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How to tell...
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HOW TO TELL A VOCATION



by Joseph T. M^cGloin, S.J.

*A QUEEN'S WORK
PAMPHLET*

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TO TELL
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VOCATION**

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THE QUEEN'S WORK

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HOW TO TELL A VOCATION

by Joseph T. McGloin, S.J.

IT WASN'T the liveliest party I'd ever been to. It wasn't the deadest one either. I'd gone to a wake once.

By about eleven-thirty, most of the guys had left and the ladies were having a hen session in one of the bed rooms. I guess Louie — Louie is really a girl named Lou — was cackling with the rest of them. I figured the best place to wait for her was in the kitchen near the refrigerator.

I'd just settled down at the kitchen table with a year-old copy of *Life* and a root-beer of about the same vintage when my old buddy, Kraus, came along. I call him Kraus because his name is O'Brien.

"Where's Louie?" he asked me, flopping into a chair and pouring half my root-beer into his glass.

"Same place as Otto," I told him. Otto is Kraus's sometime girl, Margy. "Probably yacking about what a swell party it is."

We sipped my root-beer moodily until the next interruption. It wasn't long in coming.

ENTER FATHER ALAN

"Thought you had a party?" Father Alan said as he came in the back door and sat down with us. We call him Father Alan because he's lively and tough, a swell guy

who could have been in the movies — like Alan Ladd. Nobody's ever surprised to see him walk in on a party. We always invite him and he usually manages to get there for at least a couple minutes.

"We thought so, too," Kraus told him, getting another glass and splitting my root-beer again.

"You just came in time to anoint the survivors," I added.

Father Alan shook his head sadly as he sipped my root-beer. "Party's no better than you make it," he pointed out. I guess that's one reason we like him — he never keeps you much in doubt about where you stand. Sort of rough sometimes, maybe, but interesting anyhow.

"You two characters made up your minds — and I use the word loosely — what you're going to do to make your lives less worthless?" he added.

"Doctor," Kraus told him promptly.

"Ditto," I added. Both of us had been talking to Father a lot lately about the priesthood. We were still on the fence, although we weren't perched there quite as solid as we liked to let on in front of him.

"Great vocation," he admitted, killing off his half of my half a root-beer and looking in the refrigerator. "But not for you two," he added as he poured himself a glass of milk.

"We can make it all right," Kraus told him.

"Easy," I echoed.

"Maybe," Father admitted. "Maybe not. 'Making it' is not the point."

"It isn't?" I asked him.

"It is not."

"How come?" Kraus put in.

"Good question," I observed, rather shrewdly I thought.

SOMETHING BETTER

"Because," Father answered, with a little too much show of patience, "God wants you for something better — infinitely better, in a sense. As you well know," he added.

It seemed as good a time as ever to stick my neck out. So I did. "If God wanted us for something better, He'd tell us."

"Yeh," Kraus nodded his agreement.

Father seemed surprised. "You mean you think He'll give you a personal engraved invitation?"

"Not that," Kraus assured him. "But He'd *tell* us. A vocation's a *call*, isn't it?"

Again Father seemed to be putting on a big act of keeping his patience. "A *call*, yes," he agreed. "But not a yell. The Holy Ghost won't tap you on the shoulder and shout it in your ear. Not usually, at least. He doesn't do that for *any* calling — doctor, lawyer, soda-jerk, anything."

"So how do we know?" I asked him. It seemed a pretty good question until he started to answer it.

"By using your head," He told me.

THINK IT OVER

"Your vocation is pretty much the best way for you to save your soul. After all, that has to be the big consideration no matter what life you choose. And your vocation will be the life you're fitted for and the one God leads you to — but doesn't force you to — by His Providence. And since it looks as if we're in for a session on religious and priestly vocations, let's get one thing clear — your vocation in life is *whatever* state God calls you to. In other words, marriage is a vocation too, you know. However, the vocation you seem to want to talk about is the religious and priestly one, so we'll use the word just to mean that type from here on out. Clear?" he asked, in a tone which implied it would have to be except maybe to a moron.

