

## Purpose and the Season of Lent

Dr. Germain Grisez (1929 – 2018) was generally considered one of the good and reliable moral theologians of our time. Morality does not refer only to sexuality. It deals with the whole gauntlet of human actions – work, social interactions, duties, and so on. Grisez wrote on a vast array of moral topics, one of which was “personal vocation.” As stated by Grisez: “The faithful need to think in terms of their personal vocation — instead of their personal agendas.” What does he mean by ‘vocation’ or ‘*personal* vocation?’ At its core, vocation means purpose – it means I have a purpose. Purpose is exceedingly important. Purpose gives one a reason to live, it is a driving force, something that pushes a person forward even in the face of the greatest of difficulties. Without it, a person is dead inside.

Every single human being who has ever lived or ever will live not only has a purpose but a supreme purpose, the highest and most noble of purposes, which is to become a son or daughter of my Father, the building up of the one true kingdom – a *real* kingdom, namely the Kingdom of God. Dwell on that point. Every day when you get out of bed in the morning, remember that purpose and commit yourself to it. To live for the sake of the other and for *the* supreme purpose is very motivating. It awakens and sharpens the mind, your whole interior.

Now Grisez also spoke of a *personal* vocation. What that means is that within the overall vocation of building up the Kingdom (there are many ways to say this – forging relation with our Lord, becoming the son or daughter I am meant to be, doing the will of God, growing in virtue, becoming like Christ, growth in knowledge and love of the Lord) each person has a God-given *particular* role. Your Father, with just you in mind, has given you a particular role in His great work. It might be marriage and family life or priesthood, for example, and even within that particular vocation, there can be something even more specific, indeed right down to the individual person. This is what Grisez means by *personal* vocation. It is not unlike building a house; the foundation layer, the framer, the electrician, plumber, etc are all building the house – that’s the common purpose, and yet each one has a specific role. The Church, as our Lord said through St Paul, is the [Mystical] Body of Christ. In a physical body, each part has a significant role that affects the others. Have you ever heard of the Islets of Langerhans? They are a small patch of seemingly insignificant cells on top of the pancreas. Yet without them you’d die – they produce insulin. Your Father does not give out insignificant or trivial purposes.

One thing to bear firmly, *firmly*, in mind is that the universal purpose has to always be adhered to; true personal vocation never supersedes or discards the universal vocation – what the Second Vatican Council called: The Universal Call to Holiness. A person cannot take off on their own, depart from the overall purpose, and say this is my personal vocation. If a house is being built and the framer decides to frame a church instead of a house, he has departed from the universal, overall purpose and he is no longer fulfilling his true personal purpose. Those who place judgement on what God has revealed, for example, have departed from the universal vocation (purpose) and thus also, necessarily, from their own true personal vocation as well.

Now all of this is clearly true – objectively true, it’s not personal speculation but what God has revealed. However, being able to recite a fact is different than really knowing it – embracing it and living it out, knowing to the depths of my core, being determined by it, having it direct my every thought, word, and deed, subjugating everything I do to that one purpose. In order for a person to really embrace their vocation, their great purpose, they have to train for it. This training is lifelong – not once and done. It may take various forms at different times and may be more intense at certain times but it never stops, not until we take our last breath. If a wrestler, for example, stops training, he will still know the moves but he will not be able to execute them as he could when he was still training. This brings us to the season of Lent. The Church, in her great wisdom, guided by the Spirit of God, provides us with a special season for special training – Lenten practices.

What are these *indispensable* Lenten practices that train us in living our true and enlivening purpose? First, what is the effect of being distracted from my purpose? It bears some likeness to being distracted while driving – it can end my life in a moment, even if it’s just once or just for a few seconds. Even if distraction while driving doesn’t result in a mortal crash, if I’m not really paying attention I can miss a turn or an exit and I will not reach my destination. Being distracted or diverted from my true, life-giving vocation, has the same consequences. *But*, there is also a difference – while the consequences of distracted driving might be irreversible, while I am still alive I can always recover from falling away from my true purpose. This is

**repentance.** Repentance is not seasonal, it is for the whole year. However, the Church, following the teachings of our Lord, has a special season to *emphasize* this necessary spiritual practice. We *will* deviate from the path and once deviated, a person will continue to get farther and farther away, and will not hit their destination unless they get back on the path. How empty confessionals are today. It is a sad thing to see so many say (in effect): I don't need a Savior, I don't need Jesus, I'm good. Will our Lord's death be in vain for me?

