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Finding My Vocation on the Streets of London

Jaime talks about his personal path to the priesthood in this article originally published in “Palabra.”

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My name is Jaime and I’m from Saragossa, a graceful city located in northern Spain. There, on the banks of the river Ebro, stands the Basilica of our Lady of the Pillar, a baroque church that commemorates a

thousand-year tradition of our Lady's appearing to the Apostle Saint James, encouraging him to convert everyone living there to God's love.

I come from a simple family that has always tried to stay close to God and welcome his love. I am the oldest of three siblings, and my parents raised us very well in the practice of the faith. They taught us how to pray, and to offer each day to God. My parents led us to Jesus. From them I learned that the most important thing in life is my faith.

Some people say that we owe 90% of our vocation to our parents, and in my case I can confirm that this is true. My family was my shield, my refuge, my school, the place where I first encountered God's love through my parents' affection. My family was the fertile field in which God planted the seed of my vocation.

Like any normal boy my age, I liked spending time with my friends and playing soccer. But, as time went by, I lost interest in my friendship with God and instead was only concerned about having a good time. I wanted to spend as much time as possible with my friends and look “cool” in front of the girls. I started to get bad grades and only worried about partying on the weekends. I thought I was a rebel and “with it,” but I was just trying to be popular with others.

The example of friends

Still, I had some very good friends, and although I didn’t say so, I admired how some of them took their relationship with God seriously. They were ordinary people, but their Christian life was very important to them, and they worked every day at being better people. I said to myself: “These friends of mine are like everyone else, but the difference is

that they have God in their lives, which seems to give them a special joy and sparkle.”

When I reached the final year of high school, I began to wake up to my responsibility to get good grades in order to go on to the university. I put more effort into my studies and improved my grades, and I restarted my relationship with God. I also started dating a girl but after a few months we split up. My mind was on other things. I went to Mass on Sundays with my parents and even prayed from time to time. I thought that was enough and didn't want to be seen as a "freak" who goes to Mass every day and gets emotional over pious songs.

When summer came, my friends threw themselves into having a good time. They were only interested in alcohol, partying, and flirting with girls. Luckily my parents had made

other plans for our family which helped me to use my time well. During that summer the idea of becoming a priest first began to come to my mind. But I didn't want to think about it and didn't give it much importance. I even told myself that being a priest was for people who are strange.

What a priest told me

Even so, as I was a bit uneasy, I decided to speak with Fr. Juan Luis, a priest friend of mine. I told him that, from time to time, I felt a certain tug to become a priest. But I also said that I didn't think it was for me. I wasn't the type of kid who goes to Mass every day and prays at all hours. Fr. Juan Luis laughed and said: "Jaime, a vocation is known only to each person. Besides, you don't have to be a priest to be a good Christian. There are many vocations to holiness, marriage for example."

Yes, I had already thought about that. He kept telling me that it was up to each person to discover their vocation and their path in life. The important thing was to do what God wanted. That was the point, discovering what God wanted from me.

He said I had to stand before God and ask Him to help me see what He wanted from me, and that God would show me his will. Fine, but that sounded like a bit of a generalization to me. I asked him if there was any other way to find out more clearly. Naturally, God speaks in many different ways, he said: in our hearts, through life experiences, or the people we love... At that moment I was a bit uneasy: what if God was calling me to be a priest? I didn't know if I would be able to lead such a life. Fr. Juan Luis reassured me that a vocation was a call and there was nothing to worry about. The

important thing was to be holy. I had to stay calm because God was very good and He would let me see what He had in mind for me.

I gave it no more importance and put the topic out of my mind. I spent my first year at the university studying economics, going to only some of my classes, having a good time with my friends, and playing soccer and rugby. Everything was normal and tranquil. I finished my first year at the university with neither regret nor glory. Well, with some regret, because I was left with a course or two to make up.

A train conversation

Summer arrived. It was a different kind of summer since I went with some friends to a work camp in a poor neighborhood of Barcelona. Everything was going normally until that train trip that led me to rethink my whole life.