"How do you mean — He leads us to it by His Providence?" Kraus asked him.

"By giving you the idea of a religious vocation, for one thing," Father told him. "By giving you the background — your Catholic faith, your health, intelligence and a knowledge of Him — for another." He drained his glass and filled it. "You might, for instance, have been born of atheistic parents in Soviet Russia. Simple, huh?"

We thought it over. Simple all right. Too simple.

"There is more here," Kraus observed shrewdly, "than meets the eye."

Father only nodded and went on sipping his milk.

"Hey," I objected, "you said your vocation was the life you were fitted for. Both Kraus and I are fitted to about anything we'd want to be — doctors, lawyers, president of the U.S., anything like that."

The padre sighed softly. "That we could argue about plenty," he said finally. "But just to keep you fairly straight let's suppose you're right and you two are capable of any number of things. What possible difference could that make?"

Kraus and I looked at each other. It seemed like it made a heck of a lot of difference.

"FITTED" FOR WHAT?

"If I'm fitted to be both a doctor and a priest, how do I know I'm supposed to be a priest?" Kraus asked him finally.

"Or," Father asked him, "how, for that matter, would you know you were supposed to be a doctor — supposing you had the ability to do either?" He waited expectantly for our answer. It didn't come. "Of course you are fitted for any number of things," he went on finally. "That's as it should be. You don't imagine for a minute that there are many priests who couldn't have been something else do you? Or lots of doctors who couldn't have chosen another profession and succeeded at it?"

He made quite a bit of sense at that. At least I could imagine him as a business

man or a doctor or a cop without too much trouble.

"You see," he went on, "it isn't a question of saying 'This is all I'm good for,' but rather a guy should be able to say 'I can do any of a number of things well, but I'll choose this one.' Of course, there are people like you two who think you can do a lot more than you can, but that really doesn't change things any."

"Thanks," we told him in unison.

THE SIGNS

"It's all right," he agreed magnanimously. "Suppose you were capable of doing a lot of things, among them the work of the priesthood. Do you think that could be one sign you might have a vocation?"

We thought about it for awhile. It seemed pretty reasonable. But there were a couple more difficulties.

"Then," Kraus asked him for both of us, "*any* guy with the ability — health, intelligence, that stuff — has a vocation, huh?"

"Why do you ask such obvious questions?" I asked him. "Father just told us that was the idea. Let's get on to something more important, like for instance . . ."

THE CALL

"I did not," Father Alan interrupted me, "tell you any such thing. There are, of course," he conceded, "people who claim that everyone is offered a religious or priestly vocation, but I don't happen to be

one of them. There are other things that enter in besides the ability. The call itself, for instance."

"I told you there was a call involved in it," I told Kraus. "The Holy Spirit has to tell you you're supposed to be a priest. Which brings us right back to where we were — no call from the Holy Spirit, no vocation. The Holy Ghost never told me I was supposed to be a priest so I'm not supposed to be. Simple, huh?"

"For a genius who has so many possible vocations open before him," Father told me, "you can certainly throw logic out the window. *If* you have the ability — mental and physical — and *if* you have the moral stamina, and *if* you have ever seriously had the idea of a vocation to the priesthood or religious life, *then* you might have a vocation. I would certainly have to be the first to admit that there are lots and lots of others more qualified for a vocation than you — with far more ability, that is."

"You don't have to be so definite about it," I told him.

SOME NOT SPECIALLY INVITED

"We might as well be honest," he answered. "But just take old George Zilch, for example," he went on. "He's a lot smarter than either of you. He's a lot more devout, too — in fact, he *never* misses daily Communion while you . . . Well, anyhow, he's a lot better fitted spiritually and intellectually for the priesthood than either of you. Right?"

"I don't know," Kraus told him, lighting a cigarette. "I beat him in a test once . . ."

"Once," Father emphasized. "However," he went on, "George doesn't have a vocation."

"How come?" I asked his back as he rummaged in the refrigerator for anything that might be left there. "He's so darn much better that we are in so dag-boned many ways — how come he doesn't have a vocation?"

"I detect a note of jealousy there," Father grinned at me as he munched on a piece of cheese. "At any rate, you've missed the whole point, as usual. George has had the idea of the priesthood in his mind precisely once in his life — in about the seventh grade. He has never thought about it seriously."

"He's going to be a doctor," Kraus pointed out.

"Precisely," Father agreed. "He has never really *seriously* considered the priesthood. In other words, God has never put the thought into his mind in any more than a passing way. It flashed through his mind briefly, as it does through the minds of most kids in grade school, but it never seriously persisted as it did in you characters."

"In other words," I nodded learnedly, "unless a guy has been thinking of a vocation for years, he's sure he doesn't have one. Well, that lets me out. . ."

TIME NOT ESSENTIALLY IMPORTANT

Something seemed to be bothering him as he sighed resignedly. "I don't know," he said finally, "how you can always manage to get things wrong. Time," he continued, "has nothing to do with it. That will depend on God and the individual. There will be those who had the idea a long time and others it hit pretty suddenly. After all it only took a minute to knock St. Paul off his horse . . ."

"I do not," I told him, "ride horses."

"To continue," he went on with an exaggerated show of patience, "it does not depend essentially on the time element. It depends more on the *seriousness* of the thought, its conviction and persistence. In other words, it's more that just a passing idea that never really penetrates. There have, for instance, been lots of late vocations — ex-GI's, for instance — who never thought much of their vocation until just before they entered on it, but when the thought came to them it wasn't any passing fancy, it was a serious consideration. But as I say, no two are alike. Do you follow me?"

"Naturally," I told him. And this time I meant it. With me the idea of the priesthood had been like a yoyo the last few months: I'd throw it out and it would come right back.

Why God would do this to me instead of to George I didn't know, but there had to be a reason somewhere.

"I have a very serious objection to becoming a priest," I told him.

"What's that?" he mumbled through a mouthful of milk.

"They don't feed them at home," I told him as Kraus and I looked at each other and laughed.

"Very funny," the padre muttered dryly. "But you'll find out later, I hope, that when a man works he has to eat. It's still too early in your sheltered young lives to know what work does to the appetite. Anyhow," he went on resignedly, "that's all beside the point." He got a loaf of bread from somewhere and started making a sandwich.

PRIEST OR BUSINESSMAN

"I have another objection," Kraus told him. "I *have* a good job. No need for me to enter the priesthood."

"Again," Father answered shortly, "beside the point. There are lots of priests who gave up not just good jobs but lots of money besides. And there are plenty who gave up a lot more than money, too. In fact," he went on, "no one who couldn't hold a good job could be a good priest either. As you know," he added.

MORALS

"You said something about George being a daily communicant for so long," I interrupted. "Kraus does pretty good that way, too," I admitted. "But not me. I go every Sunday and most First Fridays, and that's

about it. Not daily. I'm not the sinless wonder, either."

"Don't go humble on me," Father grinned. Then he sobered. "No one ever said a guy entering on his studies for the priesthood or a religious order was supposed to be a saint to start with. The big point is that he hasn't gone to pot morally, that he's *trying* at least and succeeding for the most part in living an upright life. In other words, he has to have something for the religious life to *build* on. If he were already a saint on entering there wouldn't be much reason for the spiritual training he'll be subjected to, would there?"

"That's going to make it rough on me," I told him loftily, "since I have already traveled so far along the road to sanctity. That is," I added hastily as I saw him grin maliciously, "if I were serious in this idea of the priesthood."

"You're a lot more serious about it than you're pretending," he told me. "Bluff your contemporaries, boy, but don't try it on your elders."

"There is," I told him, "no bluff." But there was, and Kraus and I both knew it. We'd told each other weeks ago that all we were doing was fighting going to the seminary, but we were still willing to fight it.

SPIRIT vs. BRAINS

"How about these requisites you mentioned?" Kraus asked him. "You said a guy had to be a wizard at the studies to be a priest, didn't you?"

"Some slip by without being too sharp," I couldn't help pointing out.

