



**Contributed by Father Raphael Ma, C.R.**

Father Raphael professed first vows as a Resurrectionist on August 15<sup>th</sup> 2015, and was ordained a Priest on June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019. He is originally from Markham, Ontario, and is currently assigned to several community ministries for the Congregation of the Resurrection, including vocations, and our lay association: the Apostles of the Resurrection.

## **FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

**January 30, 2022**

### **GATHERING TIME**

*(10-15 Minutes)*

#### **Introduction to the Word:**

I was recently having a conversation with a friend of mine from our high school days, about vocations. This past June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021, I was assigned to vocation ministry on behalf of the Congregation of the Resurrection, and a number of ministry opportunities have been opening up for me since then along those lines. One such opportunity was my being asked to serve as an occasional contributor to a Catholic Parenting blog, from the perspective of vocations. And so I thought I would call up my friend – who actually has children – to help me get some ideas about what to write. And I started our conversation by asking: “So... do you ever think about your kids’ vocations?”

And my friend replied with the story of how before their first child was born, they had thought a lot about the morals, the values, the philosophy, the theology that they wanted to impart to their children. But when their first child was born, my friend’s first thought was “How do I even keep this child alive, who can barely hold up their own head?”

My friend’s point was that there are so many basic things that are just more urgent than what this child’s “vocation” might be, which seems so far away in their future. From my friend’s point of view, by striving to be good parents, they are laying the foundations for whatever their children’s vocations turn out to be, rather than thinking about their children’s “vocations” consciously.

And my friend is 100% correct. There is something very artificial about the idea of a “vocation” as a pre-packaged thing. The perennial temptation for parents to try and live vicariously through their children the dreams they did not pursue, can sometimes manifest itself in a religious context as well. However, recognizing that there is something unique and unrepeatable about each and every person is the remedy against the temptation – whether it is on the part of the parents, or on our part, thinking about ourselves – to see our “vocation” as something pre-packaged, as something externally imposed on us, a mould that we have to fit into. The truth of the matter is that our vocation is not something that we primarily find “outside” ourselves – though it will have external implications – but within. Not something we accomplish, so much as something we discover.

## Warm-up Activity (about 8-12 minutes):

Some questions to reflect on by yourself or with a group:

1. How did you discover your vocation in life?
2. How have you grown in your understanding of your vocation over the years?

## TABLE OF THE WORD

While we are considering the topic of our specific vocation in life, it is good for us to also recall what the Church teaches is the primarily and fundamental vocation we all have, before whatever our specific vocation in life may be, “...Love is the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being” (*Familiaris Consortio*, 11; CCC 2392).

*“...I understood that since the Church is a body composed of different members, the noblest and most important of all the organs would not be wanting.*

*I knew that the Church has a heart, that this heart burns with love, and that it is love alone which gives life to its members. I knew that if this love were extinguished, the Apostles would no longer preach the Gospel, and the Martyrs would refuse to shed their blood. I understood that love embraces all vocations, that it is all things, and that it reaches out through all the ages, and to the uttermost limits of the earth, because it is eternal.*

*Then, beside myself with joy, I cried out: “O Jesus, my Love, at last I have found my vocation. My vocation is love!”*

St. Thérèse of Lisieux – Story of a Soul  
(CCC 826)

The common vocation of all Christians – rooted in our Baptism – is to holiness. And holiness is nothing other than “to show forth the image of God and to be transformed into the image of the Father’s only Son” (CCC 1877). In other words, to allow the image of God—who is love, in whose image we were created—to shine forth, and transform each one of us in our own unique way, into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Our specific vocation in life is that “unique way” that we are invited by God to do this, and perhaps sometimes returning to that love is the renewal we need when we find ourselves feeling stagnant or without direction in our specific vocation.

## Penitential Rite:

**Leader:** “Brothers and Sisters, strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.”

Lord Jesus, before you formed us in the womb, you knew us.

**Lord, have mercy.**

Lord Jesus, you made us from love, of love, and for love,

**Christ, have mercy.**

Lord Jesus, we will see you face to face and know as we have been fully known,

**Lord, have mercy.**

***Let us pray:*** (together)

Grant us, Lord our God, that we may honour you with all our mind, and love everyone in truth of heart. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

**SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME** (45 minutes)

*(As Christians we believe that the **WORD** of God we hear proclaimed each Sunday is an empowering word, and that God is present in the word proclaimed. This is the word that God wants us to hear today. The dynamic of the small Christian community, namely, reflecting on our life story within the context of this word, and sharing the insights of these reflections, is such that God's Spirit becomes present, and the gifts of the Spirit are experienced as empowering and life giving.)*

**FIRST READING** (Jeremiah 1.4-5, 17-19)

A reading from the book of the prophet Jeremiah.

The word of the Lord came to me saying, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a Prophet to the nations.

“Therefore, gird up your loins; stand up and tell the people everything that I command you.

Do not break down before them, or I will break you before them. And I for my part have made you today a fortified city, an iron pillar, and a bronze wall, against the whole land – against the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land.

They will fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the Lord, to deliver you.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

**SECOND READING** (1 Corinthians 12.31 – 13.13)

A reading from the first letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians.

Brothers and sisters, strive for the greater gifts.

And I will show you a still more excellent way.

If I speak in the tongues of human beings and of Angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes,

the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I put an end to childish ways.

For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. Now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God**

### **GOSPEL** (Luke 4.21-30)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom, and read from the Prophet Isaiah. The eyes of all were fixed on him.

Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.

They said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” He said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself!’ And you will say, ‘Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.’”

And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon.

There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.”

When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

### **COMMENTARY:**

### **FIRST READING**

The first part of our passage from Jeremiah describes an intimate connection between God and the prophet Jeremiah.

In verse 5, the verb “formed” has the connotation of working with pottery, and is also used in the second creation account in the Book of Genesis, which is considered to be more “earthy” and intimate, because God is described as forming things into being, as contrasted with merely speaking things into being in the first account of creation. The use of the same Hebrew root word here evokes that up-close and personal involvement of God.

The next verb, “knew,” is not limited to intellectual and factual knowledge, “knowing about” things – although it does include that – but it also includes intimate and personal knowledge.

Finally, the verb “consecrated” is the same word as to make holy. For example, in the first creation account in Genesis we hear that, “God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it.” To “hallow” is to make something holy. Here we get a sense of a special call to holiness, beginning even before birth.

And yet, this intimate connection between God and Jeremiah has external implications. If God is so close to Jeremiah, and Jeremiah to God, the people to whom God will send Jeremiah will oppose him, because they oppose God as well, having turned to idolatry. And the description of Jeremiah being made by God into “a fortified city” makes him a sort of parallel of the very city of Jerusalem to which he will be sent to speak God’s message. Just as Jeremiah is opposed on all sides (“against the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land”), so, during Jeremiah’s own lifetime, will the fortified city of Jerusalem eventually be surrounded and fall to the Babylonians.

## SECOND READING

This passage is perhaps one of the best loved (pun intended) passages in the Bible. The context, however, is that St. Paul is writing to the Church in Corinth, which was quite interested in (and perhaps somewhat divided over) the various “gifts” or “charisms” its members were demonstrating. And so, after giving them a list of the gifts which implies the relative importance of each in comparison with the others, Paul moves on to point out something even greater than these gifts or charisms.

Here we find the same insight that St. Thérèse of Lisieux also had – that it is love which at the heart of, and is the life blood, that undergirds all the gifts and their exercise. We should note that here “love” refers to a very specific kind of love. The Greek word “agape” is what is used in this passage and in most of the New Testament. “Agape” or willing, committed love, which seeks the good of the other is contrasted with “Eros” or passionate love and desire. This is not to say that “Eros” is entirely without place in the life of a Christian. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI wrote about this tension in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, paragraphs 3 – 8. Pope Francis also wrote a very accessible commentary on this passage in his Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, paragraphs 90 – 119.

## GOSPEL

Most of the commentators on this passage from the Gospel of Luke notice how the people in the synagogue at Nazareth seemed to turn so quickly from “all spoke well of him” to “all in the synagogue were filled with rage.” The best explanation for this is the fact that many of the Jews at the time of Jesus had become accustomed to the school of thought that believed salvation was just for the Chosen People, and the Gentiles were going to suffer punishment (especially because of the way they had treated the Jews). This, of course, is not exactly found in Scripture; even among the Old Testament prophets, there are already gradual openings to see salvation as not just for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles as well – albeit through the Chosen People.

Jesus, then, in citing the prophets Elijah and Elisha, draws the ire of His listeners, because Jesus is opposing that narrow view of salvation, that the year of the Lord’s favour, as prophesied by Isaiah, was not just for the Chosen People, but would also be extended to the Gentiles.

Allow 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:

1. Have ever you felt close to God, and yet at the same time beset by serious difficulties?
2. When you read 1 Corinthians 12:31 – 13:13, which part catches your attention the most? Why?
3. Have you ever been angry with God for things not being as you expected? What has helped or is helping you move past that?

### CARING-PRAYING TIME: *(15-20 minutes)*

1. **Word of the Week:** “...Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you,”
2. **Suggestions for the Week:** Choose one of the descriptions of love from our second reading, and ask the Holy Spirit to help you choose one, practical way you can grow in that description of love this week.

3. **Intercessions:** (Response: **Lord, hear our prayer**)

**Leader:** Now we turn to the Lord with our prayers and petitions:

For all Christians, called to be members of the Body of Christ, that the love of Jesus will move us to witness to the God News, we pray to the Lord...

For all those who suffer and struggle for meaning and purpose in life, we pray to the Lord...

For nations of the world striving together to build a better life for all humanity, we pray to the Lord...

For a greater awareness of vocations in the Church and in the world, we pray to the Lord...

For those who have died, especially those who have died alone, that they may enter into the fullness of God’s kingdom, and those who mourn for them may be comforted, we pray to the Lord...

### How can we help you in prayer this week?

Let us pray:

Nourished by these redeeming gifts,  
we pray, O Lord,  
that through this help to eternal salvation  
true faith may ever increase.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

**With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God’s favours today, we pray that all those in our influence be moved to be open to your Word and your Spirit, while we pray as one, **OUR FATHER...****

**Celebrating the Word**, Resurrection Ministries of the Congregation of the Resurrection Ontario-Kentucky Province (including the former Resurrection Centre), 265 Westmount Road North, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G7. (**Celebrating the Word** was founded by Father Frank Ruetz, C.R. deceased 2012). For information: **website:** [www.resurrectionists.ca](http://www.resurrectionists.ca). **Email:** [provincialoffice@resurrectioncollege.ca](mailto:provincialoffice@resurrectioncollege.ca) The Scripture version used in this commentary is the New Revised Standard Version (copyrighted by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA).