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# Answering the Call

*By Andy Alessio*

It is often during the unexpected moments in life when people begin to realize their purpose in the world. This situation occurred for Kevin McCarthy while in college. One Sunday, McCarthy decided to attend a more traditional Sunday morning Catholic Mass, rather than a contemporary service, and he expected nothing to be different. Little did he know that included in this Mass would be the words that would make him decide to dedicate his life to God, and join the priesthood.

“It was a Mass for a priest who was going to be ordained and used in the service were the words ‘Don’t you think it is time to consider the priesthood.’ I thought these words were spoken directly to me. From this, I knew what I was going to do and how I was going to do it,” McCarthy said.

McCarthy’s journey to his calling was one that had religious influences, yet he never planned to be a priest. He was born in Wyatt, Indiana, but grew up in Highland, Indiana, where he attended a Catholic grade school. McCarthy found the nuns at his school to be influential in his decision to one day become a priest, as he visited the closest seminary (a college that prepares students for the priesthood and other

ministries) in eighth grade. His favorite part of the seminary; however, was that it had a bowling alley. McCarthy then went on to graduate from the University of Evansville where he received a degree in operations management. After college, he managed a fast food restaurant for two and a half years when he first received the calling to Christ. It was after experience this calling that McCarthy decided that he would attend the seminary. However, his family was not in favor of his decision.

“Mom and dad thought I was running away from a good job situation,” McCarthy said. “My siblings didn’t understand it either, but ironically my girlfriend’s parents supported it.”

McCarthy attended St. Meinrad Seminary in Saint Meinrad, Indiana for four years in order to become ordained as a priest. In the seminary, men study subjects such as philosophy, behavioral and natural sciences, mathematics, and theology through the study of ethical and doctrine theology, church history, scripture, liturgy (worship), homiletics (preaching), and canon (church) law (Ferguson 3592). McCarthy was in a class of 40, and admits that he came into the seminary with the wrong intentions. “I wanted to prove to God that he had the wrong person. I thought I was going to be married with kids,” McCarthy said.

However, McCarthy grew to like the seminary for two reasons. One, he was able to develop a love for the subject of English. In high school, he found English to be very difficult, but in the seminary he loved it and

did very well on his papers. Secondly, he considered the seminary to be “the best of both worlds” because during his time there he was able to use his operation management degree through working at a pub.

On June 10, 1989, McCarthy was officially ordained as a priest. This meant that he participated in the Mass of priestly ordination. As described in the article “Rite of Ordination to the Priesthood,” this Mass consists of many steps: the Calling of Candidates, the Presentation and Inquiry, the Acceptance (the bishop asks God for help in choosing these men for the priesthood), the Examination of the Candidate, Promise of Obedience, Prayer for the Candidates, Laying on of Hands, the Priesthood of Christ (all other priests in attendance lay their hands on the new priests), Vesting the New Priest (each new priest receives a stole (similar to a scarf) and a chasuble (a poncho like garment)), Anointing of the Hands, Presentation of the Gifts, Communion, and lastly, the First Priestly Blessings (“Rite of Ordination to the Priesthood”).

It meant a great deal to McCarthy that he was ordained a priest; however, it was almost a year before his ordination when he realized what being ordained as a priest would mean to him. He was in the Saint Meinrad Chapel and as he described it he “lost it emotionally”: “For the first time, after wrestling with how God could call me, I came upon a sense of pure joy. I was at peace with that,” McCarthy said.

After his ordination, McCarthy was first assigned to Saint Bridget’s in Hobart, Indiana. Like all priests, his primary function was to

administer the church's seven sacraments: baptism, confession, Holy Communion, confirmation, matrimony, holy orders, and anointing of the sick (Ferguson 3591). It was through performing these sacraments that a priest leads the community in addressing itself to God (Goergen and Garrido 106). It is from this role of leadership that a priest serves as a mediator between man and God.

Despite serving as a leader and administering the sacraments properly, McCarthy admits that his first assignment was not easy, mostly because of the mentality he brought to Saint Bridget's. "I thought I could do everything," McCarthy said. "I was a little green behind the ears."

After his time at Saint Bridget's, McCarthy was sent to both Saint Thomas More in Munster, Indiana, as well as Nativity of Our Savior in Portage, Indiana. However, he did not find his true calling in the priesthood until 1997. While at the seminary, McCarthy felt that he was called to be a missionary (a member of a religious group who is sent to a place to help serve the community in some aspect). McCarthy specifically felt that he was meant to work with young people. He worked with adolescents frequently by participating in activities such as retreats, and he enjoyed it. McCarthy was told by other priests that the parish of St. Teresa of Avila in Valparaiso, Indiana, would be perfect for him because of the fact that the parish was heavily involved with the Valparaiso University community. McCarthy ended up becoming the pastor at St. Teresa's, and thus began his desired life as a missionary.

When McCarthy first arrived at St. Teresa's, the parish had 25 families and 35 VU students. Services were held in the basement of the church (the church as we know it today was not built yet). When new families or students showed up at the church, McCarthy described it as a "goldmine", because new members are always desired for a parish. This "goldmine" has now become a "gold rush" for St. Teresa's as the parish now holds services each weekend for more than 150 students and 450 community members. McCarthy believes that this growth is because of the congregation's attitude toward worship. "The people who worship here want to be here," McCarthy said.

