

# THEOLOGY OF THE BODY AND VOCATIONAL DISCERNMENT

## *THEOLOGY OF THE BODY AND GIFT*

St. John Paul II, in his Theology of the Body, refers back to the Second Vatican Council. Specifically he refers back to The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*) 24:3 “Man cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.” To be a gift to others is the Christian life. The discernment question is how God wants me to be a gift to others in the world. To be a gift to a spouse and children in the Sacrament of Marriage is one option. For men in the church to be a gift to a particular diocese or religious community in the Sacrament of Holy Orders is the topic of this paper.

All Christians are called to be a gift to others. Discernment then is about how God is calling a man specifically to be a gift to others. Christians are a community of people who follow Christ and the love of Christ impels them (see 2 Cor. 5:14) to be a gift to others. St. John Paul II reminded us of this scripture and Vatican II when in his Theology of the Body talks he spoke of existing for others.

“When God-Yahweh says, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone’ (Gen 2:18), he affirms that, “alone” the man does not completely realize this essence. He realizes it only by existing “*with someone*” and, put even more deeply and completely, by existing “*for someone*.” (January 9, 1980)

St. John Paul II is stating that we are all called to be a gift to others. This is not limited to the priesthood or consecrated religious life. The someone that a priest exists for is Christ and His bride the Church. A priest lives his life for the people of the Church. He wakes up in the middle of the night to visit the hospital, he tutors people on their faith life, and especially, he prays for the people. What talents has God given you? How does He want you to gift yourself and those talents to build His kingdom?

When I was making the transition into the seminary, a young woman found out that I was moving into the seminary. Her response still gives me strength today about my priesthood. She stated with an excited tone “That’s great! You will want to provide the sacraments to the people!” Ever since her response, I have seen this as my small gift to the people of God. I bring them Christ in the sacraments. The joy I receive is immeasurable when I hear someone say “father forgive me; it has been 30 years since my last confession.” When I was in parish life, one of my favorite days of the year was the celebration of first Eucharist. Giving myself over to others, so they may receive and know Christ through the sacraments fills my heart to overflowing with God’s love. This is what St. John Paul II is stating to us in *I Will Give You Shepherds*.

“In the Church and on behalf of the Church, priests are a sacramental representation of Jesus Christ - the head and shepherd - authoritatively proclaiming his word, repeating his acts of forgiveness and his offer of salvation - particularly in baptism, penance and the Eucharist, showing his loving concern to the point of a total gift of self for the flock, which they gather into unity and lead to the Father through Christ and in the Spirit. In a word, priests exist and act in order to proclaim the Gospel to the world and to build up the Church in the name and person of Christ the head and shepherd.” (PDV15)

One of the great lies in discernment towards seminary and priesthood is “I am not worthy.” The beauty of our Catholic faith is that we believe in forgiveness and redemption. God forgives our sins and gives us grace to overcome our faults. The truth is that God calls many men to be a gift to His Church through the priesthood. When a man works with God’s love and mercy, the man can find his true calling. To make the perfect gift to God and others, we need to bring this brokenness to the Lord in our prayer and the sacraments. Pope Francis was asked “who is Pope Francis?” His response after a short time of reflection was “I’m a sinner.” The gift of oneself is whole and fruitful when it is given through Jesus Christ. Let God sanctify the gift you bring to the

Church. In other words, turn yourself over to God. He will make you a gift to others as he has done with St. John Paul II and Pope Francis.

In my ministry as a diocesan vocation director, I call people to hear six words used by Jesus over and over again in all four gospels. “Be not afraid...Come follow me.” These words need to be heard in the heart of anyone discerning a life with Christ. To pray to the Lord to take our fears away and replace those fears with the hope and love of Christ. This is exactly what I think St. John Paul II was referring to when he brought this sense of gift in I Will Give You Shepherds.

“In their final message the synod fathers summarized briefly but eloquently the ‘truth,’ or better the ‘mystery’ and ‘gift’ of the ministerial priesthood, when they stated: ‘We derive our identity ultimately from the love of the Father, we turn our gaze to the Son, sent by the Father as high priest and good shepherd. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are united sacramentally to him in the ministerial priesthood. Our priestly life and activity continue the life and activity of Christ himself. Here lies our identity, our true dignity, the source of our joy, the very basis of our life.’”(PDV18)

As you continue to discern where God is calling you to be a gift to Him and others, know that Christ will never leave you. He is with you always. Take a list of talents that God has given to you. Ask God where and how He would like you to share these talents. Be not afraid to go to the sacraments on a regular basis. Build up your relationship with God the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit and Mary our heavenly mother. These relationships are the foundation of any vocation and they will help you to find your calling and to be a gift to others.



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