



*Pastor's Pen*

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- Fr. Tom Wilson, Pastor

50/50

The case study has always been a useful tool for me to learn. I enjoyed doing case studies of different companies in challenging situations as an undergrad. Applying canon law to a set of facts was interesting in the seminary. Learning vocations ministry had its own set of cases, in which new vocation directors would apply learned principles to a description of a candidate for the seminary. This always facilitated discussion and was a great way to apply “classroom” learning to mostly real-life scenarios. Principles without application techniques are incomplete at best.

When I was asked to facilitate seminars for new vocation directors, I took great delight in preparing the case studies I used with the newbies. Essentially, they were modifications of real-life scenarios from my ministry. The details were always altered enough so that no real person could be identified. One of them was essentially based on the facts of my own background and discernment on my way to the seminary. As I recall, most of the new vocation directors were supportive of “my” candidacy and going forward. I was pleased, even though I knew a case against “my” candidacy could easily be made.

A few years after completing that phase of my priesthood, I met the guy who did the seminar after I left, who was grateful for the case studies I had left in the file. He was using them and still does in his new position on a seminary faculty. The last time I saw him, I stupidly asked him what the votes typically were on the study based on my life. “Fifty-fifty,” he said, and we laughed together. Half of the formation personnel and vocation directors thought I was a bad candidate for the priesthood! Ouch!

As I approach 23 years of ordination, the “fifty-fifty” reality is hitting home. I am more comfortable than ever, and as confident as ever that God called me to this life. It has been better than I ever imagined, even though I was unable to anticipate many of the challenges I would face as a priest, and that the people whom I serve would face in the world in which we live. I responded to what I believe was God’s call to me to serve, not because I thought I had any easily identifiable strengths or traits that would make me a good priest. That’s probably why it’s easy for fifty percent of formation personnel to pass on “me” as a candidate. On some days, a fifty percent approval rating would feel pretty good. Such is the nature of a vocation with a wide base of responsibilities and an even wider base of people to serve and expectations to be met.

We all know we can’t meet all the expectations that are thrown our way, but we need to know what the most important of them are and do everything we can to meet those. One of the reasons I have moved past the predictions of current formators is that some fundamental qualities have developed in me over the years. People expect good preaching. We’re not all good preachers, but we can all work at being better preachers and provide good content, even if our “stage presence” is weak. We may not all have the capacity to work efficiently for fourteen hours a day, six days a week, but we can all work hard to serve the needs of our people within our own abilities. We may not all be high extroverts, who are the life of the party, but we can all learn to be comfortable around the people in our communities, to whom we are called to serve. As I look back, I think for the most part people see me as hard-working and reasonably reliable, and even if not always a treat to be around, I was at least there.

Next week I will celebrate 23 years as a priest. I am grateful to God every day for being a priest. The vocation doesn’t just fit, it is a blessing for me, and I believe for most, if not all, the people I have served. I am grateful for that, and when I run into someone who can’t believe I “made it” because of an observed deficiency, I always credit the grace of God.

The fifty-fifty evaluation I get in class is humbling and not surprising. But whether the acceptance rate is 50-50 or 100-0, I am grateful to God for the call and the people I have served. Thank you.