with a story that occurred at the end of my first year when I went to LA to catch up with a mate. My mate is the tour manager and does sound for an American pop band. The particular event that I want to recount occurred after one of the band's concerts. I was sitting on the couch with the singer, Steve, and we were chatting about his life. After a while he asked if I could hear his confession. I was honoured and humbled. It was this experience that brought to the forefront of my mind a concrete reason why God is calling me to the priesthood. God is calling me to the priesthood, to celebrate the sacraments. To give others the opportunity to experience the healing power of the sacraments, through which they can touch Jesus Christ himself.

If I was to summarize and articulate my deepest understanding of God in my life and my experience of his call, I would say that: "I am very much in God's hands." Please pray for me, that I may follow Jesus.