

Vocations

and the Universal Call to Holiness



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Miraculous Draught of Fishes (detail) by Raphael.

"And Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men.'
And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything
and followed him." (Lk 5: 10-11)



The two participations in the priesthood of Christ—the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood—are complementary.

THE COMMON PRIESTHOOD OF THE FAITHFUL

Earlier in this text, we noted that *every baptized person is called to be a priest*. To be a Christian already is a “priestly vocation” because through the Sacrament of Baptism we share in the priesthood of Christ. The Church calls this priesthood of the baptized the *common priesthood of the faithful*. Every baptized man, woman, and child is called to holiness, which is the imitation of Christ, even in his priestly role:

Christ, high priest and unique mediator, has made of the Church “a kingdom, priests for his God and Father.”²⁸ The whole community of believers is, as such, priestly. The faithful exercise their baptismal priesthood through their participation, each according to his own vocation, in Christ’s mission as priest, prophet, and king. Through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation the faithful are “consecrated to be... a holy priesthood.”²⁹ (CCC 1546)

Where did this idea of a common priesthood originate? A careful reading of Scripture indicates that priesthood was part of God’s original intent when he created the human race.

Although the word is not used, Adam, the first man, was a priest. In ancient Jewish thought, the Garden of Eden was God’s first temple: It was the dwelling place of God, and the language and images used to describe the Garden correspond to the later description of the tabernacle of Moses in the desert and to the Temple in Jerusalem. Just as God “walked” (*hithallek*) in the Garden, a later prophet tells of how God “moved about” (*hithallek*) in his Temple. For his part, Adam is given the responsibility to cultivate (Hebrew *abad*) and keep (*shamar*) the Garden; these same words, *abad* and *shamar*, were the instructions given to the priests who were put in charge of the Tabernacle, which was a precursor to the Temple.

A main role of a priest is to offer sacrifice. In the era before Moses, the priestly duty was carried out by the father or male head of a family. Already in Genesis we see that Adam’s sons, Cain and Abel, offered holocausts (burnt offerings). Noah made sacrifice on behalf of his family in thanksgiving to God after the Ark reached dry land; Abraham built an altar and prepared a holocaust when God tested his obedience by commanding him to offer up his only son. In this patriarchal system we see the roots of the ministerial priesthood.



St. Peter Preaching (detail) by Fra Angelico. St. Peter taught the theme of a kingdom of priests, calling upon all Christians "to be a holy priesthood."

When God first established the covenant with Moses, he identified all his people as priests. The Israelites, he said, would become "a kingdom of priests, a holy nation."³⁰ But while Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the tablets of the Ten Commandments, many of the Israelites rebelled and returned to idolatry, forcing Moses' brother Aaron to forge a golden calf for their worship. When Moses returned to find this distressing scene, he found that the Tribe of Levi had remained faithful, and so the Levites were consecrated to the ministerial priesthood. They would have the responsibility of offering the sacrifices before God, leading the people in worship, and taking care of the Ark of the Covenant and other sacred objects.

In the New Testament, St. Peter again took up the theme of a kingdom of priests, calling upon all Christians "to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."³¹ A little later he adds:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Pt 2:9)

Through Baptism, a person is enabled to participate in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly ministry of Christ—through prayer and sacrifice (priest), proclamation of the Good News of salvation (prophet), and serving the poor and needy of the world (king).

The common priesthood primarily is oriented toward carrying on the work of Christ in the midst of the world, a task that calls both for a living witness steeped in the virtues of faith, hope, and charity, and in taking opportunities to lead others to Christ and to greater faithfulness through words.

All of the baptized, then, share in the priesthood of Christ in that, in living out their call to holiness, they seek to imitate his example of love and service as they carry the Gospel message throughout the world.

The Ministerial Priesthood

Meanwhile, some baptized men are called by God to serve in the *ministerial priesthood* as priests and bishops. (Deacons are not part of the ministerial priesthood, but rather share in the common priesthood of the faithful.) Their service is directed primarily toward building up the faithful, the Body of Christ, and enabling their gifts so that they may serve God and neighbor within their own vocations:

While the common priesthood of the faithful is exercised by the unfolding of baptismal grace—a life of faith, hope, and charity, a life according to the Spirit—the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood. It is directed at the unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians. The ministerial priesthood is a *means* by which Christ unceasingly builds up and leads his Church. (CCC 1547)

From this description, we can see how the two participations in the priesthood of Christ—the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood—are complementary, as well as how the common priesthood of the faithful benefits from the ministry of priests and bishops.

