



# Holy Cross

## Vocation as Journey

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by Fr. Daniel Groody, C.S.C.

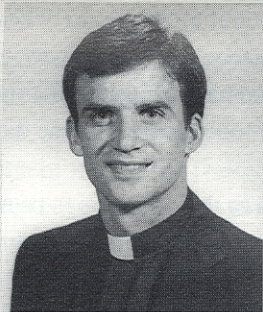
### Framing the Journey: Life Between Two Waters

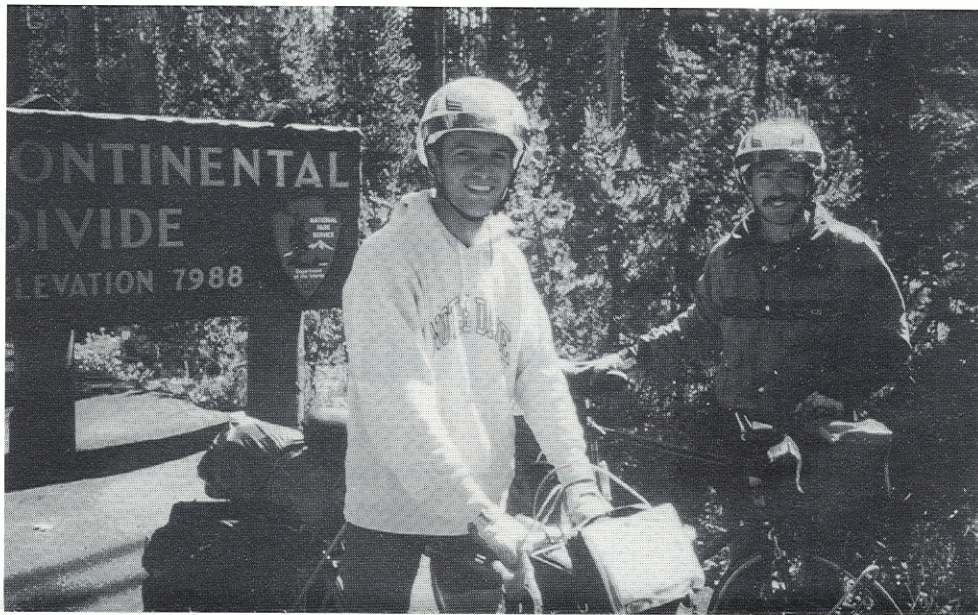
**A**t the heart of a vocation is the desire for life, and I became a Holy Cross priest because I wanted to find something of the life promised by Jesus in the Gospels: not a half-life, a mediocre life, a comfortable life, or even a fulfilling life, but a full life. I wanted to experience life in all its intensity and richness, all its joys and pains, all its peaks and valleys. I wanted to know what Jesus meant when He said, "I have come that you might have life and have it abundantly."

I have found no better root metaphor

for describing the spiritual life and vocation than that of "journey." And I've had no more profound experience of one than a cross-country bike trip that I did with a friend in the summer of 1987 after finishing up my first year at Moreau Seminary. The trip was, itself, an incredible adventure, but, more importantly, that experience has come to mirror the very landscape of my soul and the journey of my vocation.

We started on the Atlantic shore at a Holy Cross parish near Portland, Maine, and biked 3,500 miles in 75 days to the Pacific, ending not far past the University of Portland, a Holy Cross school in Portland, Oregon, and one of the West's best. We trekked through the White Mountains of New Hampshire and





being a priest. I was much too enamored by the beauty of women and too interested in law and business, but my experience of Holy Cross religious at Notre Dame changed that perspective. They were human, down-to-earth and remarkably committed to God. Even so, it took many years before I was ready for the seminary.

Many questions paralyzed me: How would I deal with the challenge of celibacy or meet the incredible demands of ministry? Could I remain faithful to the end? Sometimes I felt completely confused, lost and stuck. But despite my initial anxieties, there was something freeing about simply setting out on the road.

