A Message From the Pastor

Looking for a Sign From God??



Almost exactly 25 years ago: After I had finished college I was well-employed at a vibrant publishing company in the Chicago area, but was feeling spiritually unsatisfied. My soul was more than a little restless. I was feeling the Lord calling to my heart, inviting me to consider the priesthood. It was somewhat unsettling because, while curiously intriguing, it prompted more questions than I could possibly answer. I wasn't sure where to start, but I knew I needed to pray, and I couldn't not do something.

So on Sunday I had arrived to church early for some personal prayer time, and couldn't stop thinking about what was stirring in my heart. I knew I needed to something, but didn't know exactly what or where to go or who to talk to. I had the irrational fear that my pastor (who I didn't really know and would feel awkward approaching) would stuff me into a box and ship me off to seminary just for asking a question. But thankfully I remembered that periodically the bulletin would have a small blurb about vocations, that if any men had any questions about being a priest, that they should call the number provided. And so I prayed, "Dear Lord, I remember that once in a while there was that blurb. Well if that's in there, it'll be a clear sign from you, and then I can safely take the first small step. Amen."

When Mass began, I quickly forgot about my prayer, and the liturgy went as any normal Sunday. After Mass, a smiling usher handed me a bulletin. As soon as I took it I remembered the prayer I said before church. My heart rate rose and my palms started to sweat. I didn't dare open the bulletin with people around, so I hurried into the parking lot. Standing next to my car I opened the bulletin, and my jaw hit the floor. There was not one little blurb about vocations – there were *four full pages!* It was National Vocations Awareness Week.

Today, now 25 years later, also begins National Vocations Awareness Week, which holds a special place in my interior prayer life. It enabled me to journey into the Priesthood for the Archdiocese of Chicago, a journey which has not only transformed my life, but countless others, not just in the Archdiocese, but in different parts of the world, from the western edge of Alaska to the eastern coast of Russia. My mind cannot comprehend how many people Christ has touched, healed, transformed, and saved through my ministry and service as a Catholic Priest. Through it all, I keep growing in how I see, know, and love Him. "Blessings without number and mercies without end," to quote a line from one of my favorite hymns, *O God Beyond All Praising*.

And this God of beauty, life and love has placed it on my heart to share this specific story at this specific time, because maybe there is someone specific who needs encouragement to open his heart – or maybe generally because these days we all need to be strengthened in hope.

In reading about my own story, if the Lord has placed anything on your heart or mind, or if there's a little bit of restlessness going on inside your soul, please consider this an invitation to talk to myself, Fr. Jesús Raya our Associate Pastor here, or Fr. Tim Monahan from the Vocations office of the Archdiocese of Chicago. Any of us would be happy to serve as a sounding board and just discuss whatever thoughts or feelings may be floating in your mind or heart. And don't worry, you're not going to be drafted against your will, you're not going to be dragged off and ordained tomorrow, but a conversation about the interior life with someone familiar with it is often a good starting point.



vocations.archchicago.org

