

SoulSpace

SERIES: OUR VOCATION, OUR CALL.

Season colour: **GREEN**

In this new series, Fr Gerard Moloney CSSR looks at the common vocation we all share as Christians.



SHARED TASK

I never prostrated myself before Archbishop Connell; instead he came down to lay his hands on me as I sat in the chair. You could say that even then, I was reluctant to prostrate myself before a bishop!

When the bus arrived back in my home village that evening, our local doctor was sent for. It didn't take him long to diagnose the problem: I had appendicitis and my appendix would need to be removed immediately. I was shocked. "But what about my First Mass?" I asked him. It was scheduled for the following evening. The bunting was up on the street, the hotel was booked, people were travelling to attend it from all over the country and beyond, everything was ready to go. "It'll just have to be postponed," he replied solemnly.

And so it was that my appendix was removed on the evening of my ordination. As I lay waiting on the gurney for the procedure to commence, I remember a nurse expressing surprise when she discovered I was a priest. "You look very young to be a priest," she said. "How long are you ordained?"

"A few hours," I replied. "I was ordained this morning."

The First Mass eventually took place later that month, amidst driving rain and mighty floods. It was a dramatic beginning to my priestly career.

And so, three decades have passed. A lot has happened over this time, and it hasn't always been easy, but I'm happy in my vocation, and pleased with the choice I made as a young man all those years ago.

FUNDAMENTAL VOCATION

When we hear the word 'vocation' we usually think of priesthood or the religious life, but we all have a vocation. All Christians share the same fundamental vocation to preach the Gospel.

There are just different ways of living out our vocation.

In his apostolic letter *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis speaks about the role and mission of every Catholic: "We have to regard ourselves as sealed, even branded, by this mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing. All around us we begin to see nurses with soul, teachers with soul, politicians with soul, people who have chosen deep down to be with others and for others" (273). "Bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing..." is a beautiful way to describe our common vocation.

This month, bishops from all over the world are meeting at a special synod in Rome to discuss "young people, the faith and vocational discernment". As part of the preparation for the synod, the pope invited young people to take part in a listening process. He said he not only wanted to hear from young people about their problems but also to encourage them to come up with new solutions to these problems. More than 100,000 young people filled out an extensive online questionnaire, offering their views and analysis, while 300 young people took part in a week-long meeting in Rome last March as part of the preparation process. It is expected that next year Pope Francis will publish a letter about young people and vocation.

We are all aware that there is a vocations crisis in Ireland today. Few men and women are entering religious life, seminaries are almost empty, bishops are struggling to staff parishes. We badly need more priests and religious.

But we need also to be aware of our common vocation as Christians, something we have been given by virtue of our baptism. It means trying to discern God's plan for our lives and then witnessing to God's love to the best of our ability, no matter what job, or role, or profession we ultimately end up in. ■



Today's readings

Genesis 2:18-24

Hebrews 2:9-11

Mark 10:2-16

The Gospel story presents us with several incidents in which Jesus is asked a question that will put him on the spot. In today's episode the subject is divorce. Mark sets the scene with some Pharisees asking Jesus whether divorce is permissible under the Law. However, it is clear that this is not a neutral question but one asked with hostile intent by characters who already know that the answer is yes. As with most aspects of Jewish life, there were different interpretations of the Law. Generally, Jesus would be on the more lenient side of these views, but in the case of divorce, he is more demanding even than those who would adopt a strict opinion on the matter. He forces his opponents to modify Moses' command in the event of the breakdown of marriage, to a concession given in view of people's "hardness of heart" in blinding themselves to God's original vision of unity and mutuality as set forth in Genesis.

The background to this controversy is that divorce was a common occurrence in the society and culture of Jesus' day. Under Roman law, a woman could divorce her husband, a detail which occurs in Jesus' explanation to his disciples.

GOD'S WORD TODAY

There are many different ways of living our vocation as followers of Jesus of Nazareth.

I'm finding it hard to believe that I'm a priest for 30 years. On October 2, 1988, I was ordained. It was a great day, the culmination of nine long years of study. It was also a most eventful day. I woke up that morning feeling decidedly unwell. I put it down to nerves, but as the morning progressed and the ordination time drew closer, and the bus full of family made its appearance, I felt weaker and nauseous. A doctor on call gave me an injection to relieve the pain of what he surmised was a kidney stone, and the ceremony was able to progress with me sitting on a chair with a basin underneath in case I got sick.