There were times to question, doubt, and ask if I was headed in the right direction, but if I stayed with these I would go nowhere — like staying in Portland, Maine, afraid to move forward. I began to fear that more than taking the risks to complete it. A deep freedom came with simply setting out on the road of faith and putting foot to pedal.

### Signs on the Road Ahead: New York to Notre Dame

Signs were crucial for guiding us from town to town. “Stop.” “Turn.” “Yield.” “Rochester, NH 44.” Simple signs helped us find our way. We saw the road ahead only in small increments. Similarly, I’ve found that God often reveals only a little bit of the road at a time. It took time to believe Jesus and not worry about tomorrow, that it would take care of itself. One day at a time, I kept telling myself. One day at a time.

As I listened to the promptings of my own heart and spoke with others about my vocation, I realized I had to pay attention to the signs in my life, directing me along some unknown road. Like the U2 song, I could say, “I still haven’t found what I’m looking for.” But in looking, I found signs of a deep desire to grow in relationship with God, and I knew this had a primary claim on my heart.

children or adults with water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and when we are sprinkled with holy water during burial, we are reminded that those who die with Christ in the waters of baptism also rise with Him to new life. In between, these waters continue in a multitude of ways to gradually unfold the gift of life.

### Portland, Maine: Setting Out on the Road

We didn’t know much about the road ahead. We weren’t super jocks and had only three days experience in bike touring between us. We started by dipping our tires in the Atlantic and dragging them across the sand to the road. No more than 10 feet later we had our first breakdown. The sand had jammed our gears. We knew nothing about fixing bikes, but as we went along, each setback taught us something new.

It has not been a smooth, easy road to final vows and the priesthood. Disillusionment with my job, breaking up with a girlfriend, changing directions in life were unanticipated and forced me to know the inner workings of my soul.

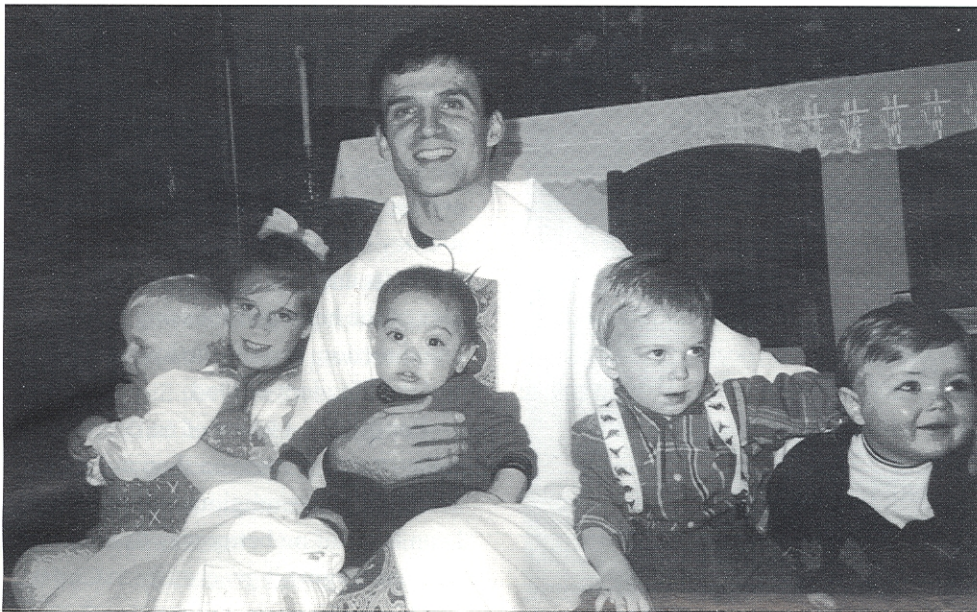
When I started thinking about being a priest I was a sophomore at Notre Dame. I’d always had some interest in religious questions but never thought much about

Vermont and the dairy farms of New York; past the raging falls of Niagara, the grape vineyards of Southern Ontario, the apple orchards of Michigan, and midwestern cornfields to the banks of the Mississippi; along highways and dirt roads to the Twin Cities of Minnesota and beyond.

