

SPIRITUAL LESSONS



Raffaello Sanzio
The Miraculous Draught of Fishes

In many ways, Michael's story is the story of every man considering the priesthood. There are moments of clarity and moments of confusion, moments of peace and moments of conflict, moments when the priesthood is attractive and moments when it is terrifying. So, how does a young man know what God wants in the midst of such contrasting experiences? What is the voice of Jesus like in a man's heart?

If you are in this situation, if you think Jesus might want you to be a priest, but you are not sure and perhaps even afraid, then Michael's story is for you. Interpreting Michael's experience through the experience and the wisdom of the saints and Catholic teaching, one can learn a number of valuable lessons on how God makes his will known to us. Following are 10 spiritual lessons describing how one comes to recognize God's voice. Each lesson builds on the ones prior to it. So, this guide will be most helpful to you, if you begin with the "First Lesson" and read through to the end.

NOTE: The phrases "spirit against Christ" and "spirit against God" are used throughout the lessons. They refer to demons, evil influences in the culture and one's own self-centered desires. These phrases should be understood as including all of these realities.

First Lesson: You must encounter Christ

In speaking to seminarians at World Youth Day in Cologne, Germany in 2005, Pope Benedict XVI said, "The seminarian experiences the beauty of God's call in a moment of grace which could be defined as "falling in love." ... It is only when a young man has had a personal experience of Christ that he can truly understand the Lord's will and consequently his own vocation." We see this clearly happening to Michael. For him, it all began with

this "peaceful feeling at Mass." This is the conscious encounter with Christ; Michael is encountering Christ and beginning to learn how to receive love so as to "fall in love" with him. It is in that experience that he begins to discern his vocation.

Discovering one's vocation is not a navel-gazing, self-focused, psychological exercise. It's not about a man figuring something out. It is not about solving a confusing puzzle. It is about meeting a person: the

person of Christ. Then, Christ reveals his chosen vocation to the man. Yes, self-reflection, psychology and self-knowledge are involved; however, all of that happens within and flows from the encounter with Christ.

David is a senior in college; he is a history major and on the lacrosse team. On good weeks, he makes it to Sunday Mass, but his main priority is partying on Friday and Saturday nights. His parents ask him to accompany them on a ski trip to Switzerland with a few days' visit to Medjugorje. David is not interested in going to Medjugorje, but he cannot pass up the opportunity to ski in the Swiss Alps. While at Medjugorje, he experiences Christ very personally. He feels grateful, blessed, loved, contrite and claimed. He sheds tears. He is a changed man. He goes to confession, something he has not done for years. He begins to pray the rosary a couple times each week and he begins to be faithful to Mass. Within a few months, he desires to enter the seminary. Monsignor David has now been a priest for more than a dozen years.

As Pope Benedict stated, David, like Michael, began to discover his vocation after encountering Christ. This is how it happened in the Gospels and this is how it still happens today.

So, where do you encounter Christ? Most clearly and consistently, you encounter him in the sacraments and in silent prayer. If you truly desire to encounter Christ, then Mass and confession

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are your treasure. Jesus gave them to the Church precisely so that you could encounter him. In them, you encounter Jesus feeding and healing your soul. Because they are encounters with Jesus, you often experience more peace and hope after going to Mass and confession. If you can go to Mass more than just weekends, it



Greco, El
St Dominic in Prayer