

It may shock you to learn that, for a brief time just before my ordination to the transitional diaconate, the discernment of my vocation was thrown entirely into doubt. Although by then I had spent a full two years very confident that God was indeed calling me to the priesthood- which brought me tremendous joy- by cunning moves, the Evil One managed to sow into my mind and heart seeds of doubt about the authenticity of my call. As I became more aware of this doubt escalating inside of me it resulted in terrible anxiety and humiliation at the thought that I might leave the seminary after seven years. It got to a point where I was no longer sleeping and had hardly any appetite. How in the world did it ever get so bad, you may ask? It's difficult for me to pinpoint an exact moment when everything came unravelled but what I do know was that I began paying attention to these little doubts that started creeping up.

Essentially, I convinced myself that it was possible God actually never wanted me to be a priest considering how He knows me perfectly and knew of all my past sins, struggles and weaknesses but that *I just wanted to be a priest*, that somehow it was all just something I made up in my own mind. And now, after so many years in, I was just going ahead with it without very careful consideration. I was terrified that I was grasping at the priesthood and without authentically being called, one day I would actually cause damage to the Church. Perhaps this thought process sounds crazy to you but it had entirely overwhelmed me.

The day before I was due to submit my petition to the Rector asking Bishop Henry to ordain me a deacon and later a priest, I still had not taken the application package out of my drawer. I was running out of time and was terrified. Thankfully, one of my closest friends in the seminary was aware of what I was going through and he challenged my way of thinking, insisting that I had never been happier than when I said confidently that I wanted to be a priest, and now that I was saying I didn't, I had never been more miserable. It was true.

This landed me in the chapel that fateful day where I knew I was going to have to make a decision. As I sat there begging our Lord for clarity about whether He actually wanted me or if I was just making this all up, I clutched my Bible and said a prayer I had only ever just laughed at before, "Lord, when I open these pages and put my finger down, please let it be a passage that gives me the answer..." It was taking a huge risk, but I did it. I opened the book, closed my eyes and randomly laid my finger down beside John 15:16, a verse we heard today: "You did not choose me but I chose you."

Well, with that, I erupted into uncontrollable weeping- scaring one of my brother seminarians out of the chapel!- and just sat there reading that sentence over and over again. *You did not choose me but I chose you; I - chose - you.* My deepest fear had been dispelled in an instant: that God wasn't asking this from me but rather, that I was just taking it for myself. I didn't need to pay any further attention to this lie. The Lord had put this on my heart for a reason and now I needed to submit to the Church for her judgement. Ultimately, even if I

submitted the petition, the Bishop could decide he wasn't going to ordain me. It was the Church who would call me, I simply needed to make myself available.

To understand and appreciate that we are among the Lord's chosen ones is an essential element of growth in the spiritual life. Unlike children who are born to us which we do not choose but receive, to be adopted is to know that you have been chosen. The option not to have you was equally present and you were chosen anyhow. This is the same with our existence, and far greater still, with our baptism. When we are baptized, God has chosen us from among all of His creation to call us His children. It is the first moment of our being chosen.

But as any married couple will attest, to love is to choose over and over again. Vows uttered once are only as effective as how often they are renewed. What makes the renewal of marriage vows possible each day of married life is the realization of the fact that you are the choice of your spouse. You were not accidentally married, but specifically and intentionally chosen, and as each day passes, you are chosen again.

For those who are not called to married life, whether as consecrated religious or those who live as single persons in the world, the question to be asked is not, *do I want to choose this*; but rather, *have I been chosen for this*? As a culture, we are so driven by personal preference and comfort that, when confronted by the possibility that something difficult may be being asked of us, we resort to deciding whether or not we want it. My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, today I challenge you to ask not whether you want to be called to the

priesthood, religious or single life- but if God wants it from you! Uncovering the answer to this question is the source of our joy.

Jesus made it very explicit in the passage which we have just heard: you are my friends if you keep my commandments. Our vocation is always a matter of freely choosing to respond affirmatively to a choice that has already been made about us. If the thought that God might be calling you to a life of celibacy lived as a priest, religious or single person has ever crossed your mind- it requires further exploration. It is not the customary thought to enter the minds and hearts of those hard-wired to desire marriage. The very thought of it might be the earliest signs that the Lord has chosen you for this. But will you choose Him back in return?