Repentance is more than just confession, or maybe we should say that confession is more than rattling off some words and saying a couple of prayers. Nonetheless, the sacrament of **Confession**, created by our Lord as the means for forgiveness of sins, is an essential part of having true purpose, of being on the path. Repentance means I see my sins, I see that they are an offense against my good Lord, I'm truly sorry for that, so much so that I fix my mind on ridding myself of these sins.

True repentance is a response to the love of our Lord. This means a person has to be struck by the infinite, powerful depths of our Lord's love – we have to see His love. This is why our Lord has so frequently said to the mystics of the Church: meditate on my Passion. He held each one of us in His Divine mind as he drug that heavy cross and as He hung upon it, being mocked even while dying. This is why the Church commends the **Stations of the Cross** especially during Lent; the Stations are for any time of the year, but Lent draws special attention to them. How sad it is to see so few at this ancient devotion. Do we really want to just pass by our Lord with indifference as He hangs on the Cross? Can we not take even a half-hour or so, once a week, to come and participate in this meditation on His Passion? This is an ancient devotional practice. It is generally held that this devotion began with Mary herself who, after the death of our Lord walked the path of His crucifixion daily, contemplating His Passion. Can we not follow along, at least a few times during Lent? Will not our most powerful intercessor be grateful for the company? Love is that which binds us the Lord and love is not just a noun but a verb – it entails making sacrifices for the beloved, including my time and effort. Parents remember that you are the primary educators of your children; the Church is here to *help*, not replace, parents. If kids do not see their parents doing anything extra for the faith – if it's just: bare minimum and that's it – what kind of love of God do they really learn? Bring your family to Friday Stations.

Another Lenten practice is some sort of special sacrifice – **giving something up for Lent**. Fasting and abstinence are part of this but in addition to that, I should make some personal sacrifice as well. There is a very substantial reason for this, which is self-discipline, denial of desires that were disordered by original sin. Sacrificing something that I really like and am attached to is aimed at developing more and more that mature self-discipline. The more I'm attached to it, the greater the interior struggle to deny it, the more that it's a source of intemperance, the greater the reward (freedom) I will receive in denying it. This is an essential part of maturing into the son or daughter of God that I am meant to be. This could be many things – for many today maybe it is internet or phone usage, some form of leisure, TV, gaming, and so on. Sometimes people say: well I will do something extra (prayers or something) rather than give something up. It is good to do something extra but not by setting aside this *need* to deny ourselves. This self-denial is serious training.

**Prayer and almsgiving** are also spiritual practices that are for all seasons but Lent draws special attention to them. Almsgiving can be difficult today, not so much because I greedily cling to everything I have but rather because you never know who or what to give to because of scammers or corrupt and immoral practices of so many organizations. One thing to bear in mind is that contributing to the Church is considered almsgiving, although we should still be conscientious about the individual needs of others, especially those around us. The topic of prayer could (and does) fill volumes but there are two things in particular that I want to mention here, one of which is **weekday Mass**. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is participation in the Son's own worship of the Father and as such, it is the highest form of worship of God on earth. It was created by Jesus Himself. It is the most direct and immediate contact we have with God on earth. Please consider carefully whether or not you couldn't make it to a weekday Mass – I hope to get an evening Mass established at each parish to make it more feasible for everyone. Remember also that one of the great preparations for Mass is spending time with our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament outside of Mass – **Adoration**.

My dear parishioners, let's decide once and for all to commit ourselves fully to the true purpose of this life. When you come to the end of this life, you will be eternally thankful you did.

God bless you, Fr Kuhn.