"I did not say," Father sighed, ignoring my foot-note, "that a person had to be a wizard in the studies to be a priest. I said that he had to be intellectually capable of the job he'll have to do. That means a pretty good ordinary head on him and a very good spirit of work. Ordinarily," he added, "that would eliminate both of you, but the grace of God can do things like getting blood out of a turnip, or making a silk purse out of a sow's ear or . . ."

"Clichés," I pointed out. "All clichés."

"I am trying," he answered with dignity, "to console and encourage you. With your little bit of intellectual talent and the infinite help of God, even you can do anything. You passed all your courses, not with much room to spare, but you passed. And when you get the motivation and interest you need, you'll be able to do it all right."

"Even supposing we could," Kraus told him, "you said perfect health was required, too. I've never been too strong."

PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS

"It is true," Father Alan said, letting his eyes wander over Kraus's two-hundred muscular pounds, "that you are somewhat on the slobby side. But once that extra fat gets melted off, you'll probably be physically efficient."

"How about my astigmatism?" I asked him.

He made an exaggerated effort to be patient. Just why, I don't know. It was an interesting and intelligent conversation. "You must realize," he said finally, "that the health required for the priesthood is of a practical kind. Minor ailments which do not interfere with your studies won't make any difference. The fact, for instance, that you get your haircuts in a pencil-sharpener has little to do with it. A potential priest," he went on above the silence at his potential joke, "must be healthy enough to take the studies and the later work of the priesthood. That's all. The priesthood is a life of service," he added as he buttered another piece of bread.

"One thing I've always wondered about," I began. I waited for him to ask what it was but he seemed more interested in finding another piece of lunch-meat in the refrigerator. "With all those healthy guys in the seminary, how do they pay for the meals? Until," I added, "they get to be priests and can go out and free-load at parties?"

"Great sense of humor," he told me. "But both of you, with your usual ability of missing the point, have failed to ask the most important question of all in this matter of vocations."

Kraus and I looked at each other and shrugged. "We did not," Kraus told him with dignity, "wish to discourage you completely by asking it. We realize that there would be no discussion at all if we brought it up."

"Interesting," Father mumbled through his latest sandwich. "Too bad you're just talking without knowing what you're talking about. Okay," he continued, "what *do* you consider the essential question here?"

INTENTION

"Simple," I told him. "You should know it. However, since you obviously don't . . . How is the medical world going to survive without Kraus and me in it?"

"Sometimes," he told me, "you're a riot. But to get serious," he went on, "— the essential question here is one of your intention itself."

"Intention?" Kraus asked him. "I don't see anything rough about that. Either a guy has the intention of being a priest or he hasn't. Easy. Any other 'essential' questions?"

"It is not," Father told him, "quite that simple. Let's take the word 'intention' here and divide it into two parts first."

"Let's," Kraus and I promptly agreed.

DESIRE

"We will consider the word 'intention' from two angles," he went on as if there had been no interruption. "There is an element of *desire* involved here and one of *motive*. You have heard these words before?"

"Not me," Kraus told him.

"Me neither," I echoed.

"We will assume," Father sighed, "that you are making with your warped sense

of humor once more. Now take this word 'desire.' It really means to want something. Would you say this 'wanting something' is an emotional or an intellectual thing?"

"Definitely emotional," Kraus told him.

"Of course," I agreed. "Let us get to something more difficult, something more befitting our keen intellects, something . . ."

"It would be hard," he told us, "to find anything exactly up to your intellectual level. However," he continued, "to get to the point — this word 'desire' can often refer to a mental act, one, in fact, which may be quite contradictory to our emotions or our feelings. Do you follow me?"

"Naturally," Kraus and I nodded. "Of course."

He looked like he wasn't completely convinced. "Do you think," he asked finally, "that a person could desire something and still not anticipate much pleasure in getting it?"

Things seemed to be getting a little sticky. I looked at Kraus who was knotting up his forehead more than usual. Apparently he thought so, too.

"Certainly not," I told the padre after all this thought.

"I have never," he sighed, "seen anyone who can so consistently come up with the wrong answers. Isn't it possible," he continued, "for someone to wish to take medicine in order to get well, even though the medicine does not appeal to him in itself?"

