

If the person you most admired was arrested, thrown into prison, and beheaded, it would make an impression on you. Jesus admired John the Baptist. Both of them held firm religious convictions. What happened to John eventually happened to Jesus: career as a prophet, assemblage of followers, arrest, and execution. Jesus began his ministry about the time John was arrested. This combination of events, the baptism of one and the arrest of the other, probably convinced Jesus to pick up where John had left off. These events formed a decisive moment in Jesus' young life and induced him to undertake his religious ministry.

Some people can point to their own decisive moment. An event nearly cost their life, challenged their values, or changed forever the way they looked at the world. Some of them pursue religious ministry.

Others live in a perpetual decisive moment: Their societies lack basic needs. They have insufficient food or water; their war-torn lands make safety impossible; or their economic status ranks hopelessly low. Religious vocations flourish in countries where poverty is strong. When people have less, they depend more on God. Religious life seems natural to their spiritual condition.

In our society, religious vocations have decreased. Most of us have food and water. We don't fear for our lives when we go to bed. Peace brings security, but often at the cost of religious fervor. If people live in prosperity and have no decisive moment, few will take on a religious mission when everything seems to be rolling along just fine. Today religious life remains at the margins. Our society enjoys material prosperity and disregards religious needs.

Here at St. Regis back in the year 1990 I issued a challenge about religious vocations. I remarked that in the 25 year history of our parish, no one from St. Regis had ever been ordained a priest. For 25 years we had used the priests of our diocese, but we had offered none back. Remembering President Kennedy's challenge in the 1960s to put a man on the moon by the end of the decade, I challenged St. Regis to put a man in the priesthood by the end of the 1990s. I suggested that in order to do that, we'd have to get ten men into the seminary. We didn't meet that goal. Now it's 35 years. But this much has happened. People are concerned. Our vocation committee has done tremendous work in the parish and in the school. Parents seem open to having their children pursue religious life.

I find priesthood immensely rewarding work. How can you be pastor of St. Regis and not think life is wonderful? But the time has come. We need people to step forward to see if God is calling them to ministry. Many propose other solutions: Let's get Rome to admit married priests. Let's get foreign priests to serve our diocese. But those ideas look for solutions elsewhere. I think the solution is closer at hand. I think it's here in this church. Today. I encourage you to consider priesthood or religious life. And I challenge you to ask others to consider the same. Let this be the decisive moment that calls forth religious ministry.