

## **Vocation and Communion: Not Transaction but Shared Life**

### **Review: God’s Initiative and Our Call**

If you were here or at Holy Family last weekend, you know that Father Val and I started a five-week homily series. As before, we’ve aligned the same principles and themes no matter which campus you’re at. As a parish family, our focus for the year is the universal call to holiness: every baptized person is capable, by God’s grace, of becoming a great saint. We are not called to mediocrity or to “barely get into heaven.”

In this second half of the year we’re highlighting the primary way that call is lived: vocation. If you are baptized, you have a vocation—a calling placed on your life through which God desires you to become a saint and to experience real fulfillment even in this life. Vocation is broader than marriage or priesthood; children and students, those who are widowed, and those with “lowercase-v” vocations such as nurse, doctor, or teacher—all are living a vocation. Because vocation is dynamic and ongoing, the question is not “What was I called to?” but “What is God calling me (or us) to now?”

Last week’s key point: a vocation is God’s initiative. It’s not me inventing what to do; it’s me, by grace, discerning and receiving what God is doing and calling me to.

### **This Week: Vocation Is Relational—Aimed at Communion**

Every true vocation—marriage, priesthood, consecrated life, single life, widowhood, student life, or a professional calling—is relational, not individualistic. Because it is relational, it is aimed at communion. This fits our life at Mass and Holy Communion, and it fits family life: communion of spouses and communion within the family.

Why? We are made in the image and likeness of the Holy Trinity—a communion of life-giving love. The ache of loneliness, which even married people experience, signals that we are ultimately made for full communion that is not yet complete in this world; our hearts are restless until they rest in the Lord. From Genesis: “It is not good for man to be alone.” That first marriage reveals God’s intention for covenant life together.

Focusing briefly on marriage: it is not “my path with my spouse and kids attached for support and mutual benefit.” When vocation is treated functionally, we slide into “transactional” mode. A pastoral example: when someone I don’t know says, “Father, thank you for your priesthood,” what is often meant (without relational context) is, “Thank you for becoming a priest so you could give me my sacraments.” That’s functional and transactional rather than relational. Imagine a child saying, “I’m glad you’re my mom because you give me my allowance and drives.” Or a spouse: “I’m glad you’re my spouse because you cook and do the taxes.” We wouldn’t state it so crudely, but we can drift there.

Marriage is a shared calling that neither spouse possesses alone. More broadly, here is a working definition of vocation: it is the reception of a call—God’s initiative—into stable, life-giving, self-giving relationships through which love is formed in me and Christ is made present in the world. Even in a lowercase-v vocation (say, teaching), those stable, self-giving relationships (your students this year) are where Christ is made present in and through you.

### **Fruitful Communion and the Ecclesial Dimension**

Vocations are about fruitful communion. This can include children, but it doesn’t have to. Fruitful communion means entering relationships not primarily to have my needs met but to glorify God by being a blessing to others. You will not find fulfillment without being a blessing; fulfillment comes as love becomes fruitful—sacrificial and sacramental, not functional or transactional.

There is also a strong ecclesial dimension—especially for sacramental vocations such as marriage and holy orders (and, in a related way, parenthood). Lived well and sacramentally, these vocations serve the Body of Christ in ways we may not see. This is why marriages ordinarily take place in a church: the sign and symbolism matter. A current crisis is that many baptized Catholics—faithful in their youth—are not seeking sacramental marriage. The sacramental connection is missed, and marriages are impoverished by its absence, whether or not the couple recognizes it.

It is not simply “I am married” or “I am a parent,” but “We, as a couple and a family, are a cell in the Body of Christ.” St. John Paul II called the family the “first and vital cell” of society; when families are sick, society is sick. The same is true in the Church: active, engaged families strengthen a parish in ways not always seen. When families are absent, the parish is impoverished, not only those families.

The good news: when families strive—imperfectly, in all the messiness—to live sacramentally, there are massive effects because of sacramental grace. The Holy Spirit works beyond what we can see or may ever know in this life. God is relentlessly good, bringing health and healing to individuals and families.

Homework. Married couples: pray honestly about whether any part of your marriage has slipped into a transactional mode; name it and give it attention with the Lord. Not married: ask whether your relationship with the Lord has become transactional; identify where, and ask for grace to move into deeper relationship.

Dear friends in Christ, as we celebrate this Eucharist—holy communion that builds and strengthens our communions—let us thank the Lord for His grace and strive to live it with sincerity and truth.

Praise be Jesus Christ.