We stayed with Holy Cross religious, family, friends, former girlfriends, distant friends and strangers; we slept on park benches and in campgrounds, parking lots, run-down hotels, national parks, and a governor’s mansion. We sought help from Catholic churches, Protestant churches and abandoned churches. We were ridiculed, spit on by passing cars, and run off the road by logging trucks.

Amid injuries, dehydration and hypothermia, we received unmerited welcomes and unexpected hospitality, riding from exhilaration to exhaustion through heat waves, hailstorms, thunder, lightning, downpours, fog, and snow. We went through six sets of tires, 12 sets of inner tubes, 21 spokes, a truckload of granola bars and a reservoir of Gatorade.

A vocational journey is similar but even more of an adventure. It is a deep grace to be a Holy Cross religious and a Catholic priest, and I never cease to be amazed at the divine-human terrain on this road. Like the oceans framing our trip, the Church blesses our lives at beginning and end. We are baptized as



There were more important things than money, success and career ambitions, like growing into a more compassionate person rather than a competitive one. I was drawn intensely to the beauty of Christ and that beauty revealed in others, especially the poor and marginalized. I wanted to be faithful to God. I also saw signs of God's grace in the community at Notre Dame, and I became attracted by the life and example of Holy Cross priests.

When I needed specific direction, I spoke with many different Holy Cross priests and asked for help, wanting to know something of their vocations. It was the beginning of many great friendships in Holy Cross. "A great band of men had passed this way," our Constitutions say, "men who had made and lived by their vows, men who had walked side by side in their following of the Lord. They beckoned us to fall in step with them." (*Constitutions 1:5*)

### **The Road Less Traveled and Not Traveled: Celibacy as Gift and Sacrifice**

**G**od always directs and guides the journey. I learned this through my first contact with Holy Cross, beginning with the late Fr. Mike McCafferty, whose life, preaching and teaching sparked my interest in

priesthood and religious life. I began exploring the prospects of a vocation with him until he died of cancer at age 40, just at about the same time we arrived on our bikes at Notre Dame.

It was during an assembly of Holy Cross that takes place every three years, gathering religious from Bangladesh, Chile, East Africa and other parts of the globe. Because of Father Mike's funeral, there were 15 miles outside Chicago that I did not and never will travel. Out of 3,500 miles, that isn't a huge amount, but at times this missing portion occupied a lot of my attention. Could I ever talk about having a complete journey if portions were missing? That question pervaded much of my discernment.

As I thought more about my vocation, I realized I couldn't pursue everything, anymore than I could travel every road to Portland simultaneously. I couldn't be Holy Cross, a Jesuit, a Franciscan or married at the same time. If I wanted to be free, not living forever at the crossroads of indecision, then I had to make some hard choices.

Traveling life's road is made more complex by the dynamics of sexuality. At different times, I've fallen in love. Few vistas compare with love's intense beauty. By contrast, celibacy appears to be a strange, if not impossible, choice, often viewed only in negative terms: no wife, no sex, no kids, and therefore,

"no thanks." Celibacy is a very difficult way of life, but when people look only at its negative aspects, they fail to understand love or celibacy.

Couples preparing for marriage often ask me, "Father, what do you know about marriage?" as if I were born on another planet. "Nothing," I usually say, "if you mean in terms of committing my life to one person, going to bed with the same woman every night, and raising kids... But if you mean in terms of honesty, communication, forgiveness, integrity, trust, intimacy, vulnerability, fidelity, love, giving life, and sexuality, then I think I know a great deal." The fact is that celibacy has deepened my relationships, and it has given me the freedom to enter into so many more than I could have if married.

