

God's Dreams, Our Dreams

The Beginnings of Personal Vocation

Do you believe that God has a dream for your life?

...that God knows what is best for you?

...that God's plan for your life is ultimately good for you (& not just good for God)?

...that you can discover and help to shape this plan--this dream---for your life?

Do you remember the first childhood dream of your life--what you wanted to be when you "grew up"? Did you want to be an astronaut...a professional athlete...a princess or a cowboy? Who or what did you imagine you were when you played "make believe" or other imaginary games? Do you remember what you dreamed of when you believed anything was possible--for you...for the world?...

Most of us never live out our childhood dreams and fantasies. We develop new dreams over the course of our lives, new visions of what we want our lives to be that grow as we grow. But the fact that we naturally begin to have desires and dreams for our lives--even from an early age--says something about us. Indeed, even *what* dreams and desires we have says something about us each individually. Have you ever considered *why* you had some dreams and not others...why you desired to see *certain* dreams come true more than any others?...

...Could it be that our most authentic dreams and desires somehow point to who we most deeply and truly are, who God is calling each of us to be?...

Author John Neafsey describes how perhaps the deepest dream we each have for our lives is "...not something we invent through our own creative or clever imaginings." Instead, maybe it is "...a gift that is given to us by God...revealed or shown to us in our mind's eye as a kind of guiding image for our life." Perhaps, then, "...there is a way in which God uses the desires of our hearts to lead us to our destiny. From a spiritual perspective, it is possible to see our own deepest and most authentic desires as God's desires *in us* or *for us*" (*A Sacred Voice is Calling* p. 99, 79).

Our deepest dreams and desires, then, might contain clues to help us uncover what God dreams and desires for us, how He calls us *uniquely* and *personally*. Within the Catholic Church, these unique and personal callings are known as **personal vocations**. While there are two other major understandings of "vocation" for Catholics--(1) a universal call to holiness for all Christians and (2) a call to specific states of life: married life, religious life, or being "single for service"--**personal vocations** are special, unrepeatable calls given to us as individuals.

What does God dream and desire for *you*? The process of discovering God's call--your personal vocation--may begin with listening to the dreams and desires of your heart. Consider author Parker Palmer's story of how some specific aspects of his

personal calling revealed themselves even from his earliest years, in the dreams of his youth and childhood:

A few years ago, I found some clues to myself in a time machine of sorts. A friend sent me a tattered copy of my high school newspaper from May 1957 in which I had been interviewed about what I intended to do with my life. With the certainty to be expected of a high school senior, I told the interviewer that I would become a naval aviator and then take up a career in advertising... These self-prophecies, now over forty years old, seem wildly misguided for a person who eventually became a Quaker, a would-be pacifist, a writer, and an activist... But inspected through the lens of paradox, my desire to become an aviator and an advertiser contain clues to the core of true self that would take many years to emerge: clues, by definition, are coded and must be deciphered.

Hidden in my desire to become an "ad man" was a life-long fascination with language and its power to persuade, the same fascination that has kept me writing incessantly for decades. Hidden in my desire to become a naval aviator was something more complex: a personal engagement with the problem of violence that expressed itself at first in military fantasies and then, over a period of many years, resolved itself in the pacifism I aspire to today...

If I go farther back, to an earlier stage of my life, the clues need less deciphering to yield insight into my birthright gifts and callings. In grade school, I became fascinated with the mysteries of flight. As many boys did in those days, I spent endless hours, after school and on weekends, designing, crafting, flying, and (usually) crashing model airplanes made of fragile balsa wood. Unlike most boys, however, I also spent long hours creating eight- and twelve-page books about aviation. I would turn a sheet of paper sideways; draw a vertical line down the middle; make diagrams of, say, the cross-section of a wing; roll the sheet into a typewriter; and peck out a caption explaining how air moving across an airfoil creates a vacuum that lifts the plane. Then I would fold that sheet in half along with several others I had made, staple the collection together down the spine, and painstakingly illustrate the cover.

I had always thought that the meaning of this paperwork was obvious: fascinated with flight, I wanted to be a pilot, or at least an aeronautical engineer. But recently, when I found a couple of these literary artifacts in an old cardboard box, I suddenly saw the truth, and it was more obvious than I had imagined. I didn't want to be a pilot or an aeronautical engineer or anything else related to aviation. I wanted to be an author, to make books--a task I have been attempting from the third grade to this very moment! From the beginning, our lives lay down clues to selfhood and vocation, though the clues may be hard to decode. But trying to interpret them is profoundly worthwhile--especially when we are in our twenties or thirties or forties, feeling profoundly lost, having wandered, or been dragged, far away from our birthright gifts.

-Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak* (p. 13-15)

Although it takes a lifetime to deeply discover and live fully our personal vocations, God promises us enough strength and insight as individuals and communities to discern our callings and the lifestyles that best fit them. Through prayer, deep listening, mutual empowerment, and discernment, we can come to know these distinct dreams of God for our lives. Perhaps we can begin with the dreams that lie deep within our own hearts... Might God be inviting us to listen to what is already inside us? What might our dreams be saying?...