It seemed safe to admit that one, so we did. "Sort of the end justifying the means," I told him.

"It is not," he pointed out, "'the end justifying the means.' It is merely an example of something we want, not for pleasure, nor for any emotional reason whatsoever, but simply some higher purpose or other which we know, *intellectually*, is something we want."

I began to get uneasy about just where this might be leading to, but there wasn't much I could do to stop it. Once Father Alan got going on this logic stuff, you knew he had already mapped out the whole thing in his mind, so there was no use trying to sidetrack him. He just doesn't confuse real easy.

"So here's the situation so far," he went on. "You've admitted that there can be a 'desire' for something we don't really want emotionally or in itself, but only for a higher good. Now, suppose here's a guy who *wants* to live his life outside of the religious life. We'll say he's the normal type of person and wants some day to have his own car, his own house, his own wife . . ."

"He," Kraus interrupted, "should not be a priest. He does not have the desire."

NATURAL ATTRACTIONS

"If you will restrain your natural ebullience," the priest went on patiently, "I will sketch the whole plot for you — in simple terms, of course. This character we were talking about," he continued, "wants all

these things that a man naturally wants. But the Lord will not let him have too much peace on the idea of a vocation either. While he *wants* the things a man naturally wants, back in his head is always the idea of a religious vocation as a terrific challenge to him, a more worthwhile life, a great way to save his soul and to do something very valuable with his life, to help others — things like that. And, of course, no one can really know Christ without wanting to serve Him with a little more generosity and sacrifice than the ordinary Joe. A guy might be repelled by the sacrifices and still want to make them out of love for Christ who has attracted him so much, bringing out a generosity he didn't know he had. Do you begin to see what I am driving at?"

"Not me," Kraus told him promptly.

"Me neither," I agreed. Maybe if the presentation were a bit more clear . . ."

"It is perfectly clear," the padre cut in, "and you know it. Here is a guy whose natural likes lead him one way and whose intellectual convictions lead him another. As a matter of fact, it isn't surprising at all that there be some natural aversion to the religious life, a feeling that has to be overcome or overlooked when a person gets the courage to accept religious vocation."

"How about you?" Kraus asked him. "You were probably cut out to be a priest from the cradle and never wanted any of these human pleasures. I imagine that . . ."

AVERSIONS

"I can remember," the priest cut in, "saying two 'Hail Marys' a night for about six months about my vocation. One was for the intention of going through with the vocation and the other was a petition that I would be refused. However, — don't think this sort of thing is always the case. Lots of times, there are those that the idea does not repel, who figure it's the greatest. In other words, to make it simple enough for even you to understand, each vocation is a very personal thing, very different from the next one. One guy will think he'd have to give up too much to be a priest. Another will figure he isn't giving up enough. One likes the idea, another is naturally repelled by it. And yet each one may have a vocation." He stopped long enough to get to the sink and start washing our glasses. "So much for 'desire,'" he said. "Now that that is perfectly clear, let's go on to the idea of 'motive.'"

"Whoever dunnit, dunnit," I foot-noted.

MOTIVE

"Brilliant," he admitted graciously. "Why would a person want to be a religious?"

"Can't get a job," Kraus told him promptly.

"Broken heart," I added cleverly.

"Terrific," he conceded. "But not quite right. You have to keep in mind that there has to be at least some slight element of supernatural motive in a person's entering religious life. He has to figure

this is a pretty good way to save his soul, realizing that he could probably find another way, too, or he might want to do something for the spiritual help of others, or he might want to pay God back for a few things, or just show his love for God, or offer his life to God as the best thing he can do with it, or . . . Is that enough to start with?"

"More than enough," I admitted. "It's confusing."

Kraus merely grunted agreement as he wiped the crumbs off the table with his shirt-tail.

"It is certainly possible, however," Father Alan went on, "that there will be other motives almost driving a man to a vocation — very natural motives. After all, God leads us around by natural things all the time. Anyhow," he went on, "a person could be entering the religious life because he likes the idea of the type of companionship in that life, or he likes to teach or likes to study, or . . ."