More than romance, celibacy has helped me understand the real meaning of love. I have been blessed with many close friends, both male and female, who have been some of the most treasured aspects of this journey. Few things in life have surprised me as discovering the profound depth of a celibate life.

Celibacy is part of a larger, fundamentally positive commitment to love and love freely. It is inextricably related to consecration, which, for me, means the ongoing offering of my heart and whole life to God. It is about big-heartedness. It is ultimately about love — love for Jesus above all and love for others in Christ for who they are and not for what I can get from them.

Celibacy expresses the fundamental truth that the human heart is made for God and God alone. Only God knows the innermost depths of the human heart, and not even the most intimate spousal relationship can enter that portion of the human soul reserved for God. There is a delicate loneliness in this recognition, but it is also freeing to realize that loneliness is part of every human journey and that this loneliness can lead to a deeper relationship with God and others.

Celibacy can be understood only by living out a relationship of love with

Christ and his people. Love is really the key to understanding the whole journey. From beginning to end, it is about being loved by God, being in love with God, being an instrument of that love in the lives of others. To embrace this love one must desire *even more* than this world offers — *even more* than I can see, hear, smell, taste, feel or hold. It means setting my heart on the heart of Christ, knowing he is the source and fulfillment of all desire. Celibacy is a gift and a sacrifice. It requires radical honesty, radical integrity and a radical gift of the heart.

## Traversing the Plains: Life on the Crossroads

**A**fter all that, I expected South Dakota to be the easiest part of the journey. “It’s flat, smooth and straight across the plains,” I thought. What a shock! I completely underesti-

mated the power of the winds. Even now, I cannot forget the details of this state: endless acres of prairie grass, more black-and-white-spotted cows than I could count, and 412 green and white, monotonous mile markers on the side of the road, hardly one escaping my attention.

We were traveling from Minneapolis to Wyoming, more than 700 miles in six days. Nothing, and I mean nothing, had been as difficult as this part of the trip. I would rather bike 10 times over a 32-mile mountain pass in Wyoming than trek across the windy plains of South Dakota again. Once it took us an hour and a half to travel six miles! It was like biking in a hurricane. In the face of the difficulties, my weakness and the seeming futility of my efforts, I said, “*Why in the world am I doing this?*” At no other point were the temptations so strong to abandon the journey. But this also was

its most crucial moment.

Fr. Daniel Berrigan once remarked, “If you want to be a Christian, you’d better look good on wood.” To be a religious of Holy Cross, one must learn to love the Cross of Christ. Anyone interested in finding the life that Jesus promises should not be surprised by challenges like the winds and terrain of South Dakota. Being a Christian is hard, and Christ promised his disciples they would run into difficulties. Running detours around these is futile.

Whenever I have chosen a half-hearted approach to vocation, trying to keep all my options open, I’ve gotten stuck in the agonizing terrain of my own ambivalent heart. A half-hearted vocation is no vocation, and a vocation of constant ambivalence is worse than one that demands the hard work of difficult choices, sacrifice, discipline, commitment and the generous offering of self.

## The Road of Life

At first, I saw God as my observer,  
my judge,  
keeping track of the things I did wrong,  
so as to know whether I merited heaven  
or hell when I die.  
He was out there sort of like  
a president.

I recognized His picture when I saw it,  
but I really didn’t know Him.

But later on when I met Christ,  
it seemed as though life were rather  
like a bike ride,  
but it was a tandem bike,  
and I noticed that Christ  
was in the back helping me pedal.

I don’t know just when it was  
that He suggested we change places,  
but life has not been the same since.

When I had control,  
I knew the way.  
It was rather boring  
but predictable ...  
It was the shortest distance between  
two points.

But when He took the lead,  
He knew delightful long cuts,  
up mountains,  
and rocky places  
at breakneck speeds.  
It was all I could do to hang on!  
Even though it looked like madness,  
He said, “Pedal!”

