

I started thinking about becoming a priest when I was a very small boy. Other priests didn't think about it until much later in life. But in some ways I was like Samuel in today's first reading, wanting to do God's will at an early age, even though I have not always done it as well as Samuel did.

When Samuel was a boy, God had not yet been revealed to him. It wasn't the young man's fault. God always makes the first move. One night God called Samuel, and the lad did not recognize the voice. Notice that Samuel wasn't doing anything particularly religious at the time. He wasn't studying the bible. He wasn't in catechism class. He wasn't helping an elderly person cross the street. Samuel was asleep. God may contact us no matter what we are doing at the time.

God called Samuel twice, and twice Samuel went to Eli, thinking he had called him. When Eli figured out that God was calling the boy, he gave this advice: "Next time you hear that voice, answer, 'Speak, for your servant is listening.'" Samuel did this, and it made all the difference.

Sometimes it is hard for us to figure out God's will on our own. Other people often hear things and see things in us that we do not see ourselves. God issues vocations at every level. Some people volunteer in the parish, and others serve the church in full time employment.

St. Munchin and St. Aloysius have been around for over 100 years, and, as far as I know, no one from either of these churches has ever been ordained a priest for our diocese. God may have reasons for that; God may be calling people from here to serve the church and society in other ways. But God could be inviting into the priesthood some young men from our parish who have not yet heard the call. Maybe they haven't listened or maybe no one has told them how to interpret the call they've received. Or maybe they do know, and they are already preparing their heart to respond.

Most people in religious life considered a vocation after someone told them they should. People should listen for God's call, but people should also issue God's call. We may not be having a shortage of vocations. We may be having a shortage of invitations. So, if you might be a candidate for religious life in the church, say the same prayer that Eli taught Samuel: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." If you know someone in our community who might have a vocation to religious life, tell them. In 1960, President John Kennedy challenged our country to put a man on the moon by the end of the decade. It happened. I'd like to challenge St. Munchin and St. Aloysius to put a man in the priesthood in the next ten years. We can do it if we listen for God's call and issue that call to others.