

Father Steven's Vocation Homily

All the readings this Sunday form for us what can be called a “**vocational vision of life**”—the vision of life God wants us to have--which means seeing our life and the special purpose for our life, not as something that we try to figure out and decide on our own, but as something that comes from God, which we seek from Him and try to embrace.

The first reading recounts the **call of Samuel**—and what Scripture wants us to notice is that Samuel has a ‘listening heart’ that is open to the call of God: “Speak Lord, your servant is listening.” God is always looking for this in us: a listening heart that is open to His will. Samuel was an answer to a prayer made by his mother Hannah. When she conceived Samuel she received him as a pure gift from God, and the most beautiful part of this story is that Hannah renounces all her own natural desires for the child and gives Samuel completely back to God, dedicating him to the temple.

The Baptismal rite for children expresses this language of ‘gift’ and ‘dedication’--where God invites the parents to embrace this “**vocational-vision of life:**” seeing their children as gifts from God, belonging more to God than to themselves--and that they are created to live their baptismal life in a special way that will glorify God on earth and lead them straight back to God, to heaven. What St. Paul says in his first letter to the Corinthians is true of every baptized child and adult: “You are not your own.” We do not belong to ourselves, but to the Lord. Even our bodies, St. Paul says, are for the Lord—made to be temples of the Holy Spirit--to glorify God in a special way.

- Very different are some of the attitudes in our culture, when people say: “this is my life, this is my body, and I will do with it what I want.” This is not the attitude of a child of God.

All this sheds light on the beautiful **vocations of motherhood and fatherhood**. Of all the things that parents do with and for their children, there is nothing more important than renewing this dedication of their children to God each day, cultivating in them a ‘listening heart’ to the voice of God, and preparing them to hear His personal call to them.

The **Gospel** of John gives us another light on the vocation of parents. With the coming of Jesus Christ, a parents primary role, like that of John the Baptist, is to point their children to Christ: “behold the Lamb of God”--to lead them into a personal life with Jesus Christ so that they may discover God’s beautiful plan for them.

And Jesus is always asking us and our children the same question He asked these first disciples: “What are you looking for, what do you seek?” And of course the answer Jesus is waiting for is that we are seeking Him: “it is you Lord that I seek, it is your will that I want.” Jesus is the perfect example of this attitude regarding His Father, for he says one day to the crowd: “I have come not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent me.” This is what it means to have a “**vocational vision of life,**” and it all depends upon what I do with my heart and my will: Will I surrender my life to God and seek His will, or will I take life into my own hands and seek my own will, constructing my life around what I want and what I think?

Matthew Kelly, a popular Catholic writer and speaker, gives us a good description of our present world where many people are merely ‘doing what they want,’ apart from God and His dream for them and for the world:

We have taller buildings, but shorter tempers; We spend more, but have less;
We buy more and enjoy it less. We have bigger houses, but smaller families;
More conveniences, but less time.
We have more degrees, but less common sense; More knowledge, but less judgment.
More experts, yet more problems; More medicines, but less health.
We drink too much, spend too recklessly, laugh too little, drive too fast,
get angry too quickly, stay up too late, get up too tired, read too seldom,
watch too much TV, and pray too little.
We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values;
We have higher incomes, but lower morals.
We’ve learned how to make a living, but not how to live life;
We’ve added years to life, but not life to years.
We’ve been all the way to the moon and back, but have trouble
crossing the street to meet our new neighbor.
We’ve conquered outer space, but not inner space.
We’ve done larger things, but not better things.
We’ve cleaned up the air, but are constantly polluting our souls.
We plan more, but accomplish less. We’ve learned to rush, but not to wait;
We have more food, but less fulfillment; more kinds of food, but less nutrition;
More acquaintances, but fewer friends.
There is greater world peace, but more domestic warfare.
We have more leisure in our life, but less enjoyment of life.
These are days of two incomes and fancier houses, but more broken homes.
Our culture is becoming increasingly too busy, too noisy, and it’s pace too fast.

This is a good description of the path I was on and my ambitions for life. And was I happy? No! Why? Because I was plugged into the wrong GPS, the wrong vision of the world--I was navigating through life by what I was hearing and seeing in the popular culture around me. And the best I had to look forward too was just more of the same misery and unhappiness. God’s vision, His map for life is different, but like many people around me, I was not seeking His guidance or listening to His voice. What will change this sad state of affairs? One thing that will help is if we start changing the question we ask our children and ourselves. When we were little we were often asked ”So what do you want to be when you grow up?” And then as we got older: “So, what do you want to do with your life, your future?” And then what happens? We grow up doing what we want--and are happy? No.

Fortunately, I was 19 years old when this began to change for me. The Lord, in His mercy, placed me under the guidance of a very wise, old, Christian woman, and this woman taught me and all who came to her something very simple, but not always easy to do: to give my desires, my hopes, and my will to God, three times a day, and to ask God for His will to be done in return. By doing this I began to see life very differently, for this practice formed in me a **vocational view of life**--a listening heart. My life became less and less about what I wanted or

thought best, and more about seeking and discovering God's will--trusting that His plan for my life would be so much better than I could every imagine. And God has not let me down. I never thought I would be a priest, it was not any where on my radar screen. But if I had a hundred lives to live, I would live them all as a priest.

To what will God call the children, the youth and young adults of our parish? They will never find out unless we begin to help them live within this **vocational view of life**, and start asking God for His light and guidance. Some people say that we have a vocation crisis because of the fewer numbers of priests and religious sisters and brother. But our problem is not a shortage of vocations, it is a shortage of families who are thinking vocationally, for it is from families that vocations come. God is calling, but many are not hearing the call--are not disposed to hear God's voice.

My dear friends, inspired by these readings, let us offer again together, on this altar, our lives and the lives of each other to the will of God. And let us pray especially for our children and all the young people of our parish, and for anyone else that may be waiting for light and guidance on a vocational decision—that they will hear the voice of God and follow it with trust and courage. And those of us who have already found our vocation, let us pray for the grace to be faithful, generous and persevering in it.