

this, however, there also seems to be a significant growth in support and encouragement for priests who are seen to be doing a good job under difficult circumstances.

The scandals could become an excuse for lack of commitment, or for opting out altogether. In the final analysis, the issue is whether we value the faith we have received, and who will take responsibility for nourishing this faith in the future.

What Can Parents Do?

It is important that parents should respect the freedom of their children, in discerning what God has called them to be and to do in their lives. Relatively few are called to priesthood. Your most important contribution is your own mature faith, and Christian example.

The following are a few questions for your own consideration.

- Is your own faith a positive influence in your life, and does this show?
- Are you at ease when your children raise issues or make comments about faith or church? Are you willing to dialogue with them in an atmosphere of openness?
- How much do you actually know about priesthood, and about what priests do?
- Without ignoring the human failings of the Church, do you generally talk positively about priests and their ministry in the course of ordinary conversation?
- How would you respond if your son expressed an interest in becoming a priest?
- Would you pray regularly that God would guide your children in making their choices for the future; and could you still pray that prayer if you thought he might be calling them to priesthood or religious life?

Much of what is said here could be equally relevant to grand-parents, and god-parents. The wider family, and indeed the family of the parish, are important sources of support for anyone considering vocation.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. May God continue to bless you in your own vocation.

Acknowledgement: Thanks to Fr Kevin Doran of the Archdiocese of Dublin for use of this text.



Called into God's wonderful light

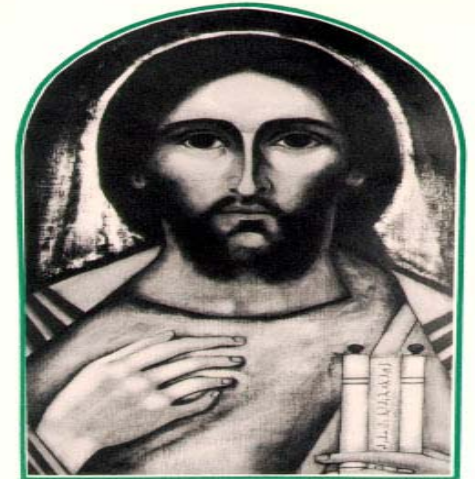
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Parents, God-Parents, Grand-Parents



"Called by Name..."

*God Loved the World So
Much,
That He Gave His Only Son*

Would You?



Called into God's wonderful light

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A Decision Made in Freedom:

The decision to offer oneself as a candidate for priesthood is, in the final analysis, a personal one. Any authentic commitment is rooted in human freedom. Human nature being what it is, however, most of our important decisions are made against the background of our key relationships. Other people, through their values and attitudes, through their encouragement or lack of it, inevitably have a significant influence on the decisions we make.

By the very fact of our creation, God invites each one of us into relationship with him. Where priesthood is concerned, although it is God who calls us, in the depth of our hearts, the first hint of that call frequently comes in the day to day life of the family and the local community.

Priests Come from Families:

Priests arrive in parishes ready-made. If you think of priests in terms of what they do, rather than who they are, it is easy to forget that we weren't always priests. We grew up, like everyone else, in a family, with its own particular characteristics and ways of doing things. We went to school in the morning, and came home in the evening. Like children everywhere, we were called in for our tea, we supported Man. United (or whatever). It is in the family too that most of us began to learn the habits of prayer, co-operation, service and respect for others, which are so much a part of what priesthood is about.

What do you Want for your Children?

Most parents will say that what they want for their children is that they be happy. Happiness, of course, is not anything in particular. In human terms, there are many elements to it; health, friends, family, a nice place to live, academic success, success in business, freedom from worry or care. The paradox is, of course, that most of the things which contribute to our happiness also contribute to our worry and care, because they are fragile and vulnerable.

To a person of faith, the real guarantee of happiness is the love of God, which is never taken back, and which is the source of eternal life. This is the love I mean; St. John says, not our love for God, but God's love for us, when he sent his Son to be the sacrifice that takes our sins away. (1Jn. 4:10).

A Temporary Culture

We live in a world of change. Many of the things which we used to think of as permanent have become temporary.

- Jobs
- Homes
- Relationships

Against that background, the idea of permanent commitment may seem to be out-moded and restrictive. People are slow to make commitments. Parents are, understandably, anxious. Yet, week after week, fathers quite happily walk their daughters up the aisle to be given in marriage. Why is that somehow easier, or more acceptable, than seeing a son become a priest?

Priesthood: A Difficult Life?

To be a priest is quite demanding in human terms. To a large extent this is because we are engaged in serving people, and people can sometimes be quite demanding. Our ministry frequently brings us into contact with people in their moments of sadness, suffering, or sinfulness. To balance this, of course, we are privileged to share equally in the moments of happiness and celebration.

Priesthood is not the only way of life which is demanding, physically or emotionally, or which carries risks of various kinds. Imagine your son as

- A junior hospital doctor
- An airline pilot
- A politician
- A fisherman
- A journalist

If he was doing a good job, fulfilled in himself, and serving others, would you not be justly proud, in spite of the pressures involved.

Loneliness!

For some reason, people seem to associate celibacy with loneliness, and they assume that priests live a very lonely life. It can be lonely at times; but there

Are also times when it's great to be able to go home at night and close the door. It's a case of swings and roundabouts. Married people; young people; old people; everyone experiences loneliness from time to time. Some people are more vulnerable to it than others. In reality loneliness is part of the human condition. It can't be avoided simply by entering relationships, or by running away from them, because it is within ourselves.

Loneliness!

Loneliness is a reminder to all of us, that nothing and nobody on this earth can completely fill the emptiness within. As St. Augustine says: *our hearts were made for you O God, and they shall find no rest until they rest in you.*

Celibacy is not for everyone, as Jesus said. As committed celibates, we priests choose not to marry for the sake of the kingdom of God. That doesn't mean that we don't have friends, or that we have nobody to talk to.

A Decline in Faith?

It is certainly true that, from the point of view of faith, Western society is going through a difficult and challenging time. With the emphasis on material success, the focus has gone off God to some extent. Yet we hear, increasingly, that people are disillusioned with what modern society has to offer. If there is a decline in faith; if people are searching for meaning, isn't that all the more reason why there is a need for normal, balanced, intelligent, healthy, compassionate people, like your son, who can offer leadership and faith, as priests in a time of change.

The Scandals!

The scandal of child abuse by a number of priests in recent times cannot be ignored. It has hurt a great many people, not least those who were abused and their families. Naturally enough, we priests have been affected by it too, both professionally and on a human level. In the midst of all