I worried and was anxious  
and asked,  
“Where are you taking me?”  
He laughed and started to answer,  
and I started to learn to trust.

I forgot my boring life  
and entered into the adventure.  
And when I’d say, “I’m scared,”  
He’d lean back and touch my hand.  
He took me to people with gifts  
that I needed,  
gifts of healing,  
acceptance  
and joy.  
They gave me gifts to take on  
my journey,  
my Lord’s and mine.

And we were off again.  
He said, “Give the gifts away;

they’re extra baggage,  
too much weight.”  
So I did,  
to the people we met,  
and I found that in giving I received,  
and still our burden was light.

I did not trust Him,  
at first,  
in control of my life.  
I thought He’d wreck it;  
but He knows bike secrets,  
knows how to make it bend to take  
sharp corners,  
knows how to jump to clear high rocks,  
knows how to fly to shorten  
scary passages.

And I am learning to shut up  
and pedal  
In the strangest places,  
and I’m beginning to enjoy the view  
and the cool breeze on my face  
with my delightful constant companion,  
Jesus Christ.

And when I’m sure I just can’t  
do any more,  
He just smiles and says ... “Pedal!”

At this point, it is not sacrifice that frightens me; it is ambivalence, half-heartedness, living a meaningless, mediocre or weak journey. There are no shortcuts to the new creation. The cross is the way; it is *spes unica*, our only hope.

My trek through South Dakota helped me realize that sacrifice is preferable to ambivalence, and without genuine commitment I will never be free. Entrusting myself to God in the face of life's uncertainties often means saying "yes" when everything in me wants to say "no!" "If you aspire to serve the Lord," says the book of Sirach, "prepare yourself for trials. Be sincere of heart and steadfast, undisturbed in time of adversity . . . since gold is tested in the fire, and the chosen in the furnace of humiliation. Trust God and He will help you; make straight your ways and hope in Him." When I persevere in the midst of trial and adversity and yield with a faith-filled heart to Christ's power, the winds shift.

### **The Grand Tetons: The Gift of Peak Experiences**

**W**hatever it cost to cross South Dakota, it was nothing compared to the Grand Tetons. Their beauty was overwhelming. Every trial in the journey was worth it just to see these snow capped, breathtaking, rugged peaks.

I don't think it is uncommon for God to give, from time to time, the extraordinary, unearned and unexpected, tangible gift of His presence, either through creation, another person or the mystical touch of the Spirit. These peak experiences have revealed to me God's closeness, and they have given me strength. Jesus too was strengthened on the mountain of the Transfiguration before His pilgrimage to Jerusalem, where, for our sakes, He offered his life on the Cross. Sometimes these peak experiences last only for a moment, but they leave a deep impression on the soul.

The journey between South Dakota



and the Grand Tetons had given me deeper insight into the profound meaning of the paschal mystery: without dying with Christ there is no new life. Without losing myself there is no finding myself. Without generosity of heart there is no way of arriving at my heart's desire. Without embracing the Cross I know I will never find God-given joy, and by this point on the journey I know this is what I want more than anything else. The flesh is useless; it is the Spirit that gives life. When the Cross is embraced, not grudgingly accepted, the heart expands and, through grace, the love of Christ is unleashed on the world.

### **The Deserts of Idaho and the Mountains of Oregon: Journeying with Christ in Mission**

**O**n the other side of the Grand Tetons are vast stretches of desert. A vocation means more than playing around in one's own sandbox; it is being sent out to proclaim the Kingdom of God, giving oneself for the sake of other people's journeys, and facing life-defining tests. After Jesus was baptized He went out into the desert and was tempted by the devil. Unlike Israel he was faithful when tested and let Himself be sent on a mission to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

Between Idaho and Oregon the ter-

rain changes rapidly and frequently. Even on bikes one is struck how much the landscape shifts from dry and barren deserts to rich, lush green mountain ranges. Over the years I have come to appreciate the changes in the landscape of ministry. Not infrequently, each day is like a microcosm of the whole journey. From the baptistry to the hospital, library to classroom, prison to altar to graveside, my journey has fallen in step with Christ's and my brothers in Holy Cross who were educators in the faith before me.