McCarthy holds Mass at St. Teresa's on all week days except Friday, and then one on Saturday evening, and three on Sunday. Since his time at Nativity of Our Savior, he ends every service the same way. With the Mass coming to a close, he high-fives the children of the congregation as he walks out of the church. He even does this with the college students in attendance, and it has been said that a good high-five from McCarthy is the start of a great week. McCarthy decided to start giving high-fives as a way to let children know that they are welcomed in the church. After doing this a couple times, the children started looking forward to it, and since it has become McCarthy's "trademark."

McCarthy's dedication to both God and his work at St. Teresa's is both strong and inspirational. His typical daily schedule shows this, as it involves work from the time he wakes up to the time he goes to bed.

McCarthy begins in the office of morning pray immediately after waking up. This prayer helps him deal with situations going on in his life, and helps bring about the presence of Christ. After prayer, McCarthy heads over to St. Teresa's to lead morning mass. After Mass, he heads over to his office to handle any adjustment that might have come up, or to attend meetings or marriage counseling sessions that he monitors. On Thursday nights, McCarthy heads to St. Teresa's soup kitchen, Café Manna, to help serve food to the community. Once he is done with that, like every other night, he then handles any appointments that he is schedule to be at. Before bed, McCarthy recites the office of evening prayer.

When a priest is not in his office, leading Mass, or performing some other obligation, he is probably in the rectory. The rectory is a house that a priest lives in that is owned by the parish that priest is assigned too. Depending on the size on the parish, sometimes multiple priests can live in a rectory at one time. McCarthy describes the situation of multiple priests living together as a "fraternity with a sense of spirituality." McCarthy; however, lives in an apartment. "It is simple," McCarthy said of living in the apartment. "I do not spend a whole of lot of time in there, only for eating and sleeping. It gets lonely."

Being a priest is difficult and it takes the right kind of man to become a very good one. All priests are required to take a vow of celibacy, which is the commitment to never form romantic or sexual relationships

with other people (Ferguson 3592). Besides having to take this vow, becoming a priest is not the best financial decision a man can make (ranges from \$20,933-\$55,907), and it can be lonely (Ferguson 3591). However, McCarthy finds meeting people in their weakest state to be the most difficult part of being a priest. “Not being able to fix or take away anything is hard, and anything related to death and funerals is not successful either, it’s seeing people when they are most human that is most difficult,” McCarthy said.

Despite these difficulties, McCarthy and other priests feel that men need to be more open to the possibility of joining the priesthood. Recruiting men to become priests has not been easy, as the Catholic Church is currently experiencing a shortage of priests. The article “Casting the Net for Potential Priests,” states that in 1965, there were 8,325 graduate-level seminarians in the U.S. diocesan seminary system (Gallagher). In 2010, there were just 3,357 (Gallagher). Out of the more than 3,000 men that enroll in the seminary yearly, only 430 to 470 actually become ordained (Gallagher). McCarthy credits this shortage to the changes that came out of the ecumenical council (a conference consisting of church members and theological experts to discuss and resolve problems arising out of Church doctrines and practice), Vatican II, in 1965. McCarthy thinks that some of the changes made were not fully thought through, and that caused some priests to lose their identities. “Some senior priests are still struggling with the results of

Vatican II and are angry. They are giving the priesthood to men out of that,” McCarthy said. “Men and even women or those married, need to take on the leadership and that comes within. This is a frightening state of the priesthood.”

McCarthy believes this problem can be solved through a three-fold process that cannot only be applied to men considering the priesthood, but just to men in general. “One, be open to the possibility. Two, be amidst, and joyful in the service of people, and three, strive to love the Lord. It’s a privilege,” McCarthy said.

McCarthy has shown all three of these qualities in his time as a priest, and through these he has come to enjoy the priesthood. However, if he had to pick one experience in his time as a priest that he considers to be the most beneficial, he could not do it. That is because he has two. “The first happened in last December when the blessing of the new building (St. Teresa’s) occurred. We all came together, it showed our success in the community and there was a sense of hopefulness,” McCarthy said. “The second one is more on a personal note. Two years ago, this coming Saturday (March 5) my dad died. It was everything I could hope for and more as he was sick for 18 months. I felt that I did the greatest sendoff I could through my homily, and I felt like I found myself in the whole process.”

If a person asked a priest how he would want to be remembered, one might expect an extraordinary answer. Rather than wanting to be

known for settling a dispute over a doctrine, or healing the sick, McCarthy wants to be remembered for the simple things. “I want to be remembered for loving people, loving the Lord, and as a priest who was generous in service,” McCarthy said.

This quote of McCarthy’s explains why I admire him. He is humble, and is completely dedicated to both God and everyone around him. To be honest, I was scared heading into this interview. I attend Mass at St. Teresa’s every Sunday, but yet I never had a conversation with Father Kevin. However, through this interview, I can not only call Father Kevin a person I look up to, but a friend. McCarthy’s story reminds us, that it can be during the unexpected moments in our lives in which we realize what we are called to do, and answering this call can lead to everlasting happiness.

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