

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 either. 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.

I think we all have to bear in mind St Paul's contention that 'God has no favourites' (Romans 2:11) – what kind of God would it be who did? – and therefore calls either everyone or no one. And this has

always been a particular problem of mine: because if I am called to be a priest, and you are called to be a Christian mother or father; if some are called to the loving depths of family, and some to the rich beauty of a single, celibate life in midst of the world, to what is the child blown up by a landmine in Syria called? Or those who are ravaged by mental illness or chronic, debilitating disease? God knows, I *do* believe in vocation... but mostly I don't understand it. A German Dominican nun once admonished me: "Why don't you have the humility to say 'I don't know' then keep quiet?" Dominicans always go for the jugular, in my experience. I've been struggling to say I don't know and keep quiet for a good many years now, not terribly successfully at times.

I believe that every single being in creation is given a vocation, a calling to a particular path... but each particular vocation and path is a reflection, a mirror-image of the one infinite call: to eternal union with God. It is his will that each and every creature should be united with him in a union of everlasting love. 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 love is depressingly short-sighted. 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 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 painless nor direct for me, but I always knew that it was authentic. In the same way, I guess some people simply *know* that they want a partner, children, a family, a particular job, and so on. This too is a conviction. Neither should we hesitate to say that no calling is higher or better or more worthy than any other – how could that be if we are all equal in God's eyes? It is usually only the people who have followed a particular path who claim it as superior.

The word 'vocation' comes from the Latin *vocare*, which means 'to call' and it implies listening to a voice: the voice of the Lord, like the most subtle of beckonings, deep in our mind and heart, beneath the passing flux. The voice of the Lord within us may be known by its gentle authority: it never cajoles or bullies, it is never repetitive or insistent, it never criticises or carps, it is not impatient or disappointed. The voice of the Lord simply suggests – just once and with profound graciousness – what we might best choose to do in any given situation, then leaves us to the devices of our free will. This is the voice that we should listen for and hear in our daily lives, whatever work we do or life we lead. It is always calling – in pain or in pleasure, in happiness or misery, depression or joy, dark moods and light, adversity or prosperity. That voice teaches us how to make sense of all these things, how to recognise meaning in them when all meaning seems lost.

A vocation means 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 unlived life. 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.

Here, I want to share something I've shared before in a homily, simply because it is beautiful and profound. It bears repeating. 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.”