Throughout initial formation and priesthood, my life in Holy Cross has led me through all kinds of ministerial terrain: refugee work, homeless shelters, cancer wards, retreat work, spiritual direction, orphanages, parish ministries, university work and migrant work. *My life would be very different today were it not for Holy Cross's commitment to education. Notre Dame shaped me as a person more than any other place in the world, but my enduring, apostolic passion has been for Hispanic ministry and the spiritual life.*

My current assignment, combining doctoral studies in Christian spirituality with retreat and evangelization work among Hispanic migrants in the Coachella Valley, California, has clearly been the most creative and engaging ministry to date. Holy Cross allowed me to explore this ministry in both its intellectual and pastoral depth, pursuing the best of schol-

arship with being a servant of the poor.

As our Constitutions say, "Our mission sends us across borders of every sort. Often we must make ourselves at home among more than one people or culture, reminding us again that the farther we go in giving the more we stand to receive." (*Constitutions 2:17*) In different parts of the world and in the depths of my own heart, I have been brought across borders of every sort: personal, ethnic, cultural, intellectual, spiritual, denominational, emotional, social and economic. Holy Cross has plunged me right into the heart of life, where I have begun to glimpse God's saving love amid life's beauty and brokenness, joy and sorrow, and hope and disappointment.

## Portland, Oregon: Vocation As a Life-Giving Journey

**W**hen we reached the shore of the Pacific in Oregon, we brought our tired bodies and worn-out bikes to the Pacific and rode them into the ocean. This trip across America lasted 75 days and it is over, but the journey of vocation continues as a life-giving one that will be complete only when in death I see God face to face.

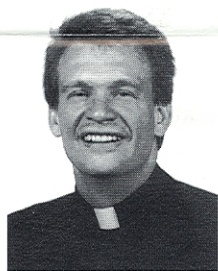
Still, I feel it is just beginning. As full as this life has been, I am just starting one, long and adventurous trek with Christ, just beginning to learn about the depth of this mystery of vocation, in all its complexity, in all its mystery, in all its humanness, and in all of its grace.

I am constantly learning about faith, love, and grace; about mission, ministry, and being ministered to; about friendship, joy, and freedom; about sacrifice, the Cross, the real hope of resurrection, and the enduring promise of life. The journey of a vocation means embracing life in its entirety, harnessing the energies of the heart and focusing them in one direction: toward the love of God and the kingdom of God.

For myself, I know of no deeper, fuller or richer vocation than my journey as a Holy Cross religious and priest. I can think of no better way to offer my life than to give it generously to Christ and his mission. As a life-giving, consecrated journey, nothing has cost so much, demanded so much, promised so much and given so much.



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## The Cross: Our Hope

**T**he Congregation of Holy Cross was founded in 1837 in LeMans, France, by Fr. Basil Moreau, C.S.C., through a union of brothers and priests who had been separately entrusted to his care. In December 1842, Fr. Edward Sorin, C.S.C., and six brothers arrived in Indiana to establish the community's first American foundation, at the University of Notre Dame.

Today Holy Cross has more than 1,700 priests, brothers and seminarians serving as "educators in the faith"

on five continents in universities, colleges, high schools, parishes, missions and direct service to the poor. The seal of Holy Cross is a cross and twin anchors, an ancient Christian sign of hope dating to the earliest days of the Church.

It is underscored by its motto, *Spes Unica*, Latin for "the cross, our hope." The initials "C.S.C." stand for *Congregatio A Sancta Cruce*, the Latin name for the Congregation, which has its generalate in Rome.