

I remember being in the seminary and people would often ask how I discerned a vocation to the priesthood. I would tell them it was consistent prayer, the help of family and friends, speaking with good priests, etc. Then they would ask, "What did your mom and dad think about it?" It's a great question.

I'm always amazed at the various responses of parents when their children tell them they have a vocation to the priesthood or the religious life. Some, of course, are supportive. They are excited because they've wanted a priest or religious in their family. Others are indifferent. "If that's what makes you happy." And still others are against it. They worry how it will look to their friends or because they want children.

Today's gospel really hits home for those whose parents are opposed to a religious vocation. When the child says, "I must listen to the Lord," in some sense they are experiencing firsthand the "pinch" from Jesus' words today.

*"If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."* Hate, here, can be understood as "love less." The idea is that while we must honor our parents (i.e., obeying fourth commandment), God comes first. If the decision is between honoring a parent's wishes and following Jesus, one must choose Jesus.

In other words, it is not matter of loving God and hating parents, but rather of ordering our love. We can only build a truly meaningful life by ordering our love properly. We love God first. Then, in and through Him, we love according to our state in life. For husbands and wives, it is each another, then, their children. For priests, it is God, then the Church.

This, however, is countercultural because the world says, "You must take care of yourself first. You're number one." Consequently, as Catholic Christians, we will make many decisions what will cause the world to scratch its head.

When we put Jesus first in everything, it will cause suffering because we will have to deny ourselves and go against the grain of the world. None-the-less, God always returns hundredfold of what we give Him. Not only that, He also gives us the grace needed to do it. May God help us to complete the good work that He has begun in us.