I was in a train car with some friends and we were talking about many different topics. Trips make me sleepy and I was nodding off while looking out the window. We were talking about our studies and the subjects we had flunked. I asked a friend about his second year studying engineering. He replied that he wasn't going to continue on that path because he wanted to start studying theology. At first, I didn't understand what he meant and remarked that studying theology didn't seem a good way to find a job. With great peace of mind, he replied: yes, there is a job and a very good one: being a priest.

At that moment, I sensed clearly that God was calling me to be a priest. God wanted to dwell within me and never leave. He wanted to guide my life. I told myself interiorly: "Your friend has the courage to be a priest, and you don't?"

I smiled and changed the topic so that no one would notice what was going on inside. It had been a very clear call. I looked out the window and tried to collect my thoughts, imagining what life as a priest would be like.

In London, everything falls in place

At the end of the summer, I had an opportunity to go to Great Britain to study English. During my stay in London, I found lodging in Netherhall House, an Opus Dei Residence Hall. I really enjoyed my stay there and met many young people from different countries who had come to London to study. In the morning I had English classes at an academy near Piccadilly and I spent the afternoons visiting the city with friends.

When the summer ended, I thought it would be good to take a year off and

stay in London to gain some professional experience. That way I could work and improve my English at the same time. So I stayed in London that year and started looking for work. It wasn't easy to find a job, especially since my English was still poor. But thanks to a friend, I found a job at *Hello Magazine*, the *Hola* magazine in England. I worked there as a computer technician intern because I have always had the ability to understand computers and electronic devices. The truth is that I really enjoyed the experience. I learned English and made some good friends.

And it was in London where God put everything in place in my life. I began to live with more order, to study more intensely, and to take my Christian life more seriously. Work helped me to mature because I had to pay for the Residence Hall, and I spent long periods of time alone,

which gave me a chance to think about where my life was headed. As I walked through the streets of London I thought about all the people who lived only for their work, the stress that accompanied them constantly, the hustle and bustle of the City... And I asked myself if that was the life I wanted.

Little by little, I was recovering my relationship with God and I once again started giving priority to Him, finding a place for Him in each day. I began to go to Mass every day, to pray the Rosary on the way to work, offering it for all the people who crossed my path on the street. I got back to frequent confession and started going to means of formation regularly.

God's call

I was happy and discovered the joy of leading a sincere Christian life. Everything seemed the same, but in

reality everything had changed. Nothing that I experienced during those months was normal. And the reason was that, since I arrived in London, a question had been swirling like a whirlwind in my head and striking my heart: “Why not be a priest?”

The concern to be a priest came back to me like a continuous refrain, and it accompanied me everywhere. I didn't feel forced. God was inviting me to follow Him freely. Finally, I opened my heart and said “Lord, if you want me to be a priest, fine. But only with your help, of course.”

Since that moment, my life began to fall into place. What happiness! I couldn't contain my joy. I thought I had been brave, although it was God who had given me the generosity to respond. In that moment I sensed an immense peace, greater than I had ever felt.

A few days later, I made it a point to tell my family about my decision to become a priest. I sent a *WhatsApp* to my father, telling him that since I knew he was praying for my vocation, I wanted to let him know that I was going to become a priest. Two minutes later, my father called me on the phone and asked me why I had communicated that news through *WhatsApp*. I told him I didn't want to make a big issue out of it, but I wanted my decision to be known at home. My father was very happy and told me that it was an honor for the family that God should give us a priest.

A few weeks later I returned to Saragossa and told my parents and siblings in person. Everyone was very happy. Even some people I wouldn't have expected it from congratulated me on my vocation.

My great-uncle and the Pope

My next step was to go and see my great-uncle, who is a priest. He told me about his own experience at the seminary and studying philosophy and theology. He said he received a deep and well-rounded formation: intellectual, spiritual, human and pastoral.

I listened carefully to everything he said, although I didn't care what I had to do to be a priest, since I was very excited about the idea. I was thrilled to have discovered what God had in mind for me. The priesthood presented itself to me as a fulfilled life. I saw clearly that a life of self-giving to others is a life that is truly fulfilling. During those days I also happened to read some words of Pope Francis: "Anyone who is not living to serve others, is not leading a worthwhile life." That's what I wanted.

That September I entered the seminary. I had always done what I wanted in life, until God made me see that, if I really wanted to be happy, I also had to do his Will.

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