

FROM THE INSIDE:
ANSWERS TO SOME QUESTIONS

There are numerous questions that someone in discernment usually has on his mind. I know that over my time in Saint Francis Seminary's College Program and in the major Seminary, I have had to wade my way through these questions. While my answers may not be the ones you would give, I would like to share with you how I have answered some of these frequently asked questions over the years.

Don't people who live celibacy get lonely?

Of course we do! Loneliness is the desire for communion with God and others which, in reality, won't be fully satisfied until heaven. It's not just celibates who experience loneliness, though. Loneliness is a part of our human condition. Even married couples experience it (ask your parents!).

On my parish internship last year, I found that parish life brought me many more moments and days of fulfillment, communion, and joy than moments of loneliness and sadness. I also learned that loneliness isn't always a bad thing. Does it hurt? Of course, but it can remind us that only God can fully satisfy us, it can give us extra moments to spend alone with Christ, it can help us to seek out others, and it can be a graced moment when Christ's companionship can be felt very intensely.

Can I still be myself if I come to the seminary?

Certainly. If you feel God's call and others see it as well, chances are that Christ is calling YOU—with all your talents and strengths, and with your weaknesses as well. Christ wants you—your whole self. That doesn't mean there is no room to grow and mature, but seminary life is designed to help with that, through human, spiritual, pastoral, and academic formation.

Seminary formation is not about trying to make you somebody you're not. It's about helping you to be the best person you really are, the utterly unique person you are. If Christ is calling you to the priesthood, then that's who He really wants: you.

If I become a priest I won't have a lot of material wealth and success, will I?

No, you won't. Are we well-provided for? Certainly. In my entire seminary formation I have never once gone naked, homeless, or hungry. We have all of our needs taken care of, and often even more than we need. You're right in thinking that you won't live a wealthy and successful life as the world pictures it. You will, however, live a life like yeast, a small portion helping the entire loaf rise.

You will live a life for others, being with them when they are sad and disheartened and happy and full of life. You will hold the Eucharist in your hands and speak the words of God's mercy and forgiveness to those in pain. You will preach the Word and make

God's salvific actions present in the life of a new generation. You will give of yourself completely and find fulfillment in ways you never thought possible. You will share in the high priesthood of Christ. Now, tell me, who is richer, the one who has all these things or the person who has worldly money?

Am I good enough?

In some sense, it's almost an unfair question because none of us is "good enough" for the blessings we receive. God's gifts are just that—gifts. They are not due wages or what we have earned; they are God's gifts, freely, lovingly bestowed upon us.

Now, to flip the question "Am I good enough" upside down, if Christ is calling you to be a priest, then in some sense, yes, you are "good enough." There is a beautiful line in Mark's gospel when Jesus calls the Twelve: "He went up the mountain and summoned those whom he wanted..." (3:13). The key words are "those whom he wanted." If He is calling you to the priesthood, then it is you whom He wants. Let's not forget the second part of that verse: "...and they came to him."

Maybe I should wait.

It seems to me that this question could come from one of two places: from a desire to continue to discern or from fear. Where it may be coming from only you can really know. If it is from a desire to continue to discern before making that first commitment to trying the seminary, taking more time may be good and needed. No one wants you to make a half-formed decision. We must always remember, though, that discernment will NEVER lead us to certainty, but always to a leap of faith.

If our waiting arises from fear, we must be very honest with ourselves. A vocation is a precious gift from God, and it calls for our response. That doesn't mean fear will ever leave us completely, but even if we are afraid, will we get out of the boat as Peter did and walk on water? Will we trust that even if we fall, Christ will be there to pull us up? If you are waiting because of fear, I leave you with this final thought: now is the moment to get out of the boat and to walk to the One who is calling you.

—Peter Berger, Seminarian