



SIEBENQUELL

The Sentence that really counts



SOURCE: BRETT JORDAN © UNSPLASH

Over the past few days, I have been accompanying a group of women religious and helping them to reflect on the lifelong journey of their vocation. This led me to reflect on my own vocation.

I was 19 years old when I told my father that I wanted to become a Pallottine. His enthusiasm was limited. Although he never tried to forbid me from taking this step, he tried with great determination to change my mind.

Every day, in every conversation, my father told me why I would actually be much more suited to a career as a teacher or a lawyer. This is how every conversation between us went for six months. My father never once became abusive or spiteful, but he never let up. He was never unfair, but he was extremely persistent.

I endured these long and tedious conversations, but I found them extremely tiring. I also found them very upsetting, because I wanted my father to at least understand my decision, if not approve of it.

This continued until the day I stood at the doors of the novitiate. My parents had also come along to get an idea of the place where their son was now to live and study, a place 8,000 km away from my Canadian home. The confreres made every effort to give my parents a positive impression, but the atmosphere was rather tense and my parents' sadness was clearly palpable.

When we stood at the door, it was time to say goodbye. My father looked at me and couldn't believe that, despite all his attempts to change my mind, I was standing there. He handed me an envelope and said, »I cannot understand this decision at all. I am also convinced that it is the wrong one. In this envelope is a plane ticket. It is open for six months. If you realise that this path is not for you, then take the ticket and come home. I will never blame you. I will never say to you, "I told you so". When the time comes, just come home.«

I was, of course, very affected by these words. Here, at the last minute, I was still hoping he would understand me. I looked at the plane ticket and then asked my father, »And what if I don't come back after six months? Will you then believe that I am serious?« Without hesitation, my father replied, »Then I'll send you the next plane ticket, also one that's open for six months. It may take a while, but you'll come back.« Then he turned around and walked to the car.

That made me feel deeply unsettled. As I turned to go into the house, I heard the car braking. When I looked back, I saw my father running back up the hill. He wrapped his powerful arms around me, lifted me off the ground and whispered the most important words of my calling into my ear: »I can't leave like this. I've forgotten the most important thing. You are, and you will always be, my beloved son.«

Every calling is a very personal decision and matter. But each calling must be supported by loving people. Jesus heard this support and encouragement from his Father in the Jordan. 'You are my beloved Son!' These words were his source of strength, from which he shaped his calling. On the Mount of Transfiguration, when everything in his mission seemed to be failing, he heard this encouragement for the second time. Jesus endured everything, accomplished everything, because he believed these words, because he never forgot that he was the beloved Son.

In his way, my father gave me the opportunity to examine my vocation and then to live it. That moment forged my fundamental conviction that, as a Pallottine, I should accompany people in such a way that they shape their lives as beloved daughters and sons. Since then I have been seeking ways and stories that tell people: »You forgot the most important thing. You are, and you will always be, God's beloved child.« My father gave me all this. I, on the other hand, saved him a lot of plane tickets.

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