

## THEOLOGY OF VOCATION: GOD IS THE ONE WHO CALLS

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### Human person's vocation to love

In the Apostolic Exhortation, the *Family in the Modern World*, n. 11, St. John Paul II writes:

*"God created man in His own image and likeness calling him to existence through love, He called him at the same time for love.... God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion. "Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being". We must discover and communicate the beauty of the vocation for which all men and women have been created: the call to love.* In his book, *Love and Responsibility*, Karol Wojtyla reminded us that Love is an exclusive experience of the human heart. Only the human person can know love, live by love, to give it sincerely, generously and freely and to communicate it in such a powerful way that it will be fruitful... only love has the power to communicate life. Just as St. Maximilian Kolbe used to say: "only love creates".

The greatest dignity of the human heart is its capacity to freely choose to love and respond to the love of God, each according to his or her vocation. A vocation is that specific path through which we make of our lives a sincere and free gift of self to the other, to the beloved. In the Pastoral Constitution of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, this mystery was illumined in a very simple way: *"Man...cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself"*. It is in this sincere gift of self, which can only be realized by the power of love, that we find the full realization of our human potentialities, the experience of deep joy and the path for human and Christian maturity.

### Family, the Home and School of love

St. John Paul II in his *Letter to Families* stated: *"the family is the center and the heart of the civilization of love"*(LF, 13) *"because to love means to give and to receive something which can be neither bought nor sold, but only given freely and mutually"*. (LF, 11). *It is precisely because of this truth about love, that the family is the first home and school of authentic love where the person can experience love and mature in the demands of love. In this way the family becomes the home and soil of vocations.*

It is in the school of the family that the children must learn that love- in its essence- is a free gift: nothing can buy it, and it cannot be sold...all we can do is to freely and gratefully receive it, and to responsibly cultivate it and protect it by loving in return. This love must be enfolded in the daily choices of affection, communion and mutual service. It is in the family where children learn to rejoice in the simple gift of living love in the ordinariness of life. It is in the school of the family where children can learn the luminous and joyful path of self-donation for the common good, the journey of passing from the aridity of self-

reference and the exclusivity of the "I" to the beauty of the "we". *It is in the family where children are to learn the beauty of his or her own personal gift, and donate it to build the "we" of the family, society and the Church.* It is in the family that children can learn that this free self-donation must be lasting and irrevocable, sincere, total, permanent and unconditional. The logic of the gift, the science of love is taught in the school of the family.

It is in the family that children must learn that the greatness of love is founded in "giving our lives for our friends." (cf. Jn 15:13) It is in the family that children must learn that love is also demanding, but this is precisely its beauty as we read in the *Letter to the Families* n. 14. Love is demanding because it requires the elevation of the human heart to its full and true capacity of goodness, truth, generosity, humility, of sharing and of heroic choices for others. Families must live their Christian life, their vocation to be homes and schools of love, with audacity and determination. True love, teaches St. Paul, is different: *"It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."* (1 Cor 13:7) To respond to God, to His loving and perfect will, requires a daring love that does all things, hopes in all things, that overcomes all obstacles because it is a love with solid roots, discerned not based on feelings but on the deepest convictions. It is a decided and determined love that sustains the choice in times of trial...a persevering and faithful love...in the end, a love worthy of being called "love".

This formation in authentic love is the foundation of all vocations, since a vocation is the response to God's call of love to give our lives totally to love and build the Kingdom, the civilization of love. If the family lives its identity as a home and school of love, and realizes its mission to be the heart of the civilization of love and to form men and women who are ready to embrace generously their call to love, it will become what is called **to be: the home of vocations, the fruitful soil and school of vocations.**

### **Teach your children the truth about vocations: a call to love**

The youth of today must be formed with diligence and responsibility to be ready for the encounter with Christ, to be able to give a fiat to that original vocation written in their souls from the moment of their creation. At a precise moment in their personal history, this vocation will be unveiled before their eyes when Jesus stands before them and calls them by name to follow Him on the path He has chosen for them to realize and to bring to full maturity their vocation to love.

