



## SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



Father Augustine Wetta  
On Vocations  
February 2010

In our first reading this morning, Isaiah told us the story of his calling to be a prophet. Then in our second reading, Saint Paul told us of his calling to be an apostle. Then in the Gospel, we heard the story of how Jesus called Peter and James and John to follow him and become fishers of men. When Mother Church wants to send us a message, she isn't always subtle about it; and today, she is asking us to think about vocations, in particular, that special vocation to the priesthood. Because, to put it bluntly we need more priests.

Now years and years ago, back before I became a monk. Back when I was a mere altar boy (no offense, guys). I belonged to a parish with an old priest named Father \*\*\*\*\*. He was a brilliant and charismatic man, but also something of a curmudgeon, and when, in the course of vesting before mass, I mentioned something about a "vocations crisis," he said to me, "What vocations crisis?"

I said, "Well, need more priests, don't we?"

He said, "I don't."

So I said, "But there aren't enough priests to fill all the parishes."

And he answered, "Well I've got a priest in my parish. And I'm gonna have a priest in my parish wherever I go. I made sure of that when I became a priest. So I guess that makes it your vocation crisis."

I pass this story along to you because, as Catholics, I think we have a tendency to wait around for "The Church" to come solve our problems. To say to ourselves, "I don't like the music," or "I don't like the preaching" or "everyone looks bored," or "there's a vocations crisis," and to believe that somehow "The Church" is responsible. That "The Church" needs to do something about it. Well, this is true—in a sense. "The Church" is responsible. But "The Church" is not simply the Pope, a bunch of bishops, and your parish priest. "The Church" is us—you and me. And if there's a problem, we've got to be the ones to sort it out.

Now "the problem" that we're asked to think about today appears to be a shortage of vocations. As you know, we all have vocations of one sort or another, and every Christian vocation is under attack. But what we're talking about here is what I like to call an e-vocation (not to be confused with an e-mail or an e-ticket or e-commerce, unless of course your referring to that admirable commercium by which we exchange natures with divine). No, I'm talking about that unique vocation which calls you "out of" the world or even "away from it." An evocation—a calling out.

And this is the way I explain an e-vocation to my students. It starts with a baby. Now it's a well known fact that I don't like babies. I don't find them enlightening conversationalists, I find their table manners deplorable, and although I'm bound to think highly of anyone who can stick their entire fist in their mouth, I don't, by and large, hold babies in high esteem. Babies are boring. But God loves babies. And when a baby is baptized, he says to himself, "What a great baby. She will grow up and be an auto parts dealer and get married and have seven kids." That is the baby's vocation. Meanwhile,



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another baby is being baptized, and God again says to himself, “What a great baby. I’ll have him grow up and have twelve kids and become a successful tattoo artist.” And that is his vocation. But every now and then, a baby is born and God says to himself, “Well now, hold on here. This baby is different. I want this baby for myself. He’s not getting married. He won’t have any kids. He won’t have a career—at least not in the conventional sense. Because this baby has an e-vocation. I want this baby to be uniquely mine—a living sacrifice, an eschatological witness. I want this baby to become a priest, or a monk...or a nun.

Now if you ask me, I think this is one of the most important elements of our faith. It’s the one element of Catholicism that unbelievers just can’t seem to get their minds around, and it’s the one aspect of our faith that the secular media really abhors—that we have people among us who have given up everything that the world loves—put it all utterly on the line—thrown aside the nets, the boat and the fish and thrown in their lot completely with Jesus.

Nietzsche used to say, “You can tell the value of a man’s convictions by what he will bet on them.” And that’s what we’ve got. Whole ranks, whole throngs of people who have bet everything on Christ’s message. But not as many as we used to, and frankly, it’s a tragic thing to grow up in a parish without a priest, to go to a school without religious, visit a Catholic hospital that has no nuns.

So let us pray today especially that the Lord will shower this church with vocations to the religious life. That he will call our own sons and daughters to leave everything and follow him, and in particular that he will raise up more and more priests from this parish, this church.

“People need to come out of their anonymity and fear,” wrote John Paul II, “They need to be known and called by name, to walk safely along the paths of life, to be found again if they have become lost, to be loved, to receive salvation as the supreme gift of God’s love. All this is done by Jesus, the Good God’s love. All this is done by Jesus, the Good Shepherd-by himself and by his priests with him.”

Let us pray for priests. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.