

How Do I Know?

Just what is a Call to Religious Life?

Reflections by
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By a call we don't mean an actual voice, like Jesus calling the Apostles, or a voice like that heard by Paul. Don't expect a special revelation, or something dramatic to happen, to let you know what you should do. Of course, it would be a lot easier that way—like the angel coming to Mary, or St. Paul being knocked to the ground, or a voice coming from the clouds. Then we'd know for sure, right away, what to do, and we would just have to be concerned about responding! However, it doesn't usually happen that way!

Rather, a call is a growing awareness, a realization, a conviction within you, that this is what God wants you to do with your life. This sometimes grows in you for years, and sometimes it comes more quickly, but it is God's grace within you helping you realize what He wants you to do.

Struggle and tears and fear are normal—fear of the unknown, or what it will be like, or whether “I'll be able to do it”; the temptation to put it off for a vague “sometime in the future”; or resisting God's call and wishing He would call someone else instead! Sometimes even family problems or other problems appear and make things difficult. God frequently allows these struggles and difficulties, perhaps, to strengthen our vocation: Are we a “fair weather friend” with Jesus, or are we willing to follow Him even when the going is rough?

Some find it helpful, in trying to discern whether God wants them to enter religious life, to use some of these ideas from St. Ignatius:

List the pros and cons; and think and pray about them.

Imagine yourself on your deathbed and ask what you would then wish you had chosen.

Imagine some other person coming to you to ask your advice on the very same dilemma you have. What would you suggest?

Imagine yourself ten years from now, both in religious life and not in religious life. Which seems to fit you better?

But, the most important thing to do, the absolutely essential thing, is to pray, and pray much! Daily Mass, if at all possible, as well as reflective reading of Scripture and frequent prayer to Mary should be part of your prayer.

Pray for God's guidance, and for His courage to respond generously to whatever He wants of you. DO IT and do not delay any longer than necessary. Yes, courage is necessary, and only God can give that!

Ask God's help, and keep trusting in Him, and He will answer! He will also give you all the strength and graces you need, now and for the future!



“But maybe I’m too unworthy for religious life?”

You are unworthy. NO ONE is worthy of the gift of a vocation to religious life. If God chose only those who were perfect and saintly, He would have very few to choose from! But, He chooses ordinary people, ordinary people who love Him and want to serve Him and His people.

“How sure of my call, and of this particular community, must I be before actually applying and then entering?”

While 100% certainty at this point need not be present, one should have at least a reasonable certainty that this is where God wants you. This can exist with “cold feet” and feeling a bit nervous and scared, but if there are serious doubts as to whether you should do this, it would be better to wait a while, pray even more, and, if possible, discuss it with some competent spiritual person.



One can compare entering religious life with getting engaged. An engagement is not something to be entered into lightly. The same with religious life. When a young woman gets engaged, she really feels that this is the man she wants to marry and with whom she wishes to spend the rest of her life. However, everyone knows that an engagement is not a final commitment and can be broken if either party sees that it’s not the best thing. But, the hopes are, upon engagement, that the relationship will lead to marriage for life, just as a woman entering religious life as a postulant is hoping that this will lead to vows for life.

THINK OF all the people there are, all over the world, who do not know Jesus, or who know about Him but don’t care. Is Jesus asking you to spread His word to them? Is God asking you to love Him so much that you will dedicate your whole life to Him?

Whatever God has in mind for you, remember: You will be happiest and most at peace if you respond “yes” to whatever God wants. He made each of us and knows us thoroughly. His call is in harmony with our deepest selves. The way of life that God wants for us is the best one for us. He knows how you can best serve Him and His people with YOUR uniqueness. You will be happiest in life, and most fulfilled, in the place where God wants you!

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