

Last week our seminarian Phil Luebbert said that God will give you what you need in order to follow his call. Phil himself is doing a difficult thing, returning to school to begin a new career at a time in life when his peers are planning for retirement. But he's very happy in his new surroundings, joyful to do God's will. It's not always easy to do what God wants, but it is always satisfying.

When I was in the seminary, I enjoyed those years. I had great friends, comfortable living quarters, decent meals, and got to study things I was interested in. Seminary life was so easy for me that one day I asked to see Bishop Sullivan to find out if I really had a vocation because I thought it should have been harder than it was. He pretty much rolled his eyes and sent me back to school.

Today's gospel offers several examples of vocation and response. Two people say to Jesus, "I will follow you." Jesus warns one of them about the inconveniences he'll face, and the other wants to delay his membership. He commands someone else to follow him, but this person refuses. These three potential disciples show how difficult it is to discern God's will. Sometimes God asks us to do something, but it seems so hard that we say no. Other times we would be happy to do something to help out, but God does not let us. God knows more than we do. So when our willingness is not rewarded, we trust that God is preserving us from some other difficulty, or saving us for service in some other way.

Sometimes God calls you to a specific task. You may not want it, but you accept it. The challenge is not appealing, but the potential results are so good that you do it. You may have a child who underperforms; you may get asked to do an unpleasant project at work; you may have to take a difficult class in order to get your degree. We do some distasteful things because we believe they will produce a greater good, and when they do, oh, it feels great.

Jesus himself is the best example of this. The first sentence of today's gospel is a pivotal moment in his life. Luke says the days had arrived for Jesus to be "taken up" – meaning his arrest, crucifixion and resurrection. When Jesus realized those days were near, Luke says, "he resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem." Literally, "he set his face like a stone" or we might say, "like flint." For the next 9 chapters of the gospel, which we will hear each weekend over the next few months, Jesus makes a slow, deliberate journey to Jerusalem. He works only a few miracles, but says a lot to the disciples, to the crowds, and to his opponents. He accepts the task God gives him, unpleasant though it may be, because he knows it would lead to glory.

Sometimes we offer to serve God one way, but God wants us to serve some other way. When the vocation and the response do go together, we will have all the strength we need to overcome any adversity and to feel the joy that comes from doing God's will.