

## My Vocation Story – Archbishop John Dew

When I went to the Seminary in 1970 it was really the last thing I wanted to do. I didn't want to be a priest but somehow I knew that it was the only thing, and the right thing, for me. I wasn't much of a student and study didn't come easy. But the main reason for not wanting to go to the Seminary was that I didn't think I was worthy. I didn't think I was good enough to be a priest, for the first couple of years, I kept asking, '*why me*'? Yet, even as I asked that question I knew I was in the right place.



Scripture was not something I was very familiar with as a 21-year-old – I was more interested in playing rugby and squash and, being out-doors.

In John's Gospel the Jews argued and said, '*How could this man give us his flesh to eat?*' '*This is intolerable language*' so they stopped going with him and walked away. When Jesus asked Peter if he was going to walk away too, Peter's response was "*Lord, there is no one else to go to; you have the words of everlasting life.*" Those words kept me going: I still didn't think I was good enough to be a priest, but there was no one else for me to go. There is still no one else. Jesus has the words of everlasting life.

The final words of Georges Bernanos' novel, **The Diary of a Country Priest** are: "*All is gift. All is blessing*". Priesthood has been, and *is*, a blessing for me, not always easy, but still a blessing. I don't expect it to be easy, because life isn't easy. But there are things which feed, nourish, inspire and encourage us.

Years ago I read an article entitled, "**The Price of Health and Happiness**". The author maintained that the price of health and happiness was "*to see everything as gift, and God as the giver behind that gift.*" Those words had an enormous impact on me. I still don't always see everything as gift but when I pause and reflect, I *do* see the giftedness of life.

There have been Scripture passages that have lit my path – I remember as a seminarian finding those words Jesus spoke to the woman at the well, *‘if only you knew what God is offering you’*. Those words come back to me over and over again, as I see what God offers me through the Gospel, through the Eucharist, through people who share faith, through having the support of a community in making our wholehearted response to the commandments of God.

Other words from John’s Gospel are those which are, for me, the essence of and my definition of prayer. Jesus invitation, *‘remain in my love’*. I try to answer that invitation every day in order to be inspired, to be grateful, to put life into perspective. Many years ago, the Transfiguration became very important for me. Someone sent me a card which read:

*“You go beyond division and bring all things back to the Christ – centre.  
You meet Jesus in the Transfiguration. My prayer for you is that your life will be ongoing celebration of the wholeness of God.”*

That same person wrote again a few years later:

*“I know that you will go on meeting Jesus in the Transfiguration, moving from the point of view of the disciple trying to rationally define the experience, to being one with Christ and knowing that blaze of white light which burns up all words and thinking. And even later, you will not find words for it but the blessing of it will flow out and touch many many lives.”*

Those words inspired me and so the Transfiguration became central - not just the idea of being up on the mountain with Jesus knowing it’s good to be there. On the mountain Jesus was confirmed in his identity, *“This is my Son, the Beloved”*. Jesus was able to come down that mountain and resolutely take the road to Jerusalem. That inspires me to resolutely take the road to Jerusalem.

Whatever the challenge or demand in front of me might be, this is my road to Jerusalem. I can take it resolutely, because I know that I, too, am transfigured by the goodness of our gracious God. There are many passages from the Word of God which help me to know – beyond any shadow of doubt – that I am privileged to be called to serve as a priest.

I still can't understand why God chose me. If I had chosen God, instead of God choosing me, I would have reason for thinking that I made a mistake because it would have been my human choice.

God knew when he called me – with all the cowardice, compromise, failures and sin, yet he still chose me. All I can do is say *'thank you'*. It is not a matter of *"being worthy"*, it is about an ordinary person accepting an extraordinary gift.

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