



My Vocation

by Fr Luke Beckett OSB

When I think about my vocation I do not think primarily about a single moment when I decided to join the monastery. There was such a single moment, and it was important. But it came as part of a wider context. That context is fundamentally provided by the experience of God that I had before I joined the monastery and that I have continued to have since then. All of this experience is part of living in the light of God's love and seeing his hand in the different things that have happened to me.

I grew up in an atmosphere of faith. Going to Mass on a Sunday morning was for me a central part of each week. The faith of my parents was something that I always knew could be relied upon. I went through the Catholic schools in the town I grew up in. Perhaps more than anything else these schools gave me a sense of the Church as a community, of faith as something that involves doing things with other people; not just me on my own, nor even just me and my family. After school I went off to university, which was to me a time of great personal development. I enjoyed the subject I was studying, made friendships which have endured over the years, and through being involved in the University Chaplaincy grew in my intellectual understanding of my faith and in awareness of the importance of its liturgical expression. Occasionally I would drop into a weekday Mass, I served on the altar, and took part in a theology discussion group. But there was plenty of work to be done, and a reasonably typical busy student social life to enjoy.

After I left Cambridge I came to live in York to study to be a solicitor. The pace of life on this course was much easier, and this gave me time for a different, more reflective, style of thought. During this year the possibility that God was calling me to a priestly vocation kept coming into my mind, and although this idea had occurred before the less busy existence I now led allowed me to consider it seriously, I began to talk with one of the priests in the parish where I went to Mass, and to a Sister I knew as well. They were both helpful, but one big problem that remained was that my sense of vocation had no context in which it became specific. I had known and admired my parish priest as a teenager, but felt no call to the diocesan priesthood; similarly, although I have been inspired by the Dominicans I knew at Cambridge I did not feel that that was the life God was calling me to either. Eventually a wise old priest suggested that I make a retreat in a Benedictine monastery. He said he did this, going every year to Downside Abbey. But since I was living in York I thought it would be easier to come the 20 miles north to Ampleforth. I spent a week in the monastery and during that week it became clear to me that this was the life to which I was being called. So instead of going to London to be a solicitor I applied to the monastery and ended up joining the novitiate.

But my vocation did not end there. Over the last 22 years I have done an unusual variety of things. But these do not seem to me to have been the heart of my calling and my response. What unifies them all has

been, and continues to be, the common prayer of the community; the structure of prayer that divides up the day, regularly bringing me back to the choir in the Abbey Church, has been both the bedrock of my life and the principle that has united it. It stands at the heart of the community's life which has become my own life. In the choir I feel the unity that binds the community together, and binds me into it, most strongly. This unity expresses itself in the way my life unfolds day by day, for whatever I am doing, I still have the sense that I am continuing to respond to a vocation which is both something that happened "then," at a specific time, and still happens "now," as the living God continues to call me to follow his Son here at Ampleforth.