



# Into the Depths

## Sifting for God's Will

*Discernment* literally means "to sift through." The goal of any sifting is to find something valuable that presently remains hidden. Police sift through evidence to find clues, and miners sift through dirt to find gold. The Christian, however, sifts through his or her own prayer and experiences not to find material clues or wealth, but the spiritual clues that point towards the wealth that is God's will. Caravaggio's painting "The Call of St. Matthew" helps us understand discernment at an even deeper level. In the painting, three fingers are pointing at Matthew. The first is that of Our Lord; the second that of St. Peter, who represents the Church; and the third is that of Matthew himself, who represents all people who are called by the Lord to glorify Him in some particular



vocation. These are the three "players" at work in every person's vocation: God, the Church, and the individual soul. In what follows, we will take a closer look at each of these players in relation to discernment.

Firstly, God is at the forefront of all vocations. He is the one who calls, guides, and orders every vocation according to His perfect, divine plan. He who creates each soul also knows the best path of life for each soul. God offers every individual a specific and unique mission to carry out here on earth. A vocation, therefore, is primarily God's initiative – it is a gift from God to the soul. The primacy of God's role in discernment cannot be overstated or forgotten! Since God is the giver of every vocation, the individual is primarily the receiver of his or her own vocation. This is why discernment is first and foremost an act of reception rather than an act of "doing" on the part of the individual. One's vocation is a gift to be accepted, not a problem to be figured out. But this does not mean discernment is easy or requires no work on the part of the individual. Prayer is the work of the individual who, with the help of the Holy Spirit, mines through the "dirt" of one's own desires, history, relationships, and spiritual experiences in order to discover the unique and specific mission to which God has destined the soul for all eternity. And just like the one who finds the

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# How You Can Help

Looking for ways to build a culture of vocations in your family, parish, school, or community?

If this is your first time reading this newsletter, welcome! We are blessed to have you as part of our priestly vocations team in the Diocese of Peoria. Please don't underestimate the good you can do for vocations. St. Paul reminds us that we are all one in the body of Christ, and that in this body our prayers and sacrifices are offered to God in union with Jesus' sacrifice. This is especially true at the Mass.

So please continue to pray for vocations in your personal prayers and at the Eucharist. You may even consider having a Mass said at your parish for an increase in vocations. Just call your parish office and ask if you can schedule this Mass intention (usually they ask for a \$10 stipend if you are able to provide it).

We are also grateful for any monetary support. If you'd like to contribute monetarily, please send a check payable to the Catholic Diocese of Peoria to our address on the back of this newsletter.

Finally, have you ever asked a young man if he has considered the priesthood, or a young woman if she has considered the religious life? I encourage you to

plant these seeds in the young people in your parish or family, and then pray for them to grow. We are all part of the culture of vocations, and your work is effective in Christ. Thanks for all you do!

## Practicing the Presence of God

by Fr. John Bartunek, LC

Since everyone's friendship with God is unique, no generic formula will suffice for practicing the presence of God. Nevertheless, some common principles apply to all of us.

First of all, we need to develop basic spiritual disciplines: a structured and consistent daily **prayer life** (this doesn't have to be as complicated as a monastic prayer life, just sincere and substantial); regular and fruitful reception of the sacraments, especially Communion and confession (this is the objective foundation of our communion with God – **God's grace is the stuff of which our friendship with Christ is made**); and a **reasonable, mature effort to overcome one's selfish tendencies and to grow in virtue** (spiritual reading, a program of life, and spiritual direction are a big help here...).

Secondly, we can experiment with practical techniques that will help us form the habit of remembering that we are never alone, that Jesus is at our side, eager to share our experiences and make them fruitful and meaningful. Here is where tactics like the spiritual bouquet come into play (choosing a

phrase at the end of the morning meditation that you will use as a motto for the day, to keep in mind the insights and resolutions that came up in your meditation). Here we can also get creative: using a screen-saver that will remind you of the Lord; keeping religious articles visible in key places that you will frequent during the day; programming reminders into your email calendar; praying the Angelus whenever you get into the car to go for a drive; dropping by a local shrine, chapel, or church on your way **home from work, school, or shopping...** Since the current of the culture in which we live flows in the direction of self-centeredness and self-absorption, we have to make a positive effort to swim against it. Practical tactics can help. But **here's a warning: these are only means to an end, so don't be surprised if one such tactic helps you for a while but then stops "working."** When that happens, experiment with something else. I would love to hear about some of the tactics that our readers have used and found most helpful.

Thirdly, and most importantly, you (and all of us, really) need to ask yourself why it has been *Continued on next page...*



## What to Ask

Questions for discerning or strengthening your vocation:

Do I spend time in silent prayer every day?

