

## Your Elevator Speech

Jonah 3:1-5, 10

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3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

Father Dave Mercer, Pastor  
St. Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Church  
San José, California

*The word of the LORD came to Jonah, saying: "Set out for the great city of Nineveh, and announce to it the message that I will tell you." [Jonah 3:1-2]*

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Everyone here today – both you and I – everyone has a sacred vocation. God gives you and me a set of talents and gifts given to nobody else. God calls you and me to do something with our lives that God calls nobody else to do. And when we discover it, we discover our vocation in life, our *sacred vocation*. And when we discover our vocation, there's really no way to hide from it.

That's what we see in today's first reading about Jonah. The book of Jonah is similar to a parable, a rather extended parable. When most people think of Jonah, they think of him being swallowed up by a fish (a whale, perhaps) and then coughed up on a beach. However, that's not what the story is about. Instead, he has a calling from God (a *vocation*) to preach to the people of Nineveh.

Jonah hates the Ninevites. He wants nothing to do with this calling, so he hops on a ship bound for Tarshish on the far end of the Mediterranean Sea, about as far away as one can get. And the fish swallowing up Jonah and coughing him up on a beach in the Middle East is a rather fun way to say that there's no getting away from what God calls you to do with your life. There's no getting away from your God-given vocation. Jonah gives in to God and preaches to the Ninevites. They convert, and Jonah sulks over having to do what he didn't want to do.

It's a great and fun story that also makes a good point about our lives and our relationship with God. It makes for a great lead into talking about your vocation.

We make a big mistake if we think that one needs to be a religious sister or a priest to have a vocation. We make a mistake to think that one needs to be an official saint to have a sacred calling. And yet, we can learn from them how one recognizes what God calls us to do. Take Saint Ignatius as an example.

Five hundred years ago, Saint Ignatius Loyola is an irresponsible young man. He's also a soldier in the Spanish army. Wounded in battle, he reads about the life of Jesus and the lives of saints. As he reads, he writes more than 300 pages of notes and wonders what he might do with his life to match a given saint's courage, or another one's spirituality, or still another one's willingness to travel on a pilgrimage. Through it all, he feels God calling him to be a priest and to begin a religious order that today we call the Jesuits.

Similarly, each of us can prayerfully reflect on the life of Jesus and on the faith of others. Each of us can bring into prayer the question: Jesus, what do you want me to do today? What do you want me to do this year? What do you want me to do with my life?

Teenagers, you don't have to be a religious sister or a priest to have a vocation (although I certainly encourage such vocations). As with everyone else, you only need to be open to listening to God and to what God might be calling you to do. In time, you will know what God calls you to do, and there won't be a boat heading to Tarshish so you can escape your sacred calling.

And yet, I'm convinced that everyone's vocation includes a willing to tell another person about one's faith. I'm not talking about proselytism or ringing doorbells. I'm talking about everyday moments being opportunities to state clearly why you are Christian, why you are Catholic, even why you come to Mass here on Sundays. And I invite both teenagers and adults to take some time to write down what you can say in such a moment.

In the business world, people call it an *elevator speech*, that is, a brief explanation of what one does for a living, or what one's company does or stands for. It's useful when you have only a few seconds of someone else's time and attention, such as an elevator ride.

A *Catholic elevator speech* can help you when you find yourself asked what you believe or what the Catholic Church is, but have only a few moments to respond. A *Catholic elevator speech* should be succinct, theologically accurate, and sincere. It can be personalized and heartfelt, too. It can capture and communicate in a nutshell what being a Catholic Christian means to you.

I ask you to take my invitation to prepare a *Catholic elevator speech* seriously. To that end, we include in today's parish bulletin a page to help you prepare one.

I also include my *Catholic elevator speech* as an example for what you might write. (It's longer than a minute to say, so I would do well to have a shorter version, too.) Whatever you write can be a starting point to talk about your faith with someone who is interested (or even challenges your Catholic faith).

Here's my elevator speech.

I am Christian, Catholic, and a Catholic priest, because I can't imagine myself doing anything more meaningful with my life. My Christian faith – my Catholic faith – is rooted in the dying and rising of Jesus Christ. This faith is rooted in the Scriptures and nearly 2,000 years of Church teachings. We recognize that all good things in life are a gift from God intended to be put to the service of the Gospel, and we gather every Sunday simply to say we are grateful for what God has given us in life.

I like being with people who want to be grateful, and I like seeing their goodness and concern for others. We are not perfect at living up the teachings of Jesus, so we seek

his help – his grace – that we might become more loving, more compassionate toward the people we meet each day.

Jesus makes it possible for us to have an eternal relationship with God. As a Catholic priest, I hope I can be an example and guide for anyone who wants to have a deeper relationship with God through Jesus Christ.