SACRAMENTS AT THE SERVICE OF COMMUNION

Every Christian vocation involves love and service. However, two vocations—marriage and Holy Orders—were instituted by Christ as Sacraments of the Church. For this reason, these two particular vocations are called Sacraments at the Service of Communion.³² The fuller name given in the *Catechism* is the “Sacraments at the Service of Communion and the Mission of the Faithful.”³³ The sense is that these two vocations help build up communion within the Church and empower the baptized to carry out their sacred mission.

The Sacraments are channels of grace. While five of the Sacraments—Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Penance, and the Anointing of the Sick—are directed toward the salvation of the individual who receives them, the two Sacraments at the Service of Communion are also oriented outward for the care of other people.

Two other sacraments, Holy Orders and Matrimony, are directed towards the salvation of others; if they contribute as well to personal salvation, it is through service to others that they do so. They confer a particular mission in the Church and serve to build up the People of God. (CCC 1534)



Christ instituted the Sacrament of Holy Orders to foster the good of his spiritual family, the Church.

The *Catechism* explains these Sacraments as “particular consecrations”:

Through these sacraments those already consecrated by Baptism and Confirmation³⁴ for the common priesthood of all the faithful can receive particular consecrations. Those who receive the sacrament of Holy Orders are consecrated in Christ's name “to feed the Church by the word and grace of God.”³⁵ On their part, “Christian spouses are fortified and, as it were, consecrated for the duties and dignity of their state by a special sacrament.”³⁶ (CCC 1535)

Christ instituted the Sacrament of Holy Orders to foster the good of his spiritual family, the Church. This Sacrament ensures that the faithful receive Christ's grace through the celebration of the Sacraments made available in the Church.

Marriage is a natural institution, created by God as part of human nature. Elevated to a Sacrament, Matrimony is consecrated for the supernatural good of the family. Matrimony enriches the lives of spouses even as they bring new life into the world. Their union transforms society at the most fundamental level: the family.

The essence of both Sacraments is service. As Christ told his disciples, “He who is greatest among you shall be your servant.”³⁷ This is how those ordained to Holy Orders are called to serve others

in the Church and how husbands and wives are called to serve one another and their family.

Each call, then, is a particular variation on Christ's New Commandment of Love. Everyone is called to love sacrificially. To respond to God's call is to give one's life as an unselfish gift to God and others, our brothers and sisters in the Church as well as the whole world. As Sacraments at the Service of Communion, both Matrimony and Holy Orders require such a gift of self.

We will explore further the service aspects of these vocations as we discuss each vocation in more detail in the chapters to follow.

GRACES OF STATE

God calls us in many ways, and our vocations will be as individual as each of us is unique. No two people are alike; and no two vocations are alike.

With each calling, God also gives the grace necessary for fulfilling the demands of that calling. This grace is called the *grace of state*. The *Catechism* explains:

Among the special graces ought to be mentioned the *graces of state* that accompany the exercise of the responsibilities of the Christian life and of the ministries within the Church:

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; he who teaches, in his teaching; he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who contributes, in liberality; he who gives aid, with zeal; he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.³⁸ (CCC 2004)

It would be erroneous to think that any vocation is more difficult than another. There is no easy path through life. Some might believe that the priesthood or the consecrated life is more difficult because it requires celibacy, but married couples will be quick to point out the numerous challenges and heartaches involved in having a family.

God will always give us the grace that we need to meet the challenges of our vocation, but that is not to say it makes our vocation easy. Every life entails some suffering and some temptations. Every work involves some arduous effort. Every choice involves some sacrifice. These vary according to our vocation; but we cannot avoid sorrow or temptation by choosing a path other than the one God has indicated for us.

We will certainly face obstacles as we seek to discern our vocation. We will face even greater ordeals, over the course of a lifetime, as we strive to fulfill that calling. But the God who calls us will also give us the strength to respond faithfully, overcoming whatever difficulties we meet along the way. Even tasks that seem impossible will become possible with his help, for nothing is impossible with God.³⁹ He is faithful to us, and he always makes it possible for us to be faithful to him.