STUDIES

"That's me," I interrupted. "I have a great devotion to study."

"That is not," he told me shortly, "the type of study I am referring to. At any rate, any or all of these things could also be a motive, but he has to have some little spark of some supernatural motive, too. Of course, as he goes along in his training, his motives are going to get more supernatural. In fact, he's going to come to

appreciate more and more the relative unimportance of anything but supernatural values. He's going to get a lot closer to Christ, for one thing. But this is a gradual thing. He doesn't have to start out perfect."

"Like Kraus," I put in.

"Sure," the padre agreed, rather sarcastically I thought. "Like Kraus. There is another thing to consider, though," he went on rapidly.

BROKEN HEARTS

"Even these frivolous motives could sometimes be the 'occasion' of a person's vocation. Take this 'broken heart' stuff, for instance . . ."

"Very practical," I admitted.

"Very," he conceded. "It is possible that a person could, in the aftermath of what he considered a love affair, start to think of a religious vocation. He would not, of course, be accepted for this motive alone. But it might have been the 'occasion' which started him thinking himself into more solid motives. After all, the saints were often convinced of the un-permanent nature of this life by similar things. Do you begin to see some light?"

"Not much we didn't know already," I told him. "But then, of course, Kraus and I are pretty deep thinkers. It's not everyone who could . . ."

"You are neither deep nor thinkers," he assured us politely. He looked around to see if there were any more dishes to do

before again sinking into his chair. "Now that we've cleared up all your difficulties about a vocation, what will we talk about?" he asked.

ABSOLUTE CERTAINTY?

I hated to go serious on him and I tried not to when I voiced my question. But it was something which had been bothering me for a long time, and I knew Kraus had been having trouble with it, too. "There may be an element of truth in the things you say," I conceded. "But they say you have to be certain about a vocation, that there is no use trying to become a priest or religious until your mind is settled on it."

"Yeh," Kraus agreed brilliantly.

"Who are these 'they' who say all this?" the padre asked me.

"Spiritual advisers, spiritual writers," Kraus told him. "Theologians I have read."

"Theologians you have read!" Father snorted. "What you probably read and misinterpreted was the idea that a person can't simply say 'I'll give the religious vocation a whirl and see if I want it' — no, he has to be more certain than *that*. But as far as absolute certainty without misgivings, I don't see how a person can enter any life without these nagging doubts, about whether he'll be able to make a go of it or whether it is actually what God wants or a hundred other pesky little misgivings. Most people, for instance, are pretty panicky on the eve of their wedding

and you can't say that therefore they are making a mistake, that they ought to postpone it until every last doubt or misgiving is gone. Oftentimes I am convinced that these little misgivings are just another trial God sends to the person who is thinking seriously of a vocation and he'll have to show God he has the courage to overcome them, that's all. Is that . . ."

He stopped as there was a slight interruption. "Hi, Father," Otto and Louie said from the doorway. Both are sort of cute characters, Otto being a blond contralto and Louie a brunette soprano.

"Howdy," Father acknowledged. "Hungry? We just ate."

"No, Father," Louie told him. "We were just looking to see if our chauffeurs had gone yet. You about ready?" she asked me. "We're tired of waiting."

I knew by this time there was no use pointing out to her just who had been doing the waiting. "About ten more minutes," I told her airily. "Drop back."

"Oh," she and Otto said in unison. "Okay," they said, getting a hint somehow or other that we were sort of semi-serious. They disappeared as abruptly as they had come.

GIRLS?

"I have a further great difficulty to this vocation stuff," I began when they had left, "which I did not wish to air in the presence of those females. They are cocky enough already. I do not feel, Reverend

Father, that I have a vocation because I do like girls. And while I am perhaps not actually in love just yet with this little character you just saw in the doorway, I am not very far from being. I like her very much. In fact, I like girls in general. I like Louie in particular a heck of a lot."

