



VOCATIONS SUNDAY

‘DISCERNMENT’



National Office
for Vocation

Helping people hear God's call



WELCOME

Welcome to the Vocations Sunday edition of our ongoing Catechesis, which focuses on discernment and also Pope Francis Pastoral Letter for 2024. Through this edition we ask you to take sometime out of your routine to enter into a time of discernment.

Discernment:

Discernment means to work out what to do in the light of prayer and reflection. The root of the word means ‘sifting’ which means to sort out, and in this context, it is to sort out what God’s plan is for you.

JUBILEE YEAR

We are in a preparatory year for the Jubilee, which is themed ‘Pilgrims of Hope’. This year is currently focusing on prayer and Pope Francis complements both in his Pastoral Letter by stating that

“ *Prayer is the first strength of hope. You pray and hope grows, it moves forward. I would say that prayer opens the door to hope. Hope is there, but by my prayer I open the door.* ”



Pilgrimage and discernment can go well together as both require an end goal. Pope Francis talks about this goal in his letter stating that...

“ *To achieve that goal, however, they need to concentrate on every step, which means travelling light, getting rid of what weighs them down, carrying only the essentials and striving daily to set aside all weariness, fear, uncertainty and hesitation.* ”

This is true if we are to discern properly, we set everything weighing us down aside and we let God in, and in turn he will communicate with us. When you are out on a pilgrimage walk even if with someone or in a group, take those moments of silence, listen to what your surroundings are and enter deep into prayer. Pope Francis goes onto say...

“ *We set out on a journey to discover the love of God and at the same time to discover ourselves* ”

Through this, it allows us to sift out and see more clearly where God is leading us to.

Therefore, as we take time to go through this catechesis perhaps think about taking this on a walk, it is recommended that it is a slow walk that takes time, rather than a quick brisk walk. A walk may help you discern more deeply and clear your mind.





GOSPEL

JOHN 10:11-18

Jesus said: 'I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd is one who lays down his life for his sheep. The hired man, since he is not the shepherd and the sheep do not belong to him, abandons the sheep and runs away as soon as he sees a wolf coming, and then the wolf attacks and scatters the sheep; this is because he is only a hired man and has no concern for the sheep. 'I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for my sheep. And there are other sheep I have that are not of this fold, and these I have to lead as well. They too will listen to my voice, and there will be only one flock, and one shepherd. 'The Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me; I lay it down of my own free will, and as it is in my power to lay it down, so it is in my power to take it up again; and this is the command I have been given by my Father.'





DISCERNMENT

MAKING A DECISION

When you spend time in discernment, through prayer, reading scripture and perhaps asking others' advice (so you have someone else's wisdom helping and supporting you), the time will come when you need to make a decision. It is important to reflect upon your own gifts and talents as well as your deep desires in life and what you enjoy doing. These all help contribute to your own discernment of God's plan for you. It is important that you realise there will rarely be certainty, but some decisions like these must be an expression of faith. At some point, you need to have faith and say, I believe this, and I'm going to commit my life to it. It is a bit like signing on the dotted line.

In life, we will make many decisions, but few of them will be final and unchangeable. When you are discerning what you are to do with your life, you have to make little acts of faith, one after another, to see where the Holy Spirit leads you. If things don't work out, there will be time to change direction. God does not lead us into dead-ends. God wants us to be free. We know this because of what we learn in the Bible. Take for example the story in the Garden of Eden. In Genesis, God desires to create us with free will, with the power to choose between good and bad, (See Genesis Chapter 2, verse 16 or see Deuteronomy, Chapter 30 verse 19).





WAYS TO DISCERN

Start a journal - write down notes about how you are feeling, particularly after thinking and praying about the decision you have to make. After some time, you will find mounting evidence of where your heart is leading you. Read the Bible, write about the scriptures you have read and what you think you need to learn from them. What are your favourite passages of scripture? Why? Start to pray to Jesus and ask him to send his Holy Spirit to help you understand what is your place in the world. Write down in your workbook the feelings and thoughts that arise after you pray.

If you are doing this on a pilgrimage walk, it is important to stop and certain places take time to reflect and then perhaps write notes in your journal so that you don't forget them when you are reflecting on the pilgrimage.



COMMIT

Once we have discerned our vocation it is important to make a decision and 'commit'. Pope Francis talks of this further in his letter for Vocations Sunday...