SELF-DENIAL IS A GREAT GIFT

Msgr. Fernando Ocariz said the following about sacrifice and vocation in a recent interview.

“There is no doubt that dedicating oneself to God requires sacrifice, but it would be naive—a naivety that entraps more than a few people—to think that without such dedication to God, life is or would be devoid of such sacrifices or even greater ones. Of course, celibacy, for example, bears with it self-denial, but this does not mean marriage is an easier path.... Above all, in light of faith the gift of self to God is not lived out as self-denial but as a great gift one receives.

In this context, what always comes to mind is the Gospel scene where Jesus says to the Samaritan, ‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, “Give me a drink,” you would have asked him and he would have given you living water’ (Jn 4:10). What God asks of us is always a gift for us, even when from a human point of view it means suffering.”

— *God, the Church, and the World*, p. 101

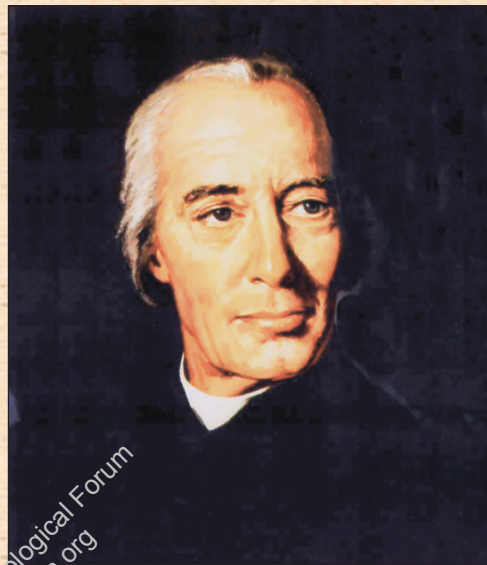
DEMETRIUS GALLITZIN: The Prince Called to Priesthood

Prince Dimitri Gallitzin was born in 1770 into wealth and nobility. His father was the Russian ambassador to the Netherlands, and his mother was a German countess. Kings and queens numbered among their friends. About religion, however, they were apathetic. Dimitri was baptized in the Russian Orthodox Church, to which his father nominally belonged, but he received no significant instruction in religion.

When Dimitri was a teen, his mother suffered a grave illness, which led her back to the Catholic faith of her baptism. She sought the company of the great Catholic thinkers and clergy of her time. Dimitri was influenced by their company, and when he was seventeen he asked to be received into the Catholic Church. He spoke candidly about the fact that he was discerning a vocation to the priesthood.

His conversion was consequential. Allegiance to the Catholic faith would disqualify Dimitri from an officer's commission in the Russian Guards. He served briefly in the Austrian military before reaching the age when young nobles customarily made their "grand tour." It was the time of the French Revolution, and the lands of Europe were tense and, in some places, dangerous, especially for an aristocrat. His parents decided to send Dimitri to the United States instead. His father hoped that the time away might dampen his son's ardor for Catholicism, since there were few Catholics in the United States.

Dimitri was not deterred. He arrived in Baltimore, Maryland, on October 28, 1792, and reported immediately to Bishop John Carroll. He asked to be considered as a candidate for the priesthood. He sent word home and said he was willing to forfeit his inheritance.



Rev. Demetrius Gallitzin
"Apostle of the Alleghenies"

Dimitri was ordained in March 1795, becoming one of the first men to be ordained a priest in the United States. His bishop immediately put him to work in the regions that are now Maryland, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania. Fr. Gallitzin would "ride circuit" from one community to the next, saying Mass for the local Catholics, hearing confessions, and blessing marriages before moving on to the next site. His visits to any one place were brief and often separated by many months. It was a hard, demanding life; travel was difficult along hundreds of miles of dirt roads; but the people needed him, and they appreciated his service.

Gradually he acclimated himself to the ways of America's pioneers. Like St. Paul, he wanted to identify with his new congregations (see 1 Cor 9: 22-23); and so he westernized his name as "Demetrius" and sometimes even went by "Fr. Augustine

Continued