"Woman-haters do not become priests," Father Alan said, suddenly completely serious. "They would not be accepted were this known to be the case. First of all, they would not be normal if they hated women. Secondly, they would, as priests, be very warped if they did. They would be doing no good for anyone, because they would be prejudiced against half the human race and would misunderstand the other half. No sir, boy, the guy who becomes a priest is not against the female of the species. On the contrary. He likes her very much. But he is willing to give up the specialized love he might some day give one woman, a wife, for a greater good and a greater love, the love of God. Let's face it," he went on, still dead serious, "this is no easy thing to give up. But then the Crucifixion wasn't any snap either, was it?"

"Nope," I told him, "it wasn't."

"You mean then, Father," Kraus put in, "that God might still want a guy to be a priest even if he thought he was in love with some girl?"

"Could be," the priest nodded. "It depends on whether the person can come to love God more than he loves others, that's all. And keep in mind that even a married

man has to do this — it's not a unique situation. Take this case," the priest went on. "Here is a guy who thinks, in fact knows he has a vocation. The summer before he is to enter the seminary he falls in love. Now certainly a vocation is not a command. It's an invitation. So he can say 'I am in love. Therefore, I will not be a priest.' He isn't refusing to obey a divine command, okay. But, isn't he saying, in effect, 'I had a vocation to serve God in a special way until one of His more attractive creatures came along.' And isn't he saying 'I'll put her love above the love of God right now.' And, further, isn't he like the guy in the gospel who couldn't get to the feast prepared for him because he had just taken a wife?"

JUST AVERAGE JOES

"Yeh," was about all I could mumble. There was plenty there to think about. What I began to see, above all, was that the guy with a vocation was just the average American Joe with the average man's likes and dislikes, but besides, a person who was willing to try to learn to love God above all things in a special way. I saw that there would be some sacrifice of feelings and even of that emotion called 'human love' in the process but I had a hunch that if a fellow could love God above all things, God would see to it that some of that promised 'hundred-fold' would begin to be obvious, too. And I figured that, while I wouldn't be disobeying God to pass up a clear vocation, still it would be a lack of

generosity on my part, a selfishness that I would have a hard time forgetting through the years that followed.

PUT IT OFF AND . . .

"Well," I told the father, "I guess I'll wait a couple years and see."

"Go ahead," he told me. "Try to lose it. That's a real good way."

"Do you mean to tell me," I asked him, "that if I decide to wait awhile on this thing and not enter a novitiate right now, that I'll lose it? Sort of now or never?"

"Not exactly," he said patiently. "All I mean is that if a person is reasonably certain about having a vocation and he puts it off without much reason, he may well lose it. It's a possibility and a big one. On the other hand, one who is completely at sea and uncertain *should* put it off. But you're not that uncertain. Putting it off for you might be throwing it away."

"I don't see how he can really lose it," Kraus put in, "if he's really got it."

"Easy," Father Alan told him. "You see, God offers you a vocation at a certain stage in life and expects you to accept it. There is no guarantee that you will be offered it again if you put it off. And there are lots of things could make you forget it, too — parties, dances, lots of dating, stuff like that. All good things in themselves, but it takes a lot of grace to safeguard a vocation and you're never guaranteed you'll get that grace again once you put it aside."

"Well," I conceded grudgingly, "I do like a good time . . ."

"Liking a good time," he interrupted, "has nothing to do with it. He would be a sad prospect for the priesthood, and he'd be pretty sad with his people later, who had no such liking. It's just that, if we deliberately keep postponing a vocation when we're pretty sure we have one, that natural liking for a good time is finally going to cause us to lose our vocation."

EXAMPLES

"You know Tim?" I asked him suddenly. I'd just thought of something.

"Naturally," Father answered. "Tim who?"

"Tim Klaus, of course," I told him. Tim was a guy who had already decided to apply for the priesthood, even though his mother was pretty reluctant to give her consent. "His mother's not real happy," I mentioned.

"I know," Father agreed. "It makes it pretty rough on the boy, too. But he has the courage it takes."

"She told him the priesthood's a waste of a fine mind," Kraus persisted.