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Do I frequent the sacraments of the Eucharist and reconciliation?

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Am I afraid of what Jesus will ask of me?

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Do I prefer anything to the love of Christ (material attachments, relationships, control, etc.)?

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Do I know my strengths and thank God for them?

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Do I know my weaknesses and believe that Jesus can bring great good out of them if I entrust them to Him with confidence?

# Passage to Pray With:

## THE CALLING OF MATTHEW

As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the customs post. He said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him. While he was at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat with Jesus and his disciples. The Pharisees saw this and said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" He heard this and said, "Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. Go and learn the meaning of the words, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' I did not come to call the righteous but sinners." ~Matthew 9:9-13



## Presence, cont'd.

difficult for you to "practice the presence of God." Part of the reason will simply be the superficiality and pace of our culture. Part of the reason will also be habits of self-centeredness that you haven't yet overcome. But a deeper reason may also be at work. When you go to a dinner party with people who are important, fashionable, and popular, but who you don't know very well, you are a bit nervous. You are worried about making the right impression. You don't want to commit a faux pas or inadvertently offend someone. You are excited to be invited, but the excitement is mixed in with some tension. Whether things go well or ill, at the end of the night, when you get back in the car to head home, you breathe a sigh of relief; driving home with your spouse or with an old friend, you can be yourself again. At the party you were sharing experiences with people, you were living in their presence, but you didn't have a relationship of trust with them. With your old friend, on the other hand, you never have to worry about making a good impression; you don't have to be anxious about what they may think of you. Your relationship is solid, resilient, familiar – you can relax together. At times, the biggest obstacle to our "practicing the presence of God" is a subtle, subconscious fear about what God thinks of us. In the back of our mind, we are concerned about making the right impression in God's eyes, and so when we are "in his presence" we put on a show; we watch carefully over every word instead of speaking simply and from the heart; we try to live up to standards that we imagine God is expecting of us; we are afraid that if we don't meet those extra expectations, God will be displeased with us – he won't invite us back to the next party. This mindset discourages us from living in God's presence, because we can't relax, we can't be ourselves if we are trying to live up to artificial expectations.

But God is not like that. He is not watching us like a hawk, just waiting for that faux pas, just looking for something to criticize. He knows us through and through already. He truly is the only friend who is perfect and perfectly committed to us. He wants to share every moment of our life, because he is simply that interested in our lives, like the oldest friend, the

one we can always count on. That is how God is. The more deeply and fully we believe that, the easier and more natural it will be to live always in his presence.

*This article originally appeared on [spiritualdirection.com](http://spiritualdirection.com) on February 7, 2011.*

## Quote of the Month

**"Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it. This, as has already been said, is why Christ the Redeemer 'fully reveals man to himself.' If we may use the expression, this is the human dimension of the mystery of the Redemption. In this dimension man finds again the greatness, dignity and value that belong to his humanity. In the mystery of the Redemption man becomes newly 'expressed' and, in a way, is newly created. He is newly created!"**

~ St. John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*

## THE LIFE OF PRAYER

"But in this lower world, he built for himself a humble habitation of our own clay, so that he might pull down from themselves and win over to himself those whom he is to bring subject to him; lowering their pride and heightening their love, to the end that they might go on no farther in self-confidence—but rather should become weak, seeing at their feet the Deity made weak by sharing our coats of skin—so that they might cast themselves, exhausted, upon him and be uplifted by his rising." (St. Augustine, *Confessions*)

pearl of great price (Mt. 13:45-46), the individual who finds his or her vocation responds with great joy and full freedom! He or she responds to the Giver of gifts with the very gift of his or her own life.

Finally, the Church's role in an individual's vocation is to nourish and confirm God's gift. One way the Church nourishes vocations is through encouragement. My own vocation was nourished at a young age when many people encouraged me towards the priesthood, even when I had no desire to be a priest. Even to this day, words of encouragement from priests and close friends provide me with great strength to continue on in God's will.

Another way the Church nourishes vocations is through prayer. Jesus says, "Therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into the harvest" (Lk. 10:2). The Church confirms a vocation, especially to the

priesthood or consecrated life, by testing it as gold in fire. An individual, therefore, who has felt a calling to the priesthood or consecrated life submits him- or herself to and seeks approval from the Church, who is guided by the Holy Spirit.

A person's vocation is first and foremost a gift from God. He calls each of us to a specific and unrepeatable mission to love and serve Him in this life. It is a joy to set out in search of this great gift, and an even greater joy to find it! With our own efforts, and with the guidance of the Church and the Holy Spirit, God helps us sift through our life's "dirt" in order to find the golden treasure that is His will.

*~Daniel McShane, Seminarian for the Diocese of Peoria*

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