*A vocation is a mystery of divine election. 'You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.' (Jn 15:16) "A vocation refers back to ...a choice on the part of God, which has preceded the human choice and decision...Our vocation is hid in the eternal mystery of God before it becomes an accomplished fact within us, before it becomes our human "yes", our choice and decision." (Letter to Consecrated Persons, 1988)*

*A vocation is the fruit of a dialogue between the Heart of God and the human heart...fruit of prayer and of attentive listening and acceptance of God's plan of love and joy for the human heart. God invites, reveals, proposes the path to follow as a concrete form of total donation of oneself...and the human heart*

should respond with love, full freedom and with pure intention. These three dispositions of heart speak about the dignity of the human person to respond freely to a vocation of self-donation.

*A vocation is the fruit of a free choice to responsible love.* A Vocation must be a choice of inner freedom and full responsibility, of responsible love, since *“love divorced from a feeling of responsibility for the other is a negation of itself. The greater the feeling of responsibility for the other, the more true love there is”.* (*Love and Responsibility*, pg. 131)



*A vocation is a decisive, fundamental choice of life.* The particular moment of hearing Christ's voice and entering into this dialogue of love is an event that transforms the whole horizon of life... This encounter causes a fundamental decision of life in the human heart as a fruit of knowing the design of love of God, as Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI tells us in the Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 1: *“Being Christian is...the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”*

#### *Some practical suggestions to foster the culture of vocations in the family*

- *Take time to share as a family about fundamental questions:* Our life, as Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI taught us, “is not an accident,” but a fruit of the design of love of God. Our greatest task before this free gift of God is to discover the vocation of our lives...It is important that through the different phases of life, children learn to discover and ask fundamental questions: what is the path of love and total donation of self by which I will achieve the full realization of my being? What is the design of love, the plan of love for which I was created? What unique and unrepeatable role should I occupy in history? How does God need me to build His Kingdom here on earth? How can I be leaven in the world so that the values of the Kingdom may build a society, a new civilization? How can I spread His Word, the seed, in the soil of the contemporary world? How can I live my primary vocation to love the Lord with all my heart, all my soul, and all my strength? How can I do the greatest good for humanity? How can I make of my life a sincere gift of self, totally, unconditionally, and permanently? Only by dealing as a family with these questions, young people will understand their lives to be a gift and to discover the path in which their gift is to be given. *“Life takes on the value of a “gift received which, by its nature, tends to become a good given.”* (*World Day for Vocations, 2001*)
- *Foster generous service in the life of your families:* Love, as we mentioned above, is not something that can be bought or sold, but simply and freely given. This fundamental truth about love needs to be experienced in the life of all the members of the family by having a regular participation in services to those in most need within the family or in society. It is a very formative path for the heart of children and young people to serve those who would not give them material or social recognition or rewards, but rather the “least”, those on the peripheries, as

Pope Francis calls them. This service helps the human heart grow in the gratuitous dimension of Christian love – to without counting the cost or expecting anything in return.

- ***Shared expressions of faith in family life***: Pope Francis, Enc. Lumen Fidei, n. 53 “In the family, faith accompanies every age of life, beginning with childhood. This is why it is so important that within their families parents encourage shared expressions of faith which can help children gradually to mature in their own faith....Young people want to live life to the fullest. Encountering Christ, letting themselves be caught up in and guided by his love, enlarges the horizons of existence, gives it a firm hope which will not disappoint. Faith is no refuge for the fainthearted, but something which enhances our lives. It makes us aware of a magnificent calling, the vocation of love. It assures us that this love is trustworthy and worth embracing, for it is based on God’s faithfulness which is stronger than our every weakness. (n. 53)

*Family, be who you are: home, school and fruitful soil of vocations.*