

This weekend we pray especially for vocations, because today is Vocations Sunday. Obviously, we pray in a particular way for vocations to the priesthood and the religious life, because without vocations, there is no Church – just as without the People of God – you and everyone else – there is no Church.

So yes, we pray in a special way for vocations to the priesthood and the religious life.

On the other hand, suppose everybody had decided they were called to the priesthood and the religious life? No marriages, no families, no children, no world – and, yet again, no Church.

The point is, not everyone can do the same thing – and not everyone is *called* to do the same thing – unless the world is simply to come to a halt.

Take any priest you care to think of: before meeting his father, suppose his mother had decided to become a nun?

No priest.

Every single being in creation is given a vocation, a calling to a particular path... and this path has many

stages. In the end, finally, we are all called to eternal union with God. It is the will of God for each and every creature to be united with him in a timeless union of everlasting joy. I say every *creature*, because Eucharistic Prayer IV says exactly that: “Then, in your kingdom, freed from the corruption of sin and death, we shall sing your glory with every creature through Christ our Lord...” To teach that creatures other than ourselves cannot share in that glory, is depressingly short-sighted. Do I believe that the individualised spirit of my mother’s dog that I loved dearly – and who loved me – is gone, lost forever, disappeared into non-existence? No, I *don’t*. As far as animals are concerned, the Church has always suffered from theological myopia.

How we actually *follow* the path to eternal union with God is, secondarily, *probably* a matter of personal temperament, capabilities and circumstances. I, for instance, was never going to be called to be a world-class snooker player – sad and shocking, but true; on the other hand, not many world-class snooker players are called to stand here and say what I’m saying.

I knew I wanted to be a priest from about the age of nine: it was more than knowing, it was a radical conviction. The path to priesthood was neither easy nor direct for me, but I always knew that it was authentic.

In the same way, some people simply *know* that they want a partner, children, a family, a particular job, and so on. This too is a conviction. No one calling is higher or better or different from another: they are all of equal worth because they all find their perfection in Christ Jesus (in the midst of the Church.) Following whatever path we may be called to – *in Christ* – is what he means by ‘listening to his voice’ and following him.

One of the most poignant and challenging of human vocations is that of the natural celibate: a person who feels no need for a partner or a family; who is content and fulfilled living their own life without the love and support of a particular other. A person who may or may not have had lovers – but who knows in the end that a permanent relationship is not for them.

Such individuals are truly blessed. The single celibate is a sacramental sign because he or she actually opens the way between heaven and earth for the People of God: he or she is a living symbol not of human loneliness, but the apparent paradox of solitariness and communion. He or she teaches the world, simply by living their life, that in fact these are not contraries at all, but complementarities. Solitariness makes communion possible and vice-versa. And in the light of divine love, solitariness *in* communion is the perfect response to the distortions of human sexual psychology. This is what the priest should be, but sometimes isn't.

It is not always easy. Sometimes we find ourselves doubting that anyone is ever called to anything – but everyone is.

A vocation is a life lived in consonance with the person we are... in harmony with the contents of our heart. If this is not the case, then we are faced with one of the greatest of all human tragedies: the un-lived life. Worst of all are those whose life has been blighted early on by abuse,

However small or modest or apparently ordinary our life may be, if it is lived in harmony with who we are, in the light of the heart, it will be a greatly blest life.

I want to share something I've shared before in a homily, simply because it is profound. It's from the psychologist James Hillman, who wrote:

“It is character which forms a life, regardless of how obscurely that life is lived and how little light falls on it from the stars. The call is to life, not to fame or success. It is a tragic mistake to equate a person with what he or she does. If we do this, then the superstar is special and the laundry-woman is not. But I say this: if the laundry-woman does the laundry with a sense of self-worth, as well as she can, with happiness - even with love for the way she is doing it *because she knows she does it well* - then she is a thousand times more special than the superstar who couldn't care less. We are *not* what we do... we are the *way* in which we do it, however humble what we do may be.”