



PRIESTHOOD

As he was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea; they were fishermen. He said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him.

He walked along from there and saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat, with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him.

- MATTHEW 4:18-22 ^[1]

CLASS DISCUSSION: QUALITIES OF A GOOD CANDIDATE FOR THE PRIESTHOOD

PRIESTHOOD CHECKLIST ^[3]

Instructions

Boys: On each of the items, rate yourself on a scale of 0 – 5. A rating of 0 means you do not possess the quality at all. A 5 indicates that the quality is very evident in your life. At the end, total your score. The highest possible score is 100. Be completely honest with yourself and rate yourself fairly. Don't be too lenient or too hard on yourself; remember that most candidates for the priesthood lack one or more of these qualities, at least initially.

Girls: review the checklist while thinking about a man you know who could be called to the priesthood, then answer the questions at the end.



Reflecting on each of these points will take you a long way down the road of self-discovery. Finding the areas that need strengthening, then actually taking steps to improve, will make you a much better Catholic man, even if you are not called to become a priest.

[1] Scripture taken from the New American Bible, Revised Edition, available at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/books-of-the-bible/>

[3] Fr. Brett Brennan, *To Save a Thousand Souls* (Valdosta, GA: Vianney Vocations, 2012), 77-108. The checklist and commentary for this activity are paraphrased from Ch. 5 of this text.



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CLASS DISCUSSION: QUALITIES OF A GOOD CANDIDATE FOR THE PRIESTHOOD *continued*

1. ___ I love Jesus Christ and I have a thirst to bring Jesus and his teachings to the world.
 2. ___ I am endeavoring to be a believing, practicing Catholic Christian.
 3. ___ I am trying to live a life of prayer and I desire a life of prayer.
 4. ___ I am trying to serve others and I desire a life of service to others.
 5. ___ I feel a desire to be a priest, though it is sometimes stronger than at other times.
 6. ___ I have had others tell me that I should be a priest or that I would make a good priest.
 7. ___ Prayerful reading of Sacred Scripture leads me to believe I might be called to be a priest.
 8. ___ I am endeavoring to live virtuously.
 9. ___ I like to be around people and I have sufficient social skills to engage others.
 10. ___ I have enough intelligence to complete graduate-level coursework and function as a priest
 11. ___ I think that I have the physical, emotional and psychological stability to become a priest.
 12. ___ I am joyful and I have a good sense of humor.
 13. ___ I think that I have a “priest’s heart.”
 14. ___ I believe that I have the self-mastery to be a good priest.
 15. ___ Generally speaking, I have demonstrated stability in life style.
 16. ___ People who know me would say I am Christian gentleman.
 17. ___ I have had events happen in my life that seem to be signs pointing towards priesthood.
 18. ___ I am usually able to accept both success and failure without losing my peace.
 19. ___ I believe that I have a healthy psycho-sexual development and orientation.
 20. ___ I am trying to be truly open to the will of God for my life.
- ___ **Total**

QUESTIONS FOR BOYS:

1. Which areas did I score the lowest? Are these things that I could work on—just to be better prepared whatever my vocation is?
2. Which areas could I work on and how?

QUESTIONS FOR GIRLS:

1. Which qualities are needed for all the vocations? Give an example of how marriage or the religious life needs these characteristics or habits.
2. How could you practically, right now, help a guy you know work on these qualities?
3. If you could imagine the best and holiest priest coming to my parish, what are the top 5 qualities from above that he would have?
4. What kind of things can families do to foster priestly vocations? What are good rules for young boys? What kind of family activities, chores, prayers, and interactions would help foster priestly vocations? Consider the kind of things families should be involved in—in the parish or wider community—to help foster priestly vocations in their family. You can be creative with this and think of anything. Whatever you think of, explain why it might help.



ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION: BECOMING A PRIEST

The following is a basic explanation of what goes into becoming a priest, a sort of “how-to”:

1. Contact the Vocation Director

- A. A man who thinks he might have a call to the priesthood should contact his diocesan vocation director. The vocation director will want to meet and talk to him to find out initially if he is a good candidate for discerning the priesthood. (If he is not fit for the priesthood, it is better that a man know this up front!)
- B. Most men will not be sent right away to seminary because the diocese needs time to get to know the discerner. He may be asked to write essays, take tests, and be interviewed. This will take several months, or even a few years. There are many things the diocese will look into to make the decision send a man for formation:
 - i. *Personal background*: family life, relationships, work, etc. This will even include a criminal background check.
 - ii. *Education*: seminary formation is intensive, so it is important that the discerner is fit for advanced studies. Most men should be able to do well.
 - iii. *Health*: physical and psychological health are important so that as a seminarian and, eventually, a priest a man can do what is required, handling stress well. The diocese will obtain physicals and psychological exams of all men before accepting them as seminarians.
 - iv. *Spiritual life*: does he attend Mass and receive the Sacraments regularly, pray daily, study the Faith, publicly serve others (works of charity), etc.
- C. The vocation director will advise the young man what to do next at each step. He will likely recommend working with a spiritual director, at least. Depending on the situation of the discerner, the vocation director may suggest one of many different options, such as:
 - i. Continuing or beginning education at a local college as he works through some paperwork and testing;
 - ii. Continuing to work at his job or find a job as he tackles some difficult issues;

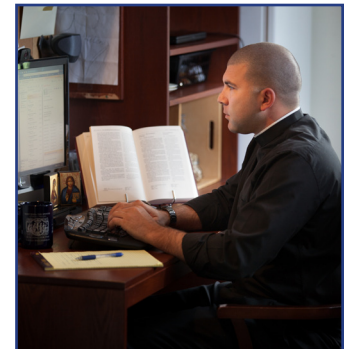
- iii. Living in a more intense discernment situation, if he is mature enough, such as a house of discernment;
- iv. Eventually, when everything is in order and he has been approved for seminary formation by the Bishop, applying to a seminary.

2. Seminary Application. The diocese sponsors the seminarian at a particular seminary. Some diocese have their own seminaries, but most send their men to several seminaries in various locations (both locally and abroad).

- A. Every seminary is different, but normal application requirements may include writing an account of yourself and your life, writing short essays on the priesthood, submitting academic transcripts, letters of recommendation, sacramental records, photographs, and many of the tests and records gathered by the vocation director.
- B. Seminary application is usually completed in spring for men who will begin seminary formation the following August.
- C. Some of these steps cost money. Each diocese has different policies, but most dioceses will not let cost stay in the way of a good candidate. Many dioceses will bear much or all of the cost of the actual seminary education.

3. Seminary Formation

- A. Seminary formation usually takes between 6-8 years.
- B. There are three levels of seminary—men enter the seminary at all different stages of life and slightly different plans are worked out for them. Depending on when a man applies he may start with one of the following:
 - i. College Seminary: Men who obtain a normal college degree, while at the same time undergoing the formation required to enter major seminary.



The academic formation at a seminary is rigorous. It's important to have well-educated priests!



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ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION: BECOMING A PRIEST *continued*

- ii. **Pre-Theology:** Men who already have a college degree, but who need to satisfy the requirements of two years of formation and study of philosophy before entering major seminary.
 - iii. **Major Seminary (Theology):** Men who have attended either college seminary or pre-theology, who now begin the final four years of priestly formation.
- C. The seminary day is divided between classes, prayer, service, study, and other formation activities. Formation is divided into four major areas:



An essential part of seminary formation is prayer.

- i. **Human:** From basic manners to relationships, the seminarian is given opportunities to grow in many ways. A priest must be able to interact with people, so it is important for him to learn how to do so gracefully.
- ii. **Spiritual:** The seminarian participates in the mass, the liturgy of the hours, adoration, confession, retreats, and spiritual direction. He learns to develop the habit of prayer which he must teach to others, the habit of prayer which will sustain him for the rest of his life.
- iii. **Intellectual:** The main focus is philosophy and theology, but seminary classes cover the usual range of subjects, including math and science, literature and languages, history, etc.

- iv. **Pastoral:** A seminarian must learn to become a good pastor so that he can lead the people to God. He learns practical skills (such as business knowledge for running the financial and management side of the parish) as well as spiritual matters (like helping the poor, visiting the sick, and counseling.)

