

# ONE THING NECESSARY


EACH UNIQUE PERSON AS THE WAY OF RENEWAL



Inscape Center for Personal Vocation  
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"Every life is a vocation,  
and every believer is  
invited to co-operate in the  
building up of the Church."

SAINT JOHN PAUL II

## 1. INTRODUCTION

We begin with a brief story told by Christopher Stefanick about a great saint of our time, Pope John Paul II, who boldly taught that each unique person is the way of the Church and that helping each person embrace his own vocation must be for her a fundamental priority. The story is about a series of encounters between Bishop Robert Brom and John Paul II. Here's Christopher's story:

"Brom's first meeting with the Pope occurred in 1963 during the second session of the Second Vatican Council. Brom was a seminarian at the North American College and Pope John Paul was the auxiliary bishop of Krakow. Brom and several classmates were leaving the Church of the Gesu after a visit there when some Polish seminarians with Bishop Wojtyla were entering. At that time Brom and his classmates briefly met the man who would thereafter become the Cardinal Archbishop of Krakow and the first non-Italian Pope in 455 years. Subsequently, Brom forgot all about the exchange.

In 1983, after his appointment as Bishop of Duluth, Bishop Brom met Pope John Paul II during his Ad Limina Visit for what he thought was the first time. However, John Paul, looking into Brom's face said, "I think we have met before." Brom assured the Holy Father that they'd never met. "I believe we have," insisted the Pope, but Brom was equally sure they had not. After all, a meeting with the Pope isn't easily forgotten!

Some days later, during the same Ad Limina Visit, the secretary to the Holy Father, then Monsignor Stanislaw Dziwisz, now Cardinal, approached Bishop Brom to say, "Don't argue with the Pope - he remembers when he met you." "When?" Brom asked. "In November of 1963 outside the Church of the Gesu in Rome." Brom's memory refreshed, he asked Monsignor Dziwisz, "How can he do that?" to which Dziwisz explained that for John Paul to meet another person is to encounter God."

*"The glory of God is man fully alive." - St. Irenaeus*

There are two key points we can draw from this story about the encounter between Bishop Brom and Pope John Paul II.

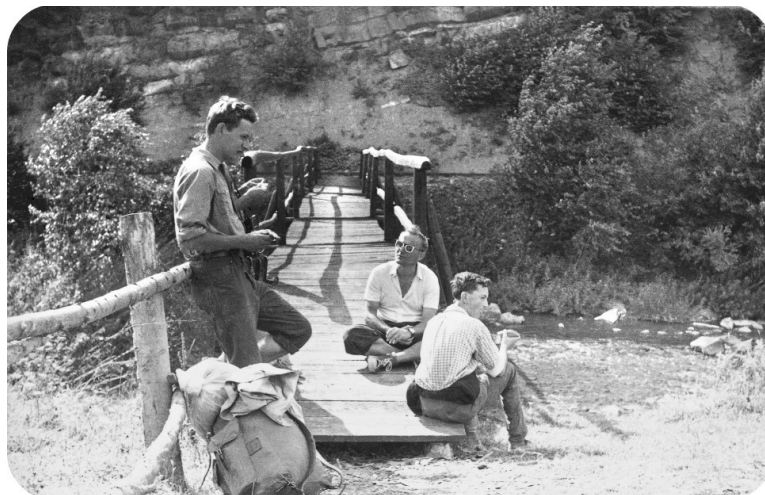
**First**, the Holy Father's radical sensitivity to the unique human person. The only way John Paul II could have remembered Bishop Brom and the thousands of others he encountered is through close and loving attentiveness to each person.

**Second**, John Paul II did not encounter God in an abstract way when he first looked upon the face of Bishop Brom. He recognized (as so many of his other writings also testify) that Bishop Brom and every person manifest in a unique way the face of God on this earth.

This short document is about the central importance of unique personal vocation.

We will first explore how the human person—each unique and unrepeatable—is “the primary and fundamental way of the church” (*Redemptor Hominis*, 14). We will then discuss the meaning of personal vocation as it emerged from the Second Vatican Council and was developed in the teaching of Pope John Paul II to the point where he wrote in his first encyclical that “every initiative serves true renewal in the Church...insofar as the initiative is based on adequate awareness of the individual Christian's vocation.” (*Redemptor Hominis*, 21)

*Every initiative.*



*Pope John Paul II as a young priest, hiking with students*

Given John Paul II's instruction that personal vocation is foundational for every initiative of renewal in the Church, one would think that now, 40 years later, thriving programs would exist for cultivating personal vocation in every area of the Church.

*But there is not.* Indeed, the very concept of personal vocation remains peripheral in the life of the Church despite clear teaching from the magisterium regarding its central importance.

Why is this the case? We will explore three reasons for the neglect of personal vocation, highlighting the alarming loss of priests and religious in recent decades as the primary reason for the overshadowing of personal vocation. We will go on to argue that, in fact, a robust cultivation of personal vocation can lead to great renewal in the Church and help to solve the problems that led to the neglect of personal vocation in the first place.

Next we will address how everyone, by emphasizing personal vocation as a key formational objective, can help bring renewal to the church. This is especially true for parents, coaches, and educators. So, we won't dwell on the neglect. We'll do something about it!

Finally, we will close with a meditation on the concrete and particular nature of God's love and how Catholics can more deeply manifest such love as they clearly identify and embrace their own personal vocations and help cultivate them in others.

*"I understood that every flower created by Him is beautiful, that the brilliance of the rose and the whiteness of the lily do not lessen the perfume of the violet or the sweet simplicity of the daisy."*

*- St. Thérèse de Lisieux*

