

The following article was published in the May/June 2006 issue of Faith magazine. With permission of the editor Anne-Marie Walsh it has been printed here. Note this article was written a few days before Fr. James Campbell was ordained.

Twice Blessed (Thrice, Really!)

If the results from a recent survey published in *U.S. Catholic* are to be believed, the young men about to be ordained for the Erie Diocese have their work cut out for them. Overwhelmingly the most frequently mentioned quality people want in a priest is spiritual depth according to Heather Grennan Gary, the magazine's associate editor.

"Being able to provide spiritual inspiration and guidance is essential," Norma Minneman of Clayton, Ohio wrote in her response. "They should take time to pray every day."

Deacons James and Joseph Campbell—twin brothers who will be ordained at St. Peter Cathedral in Erie along with their classmate, Deacon Marc Solomon, on Friday, June 23—hope to be up to the challenge..

"We have to enkindle the fire of Christ's love in the hearts of his people," says James.

The youngest in a family of 13 children, the brothers credit their family life for their priestly vocations.

"My parents gave us an unwavering witness of selfless, self-sacrificing love and fidelity," says Joseph. "They inspired us to be holy by the witness of their lives and through their instruction in the faith."

FAITH magazine is pleased to introduce readers to the Campbells after an in-depth conversation which has been taking place throughout the last year of their preparation for the priesthood. An interview with Deacon Marc Solomon follows the story.

The twins' parents, John and Dolores Campbell, don't consider the way they reared their 13 children to be anything out of the ordinary.

"We raised our children the way we were brought up," says John, the lingering trace of a brogue from his native Scotland still evident in his words. That included attending Mass each morning and saying the rosary together each evening.

"Once the children got involved in sports, sometimes they would have to finish their rosary on the way to practice," says Dolores. "But we'd start it out together. I think that has really blessed our marriage and family life."

The entire family lived together under one roof for the first 11 years of the twins' lives.

"We had seven kids sleeping in one room at one time," remembers James. "Let's just say we didn't get much sleep during those years." (Apparently brothers Paul and Andrew had quite the reputation for their comedy routines.) But the close-knit clan wouldn't have had it any other way.

"Christmas was bedlam, absolute bedlam!" John recalls. "But it was so memorable. The children's friends all wanted to come and be with us on Christmas Eve because the atmosphere was so much fun."

It was the kind of atmosphere in which guests were a regular part of the dinnertime routine, in which a grandfather was lovingly cared for during the last ten years of his life and in which a young, single mom unrelated to the family found the help she needed raising her child until she managed to get through high school.

“When you’re cooking for so many, what’s an extra person?” Dolores asks.

It was also the kind of home in which the children understood and embraced their responsibilities from a very young age. For twenty-five years the Campbell family had a paper route to cover the cost of the children’s Catholic high school tuition. Keep in mind those papers had to be delivered *before* daily Mass. Priorities were very clear in this household.

“My older brothers and sisters often took me to confession and Mass with them, which played a huge part in my formation,” says Joseph. “They also took us on walks down to South Shore and around the bayfront. The quality time with them was priceless. They shared their lives with us and allowed us to share our experiences with them.”

It’s the little things from his childhood that James cherishes: summers hanging out together, laughing, going to the beach, to the drive-in and an endless roster of school sporting events.

But even in this setting which nurtured hearts and souls so openly, it is surprising to learn how James and Joseph first remember becoming aware of their calling to the priesthood. While they dispute the exact year—James thinks they were four years old, Joseph says they were five—it was while participating in the annual novena at St. Ann Parish in Erie that a Redemptorist priest asked the boys what they wanted to be when they grew up.

Without ever having discussed it before, the spontaneous and simultaneous answer from both James and Joseph was “a priest!”

“Ever since that moment, I’ve always had it in mind that God was calling me to the priesthood,” says Joseph.

Not that it was a done deal.

“At times in high school and college I entertained the thought of other paths for my future,” he says, “but I kept coming back to the realization that the priesthood was the only path that would fulfill God’s will in my life and my own deepest and most true desires.”

Even though an ocean has separated the Campbells for the last four years—James is completing his degree at St. Vincent Seminary in Latrobe, Pa., and Joseph is wrapping up his studies at the North American College in Rome, their comments and reflections from separate interviews are not surprisingly quite similar.

“What occupies my thoughts and feelings, my prayer, as I approach Holy Orders, is the immensity of the task to which I have been called and the great need for priests in our world today,” says James.

Says Joseph: “There are a lot of big challenges in the world today, and the priest is called to lead the charge against a number of those challenges.” He turns to sports to draw an analogy.

“I suppose the feeling is like that of an athlete preparing for a big game when he knows his team has to play against some notable adversary. You’ve just got to put on your game face and step out on the field.”

Both are looking forward to their first assignments as priests, but neither is preoccupied with where they will be serving or in what capacity.

James puts it simply: "I have to remain open to God's will."

The Campbell family, which now includes 40 grandchildren, is certainly looking forward to the weekend that will include the ordination and first Masses of James and Joseph, two sons their father refers to as "the best boys you could imagine." ("Their brothers and sisters might tell you differently," mom says with a laugh.)

"This is really a celebration of our larger church family," James says. "I hope people will see it as such and feel free to come to the cathedral to praise God with us."

Joseph takes a broad view of the moment as well.

"My desire is that the occasion will move the hearts of God's faithful to a greater hope and deeper faith in the Lord," he says. "To see three young guys—and it doesn't matter who they are—literally lay down their lives and cast aside all worldly ambitions for the sake of the kingdom and its ideals is awesome. To witness it can't but bring about a renewed enthusiasm for the faith."

Meet Deacon Marc Solomon

"I asked God to help me get closer to him..."

Deacon Marc Solomon remembers a few moments from his childhood when the idea of becoming a priest crossed his mind. Someone suggested it to him once when he was in elementary school. In middle school, the Scripture passages in which Jesus calls the apostles intrigued him. While he was in high school, his godfather told him he'd make a good priest.

But it wasn't until he was in college that Marc began to seriously consider that he might have a calling to the priesthood.

"One day in my junior year, I really started reflecting on the purpose of my life," he says. "I asked God to help me get closer to him and to understand what he was expecting of me. That was the beginning of my real discernment."

He considered religious life as a Franciscan brother or priest after graduation, but spent the next three years as a substitute teacher. It was during this time he had the opportunity to experience the sacrament of reconciliation with Bishop Trautman, who was visiting his home parish of St. Francis in Clearfield.

"I was really looking for signs at that point, and after confession Bishop Trautman asked me if I had ever considered the priesthood," he says with a smile. "He told me if I was being called, the thought would never leave my mind, and that has been the case."

After a year and a half of classes at Gannon, Marc has spent the last four years of study at St. Mary Seminary and University in Baltimore. Summers have been spent in parishes in Curwensville and Grampian.

Marc has experienced tremendous love and acceptance from his family and from members of the parishes in which he has served.

His advice to young men and women who think they may have a calling to the priesthood or religious life?

"Honestly, they need to begin to talk to Jesus Christ who is so present in their lives," he advises. "They need that relationship in order to hear his voice. I think the number one way is silent prayer before the Blessed Sacrament."