

OUR VOCATIONAL SENSE OF LIFE

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me, that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence. I ask your pardon for my sins and the grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

We turn to the Lord right away during this time of prayer about our vocational sense and ask him to give us this vision of our life, the real- realization that he has a plan for us, for each one of us. Just imagine St. John the Apostle as an old man, sitting with all sorts of the very first generation of Christians huddled around him, each of them pressing him to tell once again the story of his- of his own vocation. Imagine John looking at them, his eyes glistening, telling once again how he as a young man- 18, 19, 20- had first heard those words from the Lord's lips, "come and see," and by following his whole life had been transformed.

There's something very special about those who fix on a goal. Nobody is more attractive than a person who is inspired. Their eyes glisten. They are intensely interested and interesting, and everything they do has punch. There's a moment in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* where he says, speaking about a young man looking at his wife, the young man is Levin. Levin wanted to listen to her voice, the voice of his wife, that voice that had changed and acquired, along with her gaze, that mixture of sweetness and seriousness so characteristic of people who give themselves body and soul to a single occupation.

Where does that- that inspiration come from? Ultimately, it comes from the clear awareness that we have a purpose, a mission. Each one of us is special. Each one of us has a divinely given mission. As St. John Henry Newman says, "God has created me to do him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another." How wonderful to realize that God has dreams about our life, that he has dreams for us, and that we will discover those dreams little by little, day after day, as he gently and continually leads us. One person put it very succinctly: everything changes when a person becomes aware of their mission. They end up with fire in their belly, so to speak. What you are in love with, what ceases your imagination will affect everything. It will determine what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, what breaks your heart, what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love, stay in love, and it will determine everything.

This kind of life, this inspired life begins with the awareness that God dwells within us, that he is keenly interested in everything we do and that he awaits our loving response all day long. The challenge is to maintain that vocational sense every single day. Many people start the day with a very simple one word prayer - *serviam* - Latin for *I will serve*. I will find ways of serving you, Lord, all day long today. We can maintain that vocational sense through those precious minutes each morning, checking in with the Lord through our life of meditation. Then we can stop throughout the day, from time to time, to reconnect with that central truth of our existence, the fact that we are going about our Father's business.

As we grow in our spiritual life, we hopefully get better at focusing on what really matters. As Dr. Dietrich von Hildebrand puts it: "With maturity in our spiritual life, accidental concerns and complications recede into the background. The great decisive aspects of life become more clearly accentuated. A steady orientation towards the essential and decisive becomes dominant." Those are powerful words. That's quite a mouthful. But what he's getting at is it's so important for us for our interior life to the extent that we become aware that we are on a mission. It becomes that much easier for us to leave off to the side, to forget about things that just do not matter, becomes easier because we end up saying to the Lord very spontaneously, *Jesus, does this matter to you? Are you interested in this? Because if not, I'm not interested.*

Now, on the other hand, to use that great prayer of St. Josemaria, "Lord, if you want it, I want it," period. Let us ask the Lord right now for this vision of things, as stated by Dietrich von Hildebrand, a steady orientation towards the essential and decisive, the things that really matter. Without this attitude and this awareness, life runs the risk of becoming insipid. At the risk of quoting von Hildebrand too much, at one point in his great book *Transformation in Christ*, he says: "Some people squander away their lives in shallow pleasures. Others again are so engrossed in their daily concerns that, even though they are not leading an agreeable life at all, they simply find no time to stop and think. The complete enslavement of their attention to the practical task immediately ahead deprives them of any leisure for feeling their lack of peace. Like beasts of burden, like donkeys, these people tread along their path in dull monotony without ever becoming sufficiently awake to feel distressed by the meaninglessness of their lives." It's a powerful description, and we immediately shudder at the thought that we could sink into that if we were to ever lose our vocational sense of life. But that's no way to live. The fact is our life does have meaning. That meaning comes- the meaning comes from our Father God who has such great plans for us.

