

Be Obedient

"The 3rd of July, 1999, was the day of my priestly ordination. As my class mates and I filed out in procession to the sacred altar on that blessed day, and with the atmosphere eclectic and electric, there were mixed feelings within me. Although the presence of my family members and friends made me very happy and special, I was also prayerfully reflecting on the significance of the holy office I was about to undertake. There was obvious joy and relief that the long and rigorous seminary training had come to an end, but I also had feelings of anxiety about what lay ahead of me. There were thoughts about whether I was truly obeying God, making the right choice or not. Having just had an inspiring priestly ordination retreat, I was under no illusion that I was entering a new phase of my life and one which might completely alter everything I knew and everything I ever aspired to. Like St. Paul's experience on the road to Damascus, I thought that my entire story and life would be defined by this singular event. The call to become a Priest was for me a call from God, demanding obedience. It was a process that I had discerned for nine years, through my years of studies of philosophy, theology, and through seminary formation and afterwards.

My family and some of my friends did not want me to become a Priest initially because they were not sure that I would live a happy and fulfilled life. They were suspicious of what they described as "the lonely, isolated, and selfish life" of a priest. I was torn between obeying my loved ones and obeying God's voice working through my conscience, intellect and judgement. To obey God one has to recognise his voice first. Like the boy Samuel in the Scriptures, I struggled to hear and interpret his message and to decide on the proper response to give. I knew that absolute or crystal-clear certitudes may hardly ever be reached concerning what either God or my parents and friends were saying to me at that stage. However, I felt that a degree of moral certitude could be deduced or reached based on the absence or presence of specific signs.

The signs that made me obey and arrive at a judgement in those years of discernment were as follows: (a) I made sure there were no natural or legal barriers to my choice to either serve as a priest or to take my parent's option. (b) I reflected quite deeply on issues concerning my emotional stability, family background, health, likeability and compatibility. I asked to know what was motivating or driving me towards becoming a priest. (c) One big issue that I considered was the desire or wish to dedicate myself to the service of God in celibate priesthood. My culture honours marriage and family so much. A man without children is considered a waste within my culture and tradition. I pondered on this entirely unfamiliar path.

Even after thirteen years of priestly life which includes studies and ministry, I still believe I made the right choice by truly obeying what I consider to be God's call. I have learned that my occasional feelings of repugnance, disenchantment and dissatisfaction does not mean that my obedience to God was wrongly thought out. I have been happy feeling that I obeyed God after all. I am happy to be a Priest and to have obeyed what I think was God's call".

-Rev. Innocent Abonyi, MSP