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2. What to do tomorrow

Dear young people,
you are certainly asking yourselves: what will we do later, what can we expect from life? What are we called to? These are questions that everyone asks themselves, consciously or even unconsciously. Perhaps you know the word 'vocation'. What a strange word: vocation! If you prefer, we can talk about happiness, the meaning of life, the will to live....

Vocation means call. Who is calling? That is a good question. Perhaps someone who loves me. Each of us has his or her own vocation. Mine was a bit special. In my native Savoy, when I was a small boy, at the age of eleven, I felt called to give myself to God in the service of his people, but my parents, particularly my father, had other plans for me, as I was the eldest in the family. As the years passed and during the studies my father had me do in Paris, my desire grew more and more: grammar, literature, philosophy, but also horse riding, fencing, dancing...

At 17, I had a crisis. I was doing well in my studies, but my heart was not satisfied. I was looking for something... During the carnival in Paris a friend saw me sad: "What's wrong, are you sick? Let's go and see the carnival", "But I don't want to see the carnival", I answered him, "I want to see God!" That year a famous Bible teacher was explaining the Song of Songs. I went to hear him. It was like a thunderbolt for me. The Bible was a love story. I had found the One I was looking for! And with the help of my spiritual companion, I made a little rule to receive Jesus in the Eucharist as often as possible.

At the age of 20 a new serious crisis hit me. I was convinced that I would go to hell, that I would be eternally damned. What pained me most, besides of course the deprivation of the vision of Jesus, was to be deprived of the vision of Mary. This thought tortured me: I almost did not eat any more, I did not sleep any more, I had become all yellow! My prayer was this: "Lord, I know, I will go to hell, but give me at least this grace that when I am in hell, I may continue to love you!" After six weeks of anguish I went to church before Our Lady's altar and prayed to her with a prayer that begins: "Remember, O Virgin Mary, that it has never been heard that anyone, having recourse to your patronage, imploring your help and protection, has been abandoned by you." After that my illness fell to the ground "like the scales of leprosy". I was cured!

After Paris, my father sent me to Padua to study law. Meanwhile I continued to suffer from my vocational dilemma: I felt that the call came from God, and at the same time I owed obedience to my father, according to the custom very much felt in my time. I was perplexed. I sought advice from my companions, especially Father Antonio Possevino. With his help and discernment, I chose some rules and exercises for the spiritual life and also for life in society with companions and all kinds of people. At the end of my studies I made a pilgrimage to Loreto. I remained as if in ecstasy - my companions say - for half an hour in the Holy House of Mary of Nazareth. I again entrusted my vocation and my future to the Mother of Jesus. I have never regretted having trusted Her totally.

Back home at the age of 24, I met a beautiful girl called Francesca. I liked her, but I liked my life project better. What to do? I will not tell you all the details of my battle here. Just know that in the end I dared to ask my father to give me permission to follow my dream. He finally accepted my choice, but he cried.

From that moment on, my life changed completely. Before, my family and my classmates saw me all focused on myself, worried, a bit closed off. Then from one moment to the next, everything was set in motion. I had become another man. I was ordained a priest at the age of 26 and immediately threw myself into my mission. I had no more doubts: God wanted me on this path. I was happy.

My vocation, you may think, was a special vocation, although I will tell you that I was also made bishop of Geneva-Annecy at the age of 35. In my pastoral and accompaniment ministry, I was always convinced and taught that every one has a vocation. Indeed, it should not be said: everyone has a vocation, but it should be said: everyone is a vocation, that is, a person who has received a "providential" task in this world, in anticipation of the future world promised to us.

Office for Vocational Animation

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