

Thou Shalt Not Keep Away

By Colby Richards

At my preschool graduation, we all stood on a podium and declared to all parents and family present what we wanted to do in the future. When asked what I wanted to be when I grew up, my immediate response was the pope.

At the beginning of 6th grade, we all walked into class and chose our seats. When I looked around at my classmates, I was amazed that I had never realized how interesting members of the opposite gender were.

Since preschool, I've come to terms with the fact that becoming the first American pope is unlikely, but the priesthood is still a very prominent option in my mind. The only problem is I like girls. Like, a lot. This dichotomy has been occupying my thoughts for the better part of the last year, and while discernment is supposed to be an ongoing process, the looming reality that within the next couple of years I'll have to choose a college major adds a sort of urgency to my decision; especially considering that the course load for a MD in psychiatry and a Masters of Divinity can best be described as "fairly different."

I've always assumed that one day I would just hear God's voice and He would tell me what to do, but unfortunately I'm not Samuel and the Ark of the Covenant is still M.I.A. I decided to ask a priest what I should do, but when I brought up my concerns of discerning the priesthood his advice was, and I quote "Don't worry about it. Things will work themselves out." Being the most type-A, analytically minded, black-and-white, logical thinker you'll ever meet, this did not sit well with me.

Lucky for me, all of the married people in my life have given me equally helpful advice. I worry a lot about how to tell the difference between being in like with a girl and being in love with her. Married folk may find it cute say "I just knew that she was the one", unmarried teenagers who are discerning between Matrimony and Holy Orders do not find this to be useful or encouraging.

I think the real underlying problem isn't my vocation though. No matter which one I choose, I can live a life devoted to God. The game of keep away is really over my heart, not my future. I will never forget a talk that we heard right before adoration at my confirmation retreat. The leader of the retreat got up and gave us a talk on giving 100% of ourselves to God. She told us

that we could give 95% or 99% or even 99.999%, but it would never be enough until we completely entrusted ourselves to Him. And that thought has scared me even before it took concrete form in her words. It scares me not because I don't want to give everything to God, but because I don't know how. That's where the game begins.

I know that I'm supposed to give my heart to Jesus and trust in the guidance of the Holy Spirit but it's just scary. It makes me think of that scene from *The Matrix* where Neo is supposed to jump between two buildings. It will work, but only if he believes it will. And that's why he falls. It's not that I don't believe in God or think I can plan my future better than Him. I just want to know what His plan is before I commit to it.

This should be the part where I turn to God and everything clears up and I fall to the ground like I'm reenacting Michelangelo's *The Conversion of Saul* but unfortunately this has not happened. Yet. Currently God and I are playing keep away.

The game of keep away consists of me holding onto as much of my life as I can and God trying to steal away piece by piece. And though He's omnibenevolent, God plays rough. If He can see the opportunity (and according to my Sunday school teacher, God sees everything) He trips, tackles, or distracts me in an ongoing attempt to snag just one more piece of my heart. And I love it. There's nothing more exhilarating than those moments when God boxes you in the ear and through the ringing and reeling, the world suddenly becomes clear like you're putting on glasses for the first time.

I remember my first adoration and the subtle yet persistent calm that settled over me. It's moments like those that keep the game lively. Then there are moments where I think that the game is over, only to feel it resume full force. My faith will be stronger than ever and all of a sudden I take the ball firmly *my* hands. But even though I feel in control for a while, it's not long before God regains possession, and always with a tighter grip.

Then there are moments of the game where I forget the rules; sometimes I don't even know what the ball looks like. I mean, what really is the end goal of keep away? The game goes until one player simply submits. And it's not like I don't know who will win in the end.

It's that I don't know how.