



VATICAN - TOWARDS THE PRIESTHOOD - "The priest: first son and then father of many" **Mgr Massimo Camisasca**

Vatican City (Fides Service) - For twenty two years I have been involved in the formation of young men for the priesthood and I have followed in detail the itinerary of over a hundred priestly vocations, authentic or only presumed, and made many discoveries with regard to the origin and the development of a vocation in the heart and mind of a boy or a young man.

The first thing I realised was that although almost all my boys entered the seminary after obtaining a university degree or working for a while, the first signs of a vocation had appeared very early: between the age of 10 and 15 years. What happened however was that a series of other adolescent interests, passions and encounters stifled that initial intuition. However what would seem to contradict not necessarily suffices to destroy a seed sown by the Lord. We are all familiar with those streams that after flowing from the source for a few kilometres, hide between the rocks and seemingly disappear for ever. In actual fact in these underground itineraries the waters are enriched with precious mineral salts. Those streams often reappear among the rocks high up in the mountains they flow down to the valley and continue their path as mature and solemn rivers. In this way a vocation which appeared to have been buried reappears through the grace of a new encounter. In childhood, adolescence and youth the decisive encounter is often that with a priest.

Usually God does not instil the idea of the priesthood, rather he arranges a meeting with a priest. In other words a boy begins to think about the priesthood because he is fascinated by the totality he sees in the priest. What impresses him is not so much what the priest does but what he is. And who is the priest for a boy? He is a father. In the priest a boy sees a man who shows by what he does his special concern for people, not just for a few aspects or fields of their life but a disinterested concern for the person, the personal destiny. This is how God brings the boy to consider a priestly vocation.

We live in a society in which the figure of the father, the figure of one who leads with authority his son to fight the battle of life with a positive, constructive spirit, is disappearing. The fruits of this absence of the father figure are seen in the increasing insecurity of young people, the ever more delayed exit from adolescence. The boy is fascinated by the priest's maturity, the authoritativeness of his proposal, by the fact that he faces life. Although he lives beside him the priest has something which the boy has not and desires to have, he is something which he is not and desires to be. The majority of the boys at my seminary were impressed by the presence of priests who instead of extracting them from their ordinary life, accompanied them, showing them how studies, tender feelings, plans for the future, can be all the more wonderful and true, if you follow Christ.

It is from the inside of an ordinary life that a person recognises the extraordinariness of Jesus. Precisely this is what impresses a boy: to see in the priest not a specialist in prayer, in liturgy, not even an organiser of games and outings, but a true man who has discovered the most authentic development of his intelligence and fullness of his affective life in Christ. There is also the fascination of the celebration of the sacraments seen as something mysterious and strange, yet captivating.

Why does the discovery of a new father figure lead a young man to recognise his own vocation? Because he senses that virginity means being father of many, it is a real possibility for his life, a possibility of beauty, utility and happiness. For a boy it is very important to see the priest in action in his own community. His paternity in fact reveals itself in the priest's work of guidance, in the charity with which he accompanies people day after day towards the realisation of their life. Observing this father, this guide as he goes about his duty, a boy prepares the soil for the seed of a vocation which the Spirit may place in his heart, a desire to be, as the priest, father, guide and witness. (Agenzia Fides 15/12/2006; righe 47, parole 716)