- D. At the end of every year a formal report on the seminarian's progress will be sent to his vocation director and bishop to help them decide whether he should continue in formation.
- E. Every summer the seminarian will be assigned a task suited to his formation. This can be an assignment in a parish or some other suitable situation.

4. Ordination

- A. Usually after Third Theology, a seminarian is ordained to the transitional diaconate. He is a deacon from six months to a year, usually completing seminary during this time.
- B. After ordination to the diaconate, the bishop then may send an official letter calling him to the priesthood, called a "dismissorial." The ordination day will be set. After completing his fourth year of theology, he will make a formal retreat, and shortly after be ordained in one of the Church's most beautiful liturgies. This is the beginning of his priesthood!



Ordination is just the beginning to a life of service to God.



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READINGS: DE MURVILLE AND MAURIAC

BISHOP MAURICE COUVE DE MURVILLE

Maurice Couve de Murville (1929-2007) was born in France and moved to England shortly before the outbreak of WW II. He attended the Benedictine near Downside Abbey and studied history at Trinity College, Cambridge. He was ordained in 1957 and served as pastor to several parishes and chaplain to the University of Sussex and later Cambridge University. In 1982, he was ordained Archbishop of Birmingham where he served until 1999. As Bishop he worked on numerous projects, including the establishment of Maryvale Institute, the cause for the canonization of Cardinal Newman, and a translation of a history of the Catholic Church in China.

Excerpt from Bishop Maurice Couve de Murville's reflection:

*If you are wondering what to do with your life,
if you feel you want to do something really great with it,
if you don't want to fall into a conventional, self-centered existence,
if you want to help other people in the deepest way possible,
where they most need help,
then think about the service of the Gospel in the priesthood.
If you become a priest,
you will never be rich,
you will have to give up the love of a spouse
for the love of everyone you meet;
you will have to give up your family commitments;
you will often be on the move;
you will never have a mortgage;
you will be under obedience to the leader of the Church
just as Jesus was obedient to the will of the Father.
But if you are faithful to the ideal of the priesthood,
you will have the deep happiness
which Jesus gives to those who are His friends.*

*One last thing:
you don't have to be perfect to think of being a priest.
Jesus chooses ordinary people, not moral heroes.
You just have to want to serve Him;
He will give you the rest in due course.*

FRANCOIS MAURIAC

Francois Mauriac (1885-1970) was a French Catholic journalist and writer, authoring hundreds of poems, plays, novels, and essays; his complete works fill twelve volumes. He worked with the French resistance movement during World War II and won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1952.



In his book *Holy Thursday*, for which Mother Teresa wrote a beautiful introduction, Mauriac shares his personal reflections as a layman on the importance of the priesthood.

Excerpt from *Holy Thursday*:

Now they are ordained, the first members of an innumerable family. Holiness entered the world with Christ. The church is holy and what matters to us the wretchedness of individuals, their falls, their betrayals? "The great glory of the Church," writes Jacques Maritain, "is to be holy with sinning members." Until the end of the world, the hands of a few chosen men will never cease to lift up "the Lamb Of God who takes away the sins of the world."

The grace of Holy Thursday will be transmitted unto the end of time, unto the last of the priests who will celebrate the last Mass in a shattered universe. Holy Thursday created these men; a mark was stamped on them; a sign was given to them.... People say that there is a scarcity of priests. In truth, what an adorable mystery it is that there still are any priests. They no longer have any human advantage... they have no apparent power...

For centuries, since the first Holy Thursday, some men have chosen... to lose their lives because once Someone made them the seemingly foolish promise: "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it."

'What are you going to do?' said Abbé Perreyve to Christ, the day before he was ordained. 'You are delivering Yourself; You are abandoning Yourself to me. You surrender Your Body to me. I shall use it for my needs and for the needs of other souls.... You will never refuse....' Indeed, priests, holy priests, are repaid by an immense love.



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HOMEWORK

Read Mauriac excerpt from Readings section and answer these questions:

1. Why does Mauriac say it is a mystery that we still have priests? Do you agree?
2. How does Mauriac's view of the priesthood
3. Of the qualities listed on the checklist, which 5 qualities would Mauriac have stressed as most important?
4. Why do you say this?