“

Let me say it again: "Have the courage to commit!"

”

As we begin to go deeper and understand what we feel God is calling us to, let us have that courage to commit and be certain that this is God's will for us in life. Archbishop Malcolm in his Pastoral Letter to the Dioceses of England and Wales states that...

“

Following a vocation does involve making a leap of faith but it is not a leap into the unknown.

”

Whenever we make a decision, which university to go to, or a particular career path we follow, to even where we might choose to live, and to what state of life we are called to (single, married, deacon, priest, religious) we make these choices with courage.

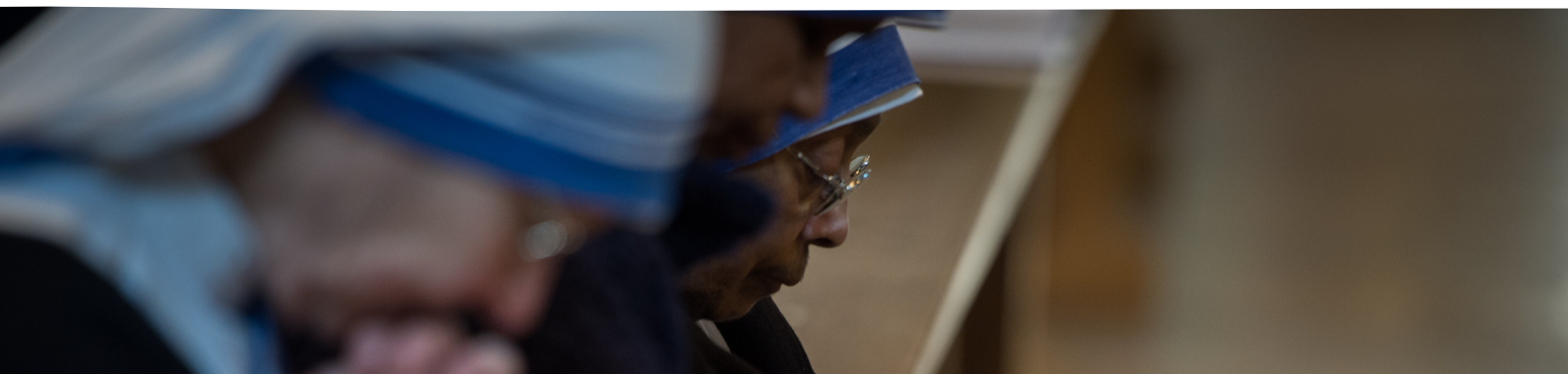
Following God's call, living a vocation and being close to Jesus is a beautiful thing, however it involves sacrifice. Archbishop Malcolm states this in his letter...

“

Becoming close to Jesus, through prayer and listening, through adoration and service will involve sacrifice there is no escaping that. But the word sacrifice means to make holy, and holiness is what we are all made for and that which we all should seek.

”

The more we spend time in adoration, being fed by Jesus, listening to him and adoring him, we are then more equipped to go out and serve him the world.



REFLECT & PRAY

- This Vocations Sunday what are we going to discern?
- How can you begin to make your decision?
- Are you ready to commit?
- Where will you get help and support from?
- Write down your desires and dreams and see where they best fit with your discernment at present.

LET US PRAY...

**God our Loving Father,
you called each of us by name through the Sacrament of Baptism to holiness.
Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, you made us the temples of the Holy Spirit.
Help us to listen to the cry of our Lord Jesus from the Holy Cross 'I thirst'
and respond to the call
'Go out to the whole world and proclaim the good news to all the nations'.
Guide us in every step we take in life
and lead us in every decision we make in responding to your call.
Make us and mould us into the living images of Christ your Son,
who was always close to those in need.
We make this prayer through Christ our Lord,
Amen.**



Sources: Select Photos: © Mazur/cbcew.org.uk
Pope Francis, 2024, Called to sow seeds of hope and to build peace.
https://www.ukvocation.org/_files/ugd/b16350_3317700ebcfe4cadb45be3201b8dd7b1.pdf

Archbishop Malcolm McMahon: A pastoral message for Good Shepherd Sunday (4th Sunday of Easter) 2024.
https://www.ukvocation.org/_files/ugd/b16350_d1b48c46eff04dc4a1f3b5b056406a2a.pdf