Sometimes, when my two great nephews are in town from North Carolina, ages 10 and 7, I got conned into taking them to Toys R Us. Actually, if I am being totally honest, I am not sure who enjoys the store more, me or them. I have learned the hard way to always set a limit of what they can spend. It is usually ten to fifteen dollars each. They immediately ask me if this includes tax or not. I have also learned that the two boys find making their decisions painfully slow. I threaten several times that we are going home and not buying anything. They carefully add up what they can get for fifteen dollars and return item after item, after picking it and deciding that is not what they want. I usually lose patience and spend fifty dollars or so just to get out of the store.

I wonder if that story is a kind of image of our age when it comes to making life choices. Adults very often ask children what they want to be when they grow up. High School guidance counselors push their students to decide what college they want to attend. As
young men and women attend college, they often switch majors several times. As people enter the job market, there are often many changes in careers and jobs. We talk about second and third careers. We seem to live in an age of immense change and flexibility. People often make many moves in their lives, going from state to state, and even to other nations. A young person can feel the immense possibilities of the world and the excitement of the future and what it might bring. A middle age person, experiencing a reality that we did not even know existed years ago, the mid-life crisis, may feel that he or she must change careers and sometimes other fundamental aspects of their lives. Senior citizens, surrounded by all this openness to new possibilities, may regret that they were born too soon. Sad to say, there are people of every generation who experience a sense of being trapped in their lives, of having no freedom. Sociologists write that people are making serious life choices at an older ages than in previous generations. In truth, it is good that people take seriously the decisions that will impact them and others very seriously.

I think a concern that I would have is that people may be asking the wrong questions as they ponder their life choices. What do I want to do with my life? What do I need to be happy in my life? What path of life will bring me joy and contentment? These are key and important questions. However, unless they are raised in the context of a greater question, they will not bring the questioner ultimate peace. The key question of life, one that we must all ask of ourselves throughout our days, is: What is God asking me to do? In the Gospel of John, Andrew is asked by Jesus, “What are you looking for?” The first disciples ask Jesus where he is staying. He tells them to come and see. It is God who initiates the call. Interesting enough, most of the calls that God issues in the Scriptures might be calls to a second life, a new path that is entirely different than that which the receiver had envisioned for him or herself. There is often a pattern of resistance to God’s calls when they are initially received. When Moses is called, he tells God that he knows not how to speak. When Jeremiah is called, he says that he is too young. When Peter is called from his fisherman’s nets, he tells Jesus to depart from him since he is a sinful man. When Zaccheus is called down from the Sycamore tree by Jesus, he is a corrupt tax collector. Matthew, another tax collector, is called from his tax collectors table. Sarah, the elderly wife of Abraham, really received a second vocation; the barren woman is called to be the mother of the Jewish nation. Saul, the fierce persecutor of the early Christian Church, is called to be Paul the great evangelizer of the first century Catholic Church. Of all the invitation in the Scriptures, none is more transforming than that of Mary of Nazareth who is called to be the Mother of the Word Made Flesh.

The founder of the Redemptorists, St. Alphonsus Liguori, is a man who receives several calls that greatly change his life. He is a dedicated layman who is called to be a lawyer. He soon feels called to be a priest. As he encounters the poor outside of the city of Naples, the young priest hears the call of God to found the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer.

God is persistent in his calls. Most of us, when we hear the parable of persistence in prayer, the widow wearing out the judge with her requests, the neighbor pounding on the door for bread in the middle of the night, believe Jesus is teaching us to never give up in
our perseverance in prayer. Quite true. I also believe they are images that help us understand the Divine. God is the persistent one; God is the one who keeps on seeking and asking. It is the Father in the story of the Prodigal Son who runs to embrace his child. Francis Thompson’s classic poem *The Hound of Heaven* captures the mystery of being pursued by God:

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;  
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;  
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways  
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears  
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.  
Up visted hopes I sped;  
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.  
But with unhurrying chase,  
And unperturbèd pace,  
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,  
They beat -- and a voice beat  
More instant than the Feet --  
"All things betray thee, who betrayest Me"

In the fourth century, St. Augustine also captures the wonder of being drawn to the Divine:

Too late have I loved You, O Lord; and behold You were within, and I without, and there I sought You.  
You were with me when I was not with You.  
You called, and cried out, and burst my deafness.  
You gleamed and glowed, dispelling my blindness.  
You touched me, and I burned for Your peace.  
For you have made us for Yourself,  
And our hearts are restless until they rest in You.  
Too late have I loved You, Beauty ever ancient, ever new.  
You have burst my bonds asunder;  
I will offer up to You an offering of praise."

We are called by God to his divine love and mystery every day of our lives. We are precious in his sight. We have been redeemed by his plentiful redemption. We have been loved with an everlasting love. The call of all of us, be we married or single, priest or religious, young or old, is to love the God who has first loved us. Each of us, by listening to the voice of God that speaks in the Scriptures, in the Church, in our prayer, in the love of others, in the cry of the poor, and in the ordinary circumstance of our lives can come to know and respond to the path that Jesus is inviting us to follow as his believers. We are called to be disciples of Christ. Each of us has our own path to follow.
Today, James McCabe will make his vows of poverty, chastity and obedience as a Redemptorist to follow Jesus the Holy Redeemer in announcing the good news to the most abandoned, especially the poor. As we reflect on the call of Jim to be a Redemptorist, we see that God was persistent with him. Jim may well have thought his time as a Redemptorist has passed, but the Lord has other plans for him. God gave Moses a burning bush, Paul was knocked to the ground and heard the voice of God, Peter has a fishing boat overflowing with a great catch, and Alphonsus hears the call of God as he visits the poor in the hospital. How did God call Jim McCabe to this day?

Certainly, his family was central in mediating God’s call. Jim wrote this about his family, “My family support is outstanding. All my family, Bob and Vivian, my parents, my brothers John and Tom and their wives Marilyn and Dana, my sister Meg and her husband Bill, my Aunt Jinny, my nephews Sean, Daniel, Jack, and Mike my niece Amy have given me encouragement that has sustained me through my life.”

As Father Bill Collins was dying from cancer, he asked Jim to consider returning to the Redemptorist. When Jim was in the Navy, he met an outstanding Redemptorist, Mike Shea, who ran an orphanage in Thailand. A friend from the seminary, the Provincial Vicar, Al Bradley, and a Redemptorist from St. Anne de Beaupre, Father Jacques Fortan, both encouraged him to consider returning to the Congregation. Good priests like Leo Dunn and Ed Donahue inspired him. John McGowan served as a fine spiritual director. What a persistent God who brought such a variety of Redemptorist confreres from so many places into Jim’s life at the right time to allow Him to hear the call of God. The God who created thunder and the crashing of the waves, gently, over many days and years, kept whispering into the heart of Jim. Like a soft summer breeze that is barely noticed, God’s grace invited Jim to live his life as vowed Redemptorist. Today, Jim, surrounded by family, friends, and confreres responds to that call by publicly taking the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

Today, is a day to congratulate Jim and promise him our prayers and support. It is a day to thank his family, his friends, and his formation directors who played such a role in his vocation. It is a day to sense the presence of Father Rip Collins and lift our heart in gratitude for his good life. It is also a day for each of us to ask how can we best be faithful to following the call of Jesus in our lives and live out faithfully whatever vocation God has called us to. We pray for the grace to follow Our Mother of Perpetual Help in saying Yes to the daily invitations that God brings into our lives.