We all offered a moment of silence for Mrs. Klaus and for the pain and sadness she was causing Tim. And I couldn't help think of some of the priests I'd known — men with great minds who had considered it the greatest privilege they could have to consecrate those minds thoroughly to God considering anything short of that a waste.

"Then there's Hank," Kraus said finally.

"Hank?" Father asked.

"Hank Snow," I enlightened him. Hank was another guy who was heading for a novitiate. His mother, too, was somewhat against the idea.

"What about him?" Father asked. The funny part of it was we were sure he already knew all about them but he could really play dumb where he thought something he knew in confidence might be concerned.

TOO HANDSOME

"Mother said he was too smart and handsome to be a priest," I told him. "Of course," I added, "that lets me and Kraus out, too."

"Sure it does," Father Alan agreed, with a slight note of sarcasm in his voice. "Sure. It's true, I guess, that we do usually want just the dumb and ugly, but maybe we could make an exception . . ."

Something else had just dawned on me. A real humble thought. "Hey!" I remarked.

"That makes sense," the padre told me.

WORTHINESS

"Let me finish," I told him shortly. "How could a guy, after all the other requisites are fulfilled, intention and all that — how could he ever know whether he was worthy of the priesthood or not. After all . . ."

"My," Father Alan answered, "suddenly we get humble. After you admit you could handle any vocation, you suddenly decide

you might be unworthy of the priesthood. You've no idea how happy this is going to make God."

"I am," I told him with dignity, "fundamentally very humble."

"And proud of it," he answered.

"Just because you can't answer my question," I told him, "you don't have to try and sidetrack it."

"Your question is so simple," he answered, "that there should be no need to answer it. God knew when He established a priesthood that it would have to consist of *men*, weak human beings. He knew that there would never be one, outside of Christ Himself, who would be worthy of the job. So why should anyone worry about whether he's worthy of it or not? He isn't. He can't be. But nobody is. And God knows that perfectly and still wants human priests. Clear?"

I had to admit it was, so I kept quiet.

HANG IT UP

We could hear a door open somewhere in the house and the usual squealing and rustling which indicates that a girl is getting ready to change her locality, so I figured Louie and Otto might be making more proximate preparations for leaving. "Time to hang it up," I told Kraus, getting to my feet.

"Hang it up?" he mumbled. "Oh, you mean the kiddies are ready to leave."

Father looked at his watch and yawned. The way he got around it often seemed to us that a yawn or two was about all the sleep he got, but he must have done better than that because he never seemed tired. "Hope you learned something," he told us. "Trouble is, you have it all backwards, you know, so far."

"Backwards?" Kraus asked him astonished.

"I personally thought it was as forwards as you can get," I added.

GIVING UP

"Not at all," Father told us, shaking his head sadly. "You've been asking about a vocation in the light of what you're going to have to 'give up' and whether you will condescend to accept one or not when God offers it to you. Believe me, that's as backwards as you can get."

"How come?" I asked him.

"Because you will soon discover," he answered, "when you do finally get the courage to accept the call to the priesthood, that God is giving *you* everything rather than you giving Him so doggoned much. All you're doing is giving Him a few trifles that He gave you in the first place . . ."

"Louie," I interrupted him coldly, "is no trifle. She . . ."

"You don't have to tell me that," Father agreed hurriedly. "Louie is a doll. She is probably one of the nicest creatures God

ever made. But in relation to God, she is still, like all of us, a trifle. As a matter of fact," he continued, "she is far too good for you anyhow."

This I had to agree with. But I didn't have to agree out loud.

"God promised a hundred-fold to those who gave up such things," Father Alan continued. "He wasn't kidding either. But you have to take the plunge before you realize what He was talking about."

"Plunge?" the brunette soprano asked from the doorway.

"Sure," I told her. "We're going swimming."

"*We're* going home," she told me briefly.

After we had broken up the party and were riding home, I was sort of thoughtful for a change. I knew I would be a priest. I knew, too, it wasn't going to be perfectly easy from all angles. But I realized that God would help out as much as I needed it — which was plenty. But I knew that I would have to have the courage to give up a few things before He'd show me that for everything given up there was a hundred-fold waiting.



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