Today’s gospel connects with vocations. Jesus calls the first Apotles. In a sense, we are all called in different ways: married life, religious life and priesthood. I’d like to talk about my vocation as an example. Growing up, I always read the Bible, went to Sunday Mass, prayed the daily rosary and as a family we watched “Leave it to Beaver,” “The Waltons,” and “Little House on the Prairie,” and never missed an episode. Just kidding. I had a lot of problems. I even spent time in prison for arson once. Just kidding again. Just seeing if you were listening.

But seriously, I did attend Mass for the most part on Sundays and we did pray the family rosary from time to time. But in high school I was just trying to survive and focused on making it in the world. Religion was on the back burner.

I think a major turning point in my life was when I went to confession, and for the first time as a young man, I really spilled my guts. I thought the priest might be offended by me, but instead he asked if I’d ever considered the priesthood. Wow! Maybe he was impressed with my desire to improve. I considered priesthood for a while but then decided to pursue college and consider marriage. I dated a few girls in college.

One girl I had a crush on. Amy Jo. She was somehow vibrant and coy at the same time. She seemed kinda quiet, but when I went to the formal with her, which was on a ferry boat in the Ohio River, she threw me for a loop. I asked where I should put my sport coat when she asked to dance. She threw it across the room onto a table and danced with skill. She was a dance instructor. In fact, I didn’t like dancing, but she got me into it. Now I do. But had a lot to learn. When it came my turn to swing her around and catch her, I dropped her. Actually, I kinda’ half caught her. Later on she would tease me saying, “You’re not gonna drop me on my head are you?” Amy Jo is alive and well because I joined the priesthood.

Well, before committing to priesthood, I wanted to be an astronomer. I loved outer space, but Math wasn’t my thing. An astronomer that doesn’t like math is an oxymoron. No to astronomer! I wanted to be an artist, but I was poor compared to good artists. I considered pursuing writing and got an English Degree, but Priesthood still called to me. Why?

I can remember being fascinated thinking what it must have been like for the Apostles. Imagine God asking you to follow Him? Maybe they didn’t completely know He was God at first, but imagine sitting down and having a cup of tea with God, of giving God a hug, or playing volleyball with God? Of course, they probably didn’t have volleyball then. I remember saying a Mass for young kids once and I asked “What would you do if Jesus appeared in your kitchen?“ A little girl raised her hand and said, “I’d ask Him, what’s He doing in my kitchen?” Pretty funny. But seriously, what would you do if He asked you to follow Him? It would blow you away, right? Well, being a priest is following him like one of the Apostles. We are all called to follow Him of course, but priesthood, though not better, is perhaps more particular. I wanted to lay down my life for Jesus.

I worked at a refugee camp in the seminary and talked with a man who swam through alligator infested waters to get to this country. I visited a lady in the nursing home that was a spiritual mother to me. I worked with Father Augustine, who would dress up as a clown like Patch Adams to bring joy to patients in the hospital. He had a heart of gold. I was filled with love for the vocation of priesthood. Since my priesthood I have never looked back. As a priest, God keeps blowing me away with surprises.

There are so many beautiful people that have touched my heart. Priesthood is tough like anything else, but God pushes me to be my best because He wants me to shine. He wants me to radiate His love. Priesthood is awesome. If you’re considering it, pray hard and God will let you know. It is a journey into mystery filled with wonder.