Furthermore, we cannot imagine how much is at stake, how much- how many people depend on our having this vocational sense. You have no- no doubt discovered that great book by St. Josemaria called *The Forge*. The very first point in that book says the following: "We are children of God, bearers of the only flame that can lighten up the paths of the Earth for souls, of the only brightness

that can never be darkened, dimmed, or overshadowed. The Lord uses us as torches to make that light shine out. Much depends on us. If we respond, many people will remain in darkness no longer. But we'll walk instead along paths that lead to eternal life." Much depends on us - how wonderful! We cannot imagine how much is at stake, how many lives are at stake, how many people depend on our responding to our vocation.

For example, as you listen to this meditation, perhaps the Holy Spirit will bring to your mind a friend of yours. And the thought might come to you, I wonder if I should forward this meditation? And if you forward that meditation, who knows what the Holy Spirit will do through- through that generous gesture of yours? If you hold back for whatever reason, well, as St. Josemaria says in this point, many people might remain in darkness. But if you respond, they will remain in darkness no longer. Going back to the earliest days of the Church, just imagine if St. Andrew, the brother of Peter, had met Jesus that first day when he was walking along with John, the very young John. What if Andrew had gone back home afterwards, had said hello to his brother, Peter- Simon Peter, and Simon- what if Simon had said, what's new? And Andrew had said, not much, nothing's new. I mean, it's impossible to imagine, but just imagine.

The one thing that can trip us up is to think, I'm just part of the madding crowd, I'm lost in the masses. I'm nothing special - I just do my job, I go home, I'm a good citizen, and that's life. God could not possibly have a special plan for me. Or even worse, we could sink into individualism and just focus on doing our thing. With that kind of attitude we would end up with no idea who lives next door. There in the workplace, with everyone in that- in the open office, wearing noise cancelling earphones, we might not know anybody. Well, that would be a very cold-hearted, scary vision of existence - it is not God's viewpoint.

Not that long ago the Holy Father wrote to the young people of the world along the same lines, trying to- wanting to point out a danger, the danger being early retirement: "Dear young people, make the most of these years of your youth. Do not observe life from a balcony. Don't confuse happiness with an armchair. Don't be parked cars, but dream freely, make good decisions, take risks, even if it means making mistakes. Do not go through life anesthetized. Do not approach the world like tourists. Make a ruckus. Cast out the fears that paralyze you so that you do not become young mummies. Live. Give yourselves over to the best of life. Open the door of the cage, go out, and fly. Please, do not take early retirement." Well, this is an impassioned plea of the Holy Father, a plea to the young ones - put down the screens, go outside, get involved in the lives of those around them. That is a great- a great exercise, a very important attitude for us. Even now we can pray about those in our own household, about our friends - how am I called to raise the spiritual temperature around me? At the office, look around, what does God want and dream of doing through me.

We're in the same situation as St. Paul when he was there one day, he walked down by the edge of the river and he saw a woman, the seller of purple goods, whose name was Lydia. He could have very simply nodded in her direction, acknowledging her presence. But instead, he spoke with her and he ended up transforming her life, the life of those in her own- in her household. Let us never lose that fascination with this reality of our life, this desire to find out what God is up to in our life. Who can I bring to an upcoming retreat? Those of you who have discovered this great app called *I Pray With the Gospel*, you can be thinking, how can I share this app with friends, with as many people as I can think of? Anything to stir up the waters.

Well, finally, a very important way for us to grow in this awareness, to aim higher, is through spiritual direction. It could be frequent confession and, as part of that confession, asking for advice on how to go higher. It could be sitting down for a session, a conversation of spiritual direction. Some of you may- may remember a movie from a long time ago called *Chariots of Fire*. And you will recall the story of those two Olympians back in the 1920s, those two runners. One of them, who was so desperate to win, that he broke the rules and he hired a coach. A hundred years ago there were different rules, but the point is that he hired a professional. And it's very clear in that movie that he was desperate to be helped to go higher. Well, let us acquire that very same desperation, so to speak.

Well, let us finish as we always do, by turning to Our Lady, the Queen of the Apostles. Mary, my Mother, you never ever forgot that moment when you discovered God's plan for you. Help me to offer my whole being to the Lord in order to give him free reign to carry out his dreams for my life.

I thank you, my God, for the good resolutions, the affections, the inspirations that you have communicated to me in this meditation. I ask your help in putting them into effect. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, of the Holy Spirit. Amen. God bless you.



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