

11th Grade: Priesthood

OPENING SCRIPTURE

5-7 min

Begin with a short prayer and/or lead a meditation based on the lesson's scripture.

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]

REVIEW OPTION

8-10 min

Tie today's class to the previous vocation lesson or other classes you have been working on.

Note to teacher: A free program is available to begin a "discernment group" to help male students further discern the priesthood. The Melchizedek Project offers free books, discussion guides, and leader guides. Groups meet seven times per semester for about 90 minutes. Order a sample packet (<http://www.melchizedekproject.com/materials/request-sample-packet>) or request free materials (<http://www.melchizedekproject.com/materials/request-materials>) for your group.

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.



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



CLASS DISCUSSION: QUALITIES OF A GOOD CANDIDATE FOR THE PRIESTHOOD

20-25 min

GOALS:

Students will learn to

- communicate the importance of the priesthood;
- communicate why it is important to develop certain basic characteristics and habits to succeed in a vocation;
- examine what characteristics and habits they need to work on to succeed in the vocation God gives them;
- consider possible signs of a vocation to the priesthood or support of others who are discerning the priesthood.

PREPARATION:

Review Discussion Points for the class discussion. (You can use these for a beginning lecture, or as discussion points to cover as part of the activity. It may be more useful to cover certain points before doing the checklist activity.)

Review and choose which method to use for going through the Checklist activity.

Note: *young men and young women have slightly different instructions for using the checklist. Be sure to look at both and pace the class so that all finish at the same time.*

- The young men should use the checklist as a tool for discernment as well as to consider what characteristics all priests need. They read through the characteristics and evaluate themselves, then answer the questions about their results.
- The young women should use the checklist to consider what characteristics all priests need and to think about ways they can support guys in this discernment. They should know what kind of characteristics to encourage, praise, respect and try to assist in developing in the men they know (or will know) who are discerning their vocations.



PRIESTHOOD

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.

VOCATION LESSONS | 11th Grade: Priesthood

2

INSTRUCTIONS:

Pass out and have students complete the Checklist, using it as springboard for discussion.

Optional methods for discussing the Checklist:

1. Have students work individually and silently without prior explanation; then discuss the questions. Solicit students' ideas about why certain characteristics would be good for a priest and help them to understand how such characteristics and habits foster the goals of the priesthood.
2. Work through the checklist as a group (though their own ratings should remain private). Solicit student ideas about why certain characteristics would be good for the priesthood and help them to understand how such characteristics and habits foster the goals of the priesthood. As you work through the questions, allow students time to consider each question and fill out the checklist.

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

DISCUSSION POINTS (see the notes in the student section as well) [2]

1. **The purpose of the priesthood:**
 - A. It serves “to build up the People of God” (CCC 1534) through the sacraments, leadership, instruction, prayer, holy example, etc.
 - B. Its mission is to be “priest, prophet, and king” (CCC 1581). Standing in the place of Christ, the priest is able to lead the people of God to holiness of life and heaven.
2. **The Priesthood is Supernatural.** God gives the vocation of the priesthood as a free and unmerited gift to some men.
 - A. **It’s a free gift.** As a gift, one cannot demand the priesthood, he can only accept it. If God decides to call one man and not another, that is His choice alone.
 - B. **The Church must decide a true calling.** Just as God reveals the truths of our Faith through the Church, so he also reveals this vocation partly through the Church, usually the Bishop of a particular diocese.
 - C. **God calls only men to the priesthood,** just as He only calls some women to motherhood.



PRIESTHOOD

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.

3. Personal Qualities important for a Priest.

- A. Every vocation requires certain basic human qualities. To fulfill any role or task well, a person needs certain qualities suited to that task. To fulfill a vocation, a person’s mind and will need to be in good working order—not necessarily perfect, but without major problems which would make it impossible or extremely difficult to think and choose rightly.
- B. Of course, all the good we do comes from Christ, and Christ can make up for any deficiency we have. However, the Church has always taught that we should not “sit back” and count on Christ to overcome all our problems. We need to be doing what we can to put our mind and will in good working order.

