

My Vocation Story – Responding to those Whispers



Hello, my name is Michael O'Rourke. I am 25 years old and in pre-novice formation for the priesthood with the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. I am currently living in the MSC community at the parish of SS Alban & Stephen in St Alban's, Hertfordshire (England) while also studying at Allen Hall seminary in Chelsea.

I had the blessing of growing up in a family that was filled with a lot of love and support. In many respects, I am the most unlikely candidate for the priesthood. I do not come from a practising Catholic family. Growing up, we did not attend mass so I was never an altar server. This is not to say, however, that we did not have a faith growing up – our identity was Catholic. I and my brother and sisters went to Catholic schools and we were all expected by both Mum and Dad to live out the gospel values in our lives and especially towards others. So the foundations of faith were there.

My own journey is certainly a series of many whispers. Growing up I always felt very much at home in church. I knew that Jesus was someone very special and I felt a very strong attraction to Him. I was an inquisitive child and I liked to ask a lot of questions. As I got older, I particularly liked physics and questions regarding the universe fascinated me. While thinking hard during my GCSEs about the path that I would like to follow, it became clear to me that the route which I would have liked to go down, that of physics, was unrealistic. Being dyslexic and absolutely hopeless at mathematical formulas it was just not a real option. It was at this time that I started to look closer at theology and my own faith. It was clear to me that although science can tell us a lot about the physical world around us it is only faith that can give us a meaningful and purposeful answer to the questions that concern the meaning of life. So I began to take my faith more seriously and upon encountering Christ as the living gospel and the incarnation of love I decided at the age of 20 that I wanted to be confirmed.

It was while I was at university that I began to feel a tug towards the priesthood. However, I did not welcome this call. I wanted nothing more than for it to go away and it presented a real struggle for me. I was a typical Jonah figure: I ran in the opposite direction. In the words of Gideon: “..but Lord, how can I save Israel? I am the least in my family”. The priesthood is so big and I am so small. So I tried to hide. After graduating with a 2.1 honours degree in Theology and Religious Studies and History I found myself stuck in which direction to turn. Teaching maybe? I knew I didn't have the confidence. Politics, following in my father's footsteps? It was while I was working in Asda that I became disenchanted. Thoughts of the priesthood re-emerged – this time with a vengeance. I realised that if I wanted to make a difference in the world, to help people, it was not going to be through any political system but through the service of a meaningful message: one of hope which will be for all people (Luke 2: 10). And so the rest is history as they say.

I guess the lesson I learned is similar to the lesson that Jonah learned: when God calls you, you can either cooperate, or go kicking and screaming, but you cannot avoid God. If I had some advice to give to a person who is trying to discern their vocation in life I would tell them to let go of their fears and to take things slowly, one step at a time. Just ask God what is the next step for you. Not everyone who enters formation for the priesthood is ordained and this does not mean that they have failed. Nobody is going to pressure you to make a decision. God calls each one of us in a very unique and particular way. Do not be afraid to answer the call! Like the children of Israel in the desert I have no idea where I am headed, and I can only guess at the many pitfalls I am sure to make along the way. It is a privilege to be called to devote one's life to the proclamation of the Gospel and the service of others and I am so grateful to the MSCs for giving me this opportunity to test my vocation. How things end up, I place into God's hands. I just hope to be able to respond accordingly and faithfully. In the words of G.K. Chesterton: "If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly." Please pray for me.