

A vocation is no minor call

The question on the cover of the November issue of O, The Oprah Magazine, caught my eye: “What’s your true calling?”

It appears beside a pared-down Oprah Winfrey – which is to say her fake eyelashes are less dramatic. The cosmetics are softer: brown eye shadow, peach lipstick. Wrapped in an ivory sweater, Oprah’s hands are drawn to her heart. She’s practically down-to-earth – except for the walnut-sized emerald on her right hand.

“True calling,” of course, is a safe, secular way of saying vocation, and the words have the same origin. Vocation comes from Latin – the noun “summons,” based on the verb “to call.” It is, by definition, a call or summons, something with an irresistible pull – not a could-do or a should-do but a must-do.

The life you were born to lead was designed by a detail-oriented Creator who counted the hairs on your head and stamped you with unmatchable fingerprints.

As Catholics we identify the big-picture vocations to marriage or religious life. When it comes to the smaller-scale vocations, a person’s work, the options are multiplied exponentially and things get fuzzy. Suddenly it’s time to declare a major, submit a resume and navigate a labyrinth of salaries, superiors and suits.

Few jobs provide a perfect fit, satisfying that quiet hunger to use all your gifts and talents at once, heart and head in concert. Whether it is designing a house, building it, decorating it, selling it or raising a family in it, a vocation feels both important and fun, exhausting and life giving.

We can delay or deny, but the summons of a vocation cannot be escaped. I was reminded of this last week when I indulged in an hour-long massage. The lights were dimmed and ocean waves sounded, and I closed my eyes, preparing to shut up and shut down – until a nagging curiosity bobbed in my brain.

Where was my masseuse from? Where does she live? What’s her family like? I lobbed a few questions her way, and as she massaged my neck, I made eye contact several times, which required a lot of my eyeballs.

I silently scolded myself then decided to accept the Chatty Kathy attack. I am an eternal reporter. So be it.

My masseuse proved just as committed to her vocation. Sitting beneath a framed diploma, Paula told me she'd been called to her industry as a teen. She rattled off the health benefits of massage and dismissed her lengthy commute.

The next day I watched Chilean miners emerge from their deep desert tomb. The second rescue, 39-year-old Mario Sepulveda, gave an early interview to CNN, professing a renewed commitment to his vocations of marriage and mining.

He resisted the celebrity awaiting him. "I want to be treated as Mario Sepulveda, as a worker, as a miner," he said. "I want to continue to work because I think I was born to die tied to the anvil."

Then came the marriage bit, Mario's counsel against divorce. "You've got to talk. Don't put an end to things just like that. Love is the most beautiful thing in the world. ...I'm going to live a long, long time, to have a new beginning with my son, my dear wife...and my daughter..."

So go, pull yourself out of your own rocky entrapments. Follow your love and embrace your loved ones. It's your true calling.

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