[2] If needed, review Freshmen Unit, Priesthood Lesson which explores in more detail about the purpose of the priesthood; also, Sophomore Unit, Priesthood Lesson which explores in more detail about the requirements of the sacrament and the practical life of the priest (deals especially with women’s ordination and preparing to talk about this with students; see also John Paul II’s 1994 letter on this topic: *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*.) Finally, teachers may also want to read Ch. 5 “Signs of a Vocation to Priesthood and Characteristics of a Good Candidate”, *To Save a Thousand Souls*.

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

- C. Also, we cannot give what we do not have. If I do not understand a math rule, I cannot teach it to someone else. Likewise, if a priest does not understand or know a teaching of the Church, he can't teach it someone else. If he is not able to interact with people very well, he will not be able to serve them or teach them very well.
- D. So the priesthood needs certain characteristics/habits. A young man discerning for the priesthood would want to see if he has these characteristics/habits. Also, if a young man had many of these characteristics/habits, this could be a very plain and simple way God might reveal a call to the priesthood—i.e. “God may have graciously helped me with these characteristics/habits, because He is calling me to the priesthood.”
- E. Since every vocation demands holiness, some of these characteristics/habits are also needed for other vocations. For example, a life of prayer is needed for all the vocations. So if a young man does not have many of these characteristics/habits, these would be good areas to work on. Many of these things are needed, whether you are called to marriage, the single life, religious life, or the priesthood.

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION: BECOMING A PRIEST

15-20 min

This could be presented as a lecture and/or a handout.



PRIESTHOOD

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:
- Personal background:* family life, relationships, work, etc. This will even include a criminal background check.
 - 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.
 - 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.
 - 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:
- Continuing or beginning education at a local college as he works through some paperwork and testing;
 - 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;

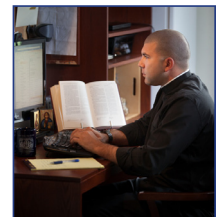
iv. Eventually, when everything is in order and he has been approved for seminary formation by the Bishop, applying to a seminary.

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:
- 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!



PRIESTHOOD

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.

READINGS: DE MURVILLE AND MAURIAC

8-10 min

GOALS:

Students will develop a reverence for the vocation to the priesthood and understand the importance to pray for holy priests in the world and be open to praying for God's will in their own lives and/or the lives of others who may be discerning this vocation.

PREPARATION:

Read short Mauriac selection. Look up unfamiliar words. Underline interesting parts. Choose 2-3 parts to discuss with students.

INSTRUCTIONS:

In class, read excerpt with students. Help them with vocabulary. Help them to identify in their own lives the feelings in these lines. Ask students to share any related experiences in their own lives—priests they have known, etc. Emphasize the need to pray for priests and the importance of the priesthood for the world.



PRIESTHOOD

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.



PRIESTHOOD

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?



MARRIAGE

HOMEWORK: CHASTE DATING *continued*

person. Both individuals may become “pleasure seekers,” paving the way for sex before they are ready or willing to make a lifetime commitment. That does not help either person live up to potential. It’s not a good way to foster real love, and it is definitely not a good foundation for marriage. In fact, many people realize too late that being sexually active before marriage means they will get bored easily with sex or with their spouse.

On the other hand, people who practice chaste dating can testify that sexual relations within marriage do NOT get boring, but instead get sweeter. Sexual relations become a sign of a powerful love. It makes sense that it would be more exciting and more wonderful to save yourself for one person and to make sex a sign of your pledge: “I love you, and you alone, and I will always love you and be there for you.” And how fantastic to sleep with someone who says the same thing to you!

Answer these questions:

1. Why is it important to realize the difference between physical affection which sexually arouses and that which does not?
2. What are some good ways to avoid situations which would make it easier to begin physical affection which arouses?
3. What are the benefits of chaste dating for a relationship before and during marriage?
4. Think of how difficult it can be, when you are caught up in emotion, to stop doing something you know will harm you but feels good “right now”. This can be even more difficult when you’re with other people who are encouraging you to do something. Think of yourself in a dating situation. What would be the most difficult thing about remaining chaste (especially considering the other person involved, who may or may not want to remain chaste)?

Resources

There are many good resources for encouraging chastity available. Check out Catholic Answers’ Chastity Project at chastity.com. They have great video and audio of short explanations about some of the most pressing questions concerning dating, romance, love, etc.