All three readings have a vocation theme. In the first reading, the boy Samuel perceives that God is calling him. Samuel responds, “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.” In the second reading, St. Paul instructs the Corinthians, “Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who dwells within you. ... Therefore, glorify God in your body.” In the gospel, John the Baptist saw Jesus walking, and pointed him out to his disciples, “Behold the Lamb of God.” Two disciples followed Jesus. He turned around and asked, “What are you searching for?” They replied, “Where do you stay?” Jesus said, “Come and see.” And the rest is history.

We Christians have a general and specific vocation. Those of us who are baptized have the general vocation to follow Jesus Christ and to reject evil. By our baptism, we promise to keep the virtues of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Specific vocations include the single life, married life, and priesthood and religious life. Most people will become married. Many will remain and choose the single life. Some will pursue priesthood and religious life. This evening, I want to focus on the vowed vocation of priesthood and religious life.

How can you know if God is calling you to priesthood or religious life as a vowed sister or brother? To assist you in this process, I will pose a handful of questions. Ready?

1. Do you possess a strong faith? Do you believe in God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit; that Jesus is God-made-Man. Do you believe what the Catholic Church teaches? ...
2. Do you live a fairly good moral life? Are you generally hard-working, responsible, reliable, kind, honest, patient; and most of all self-giving and self-sacrificing? ...
3. Do you possess relatively good people skills? Are you able to make and keep friends? Are people happy to have you as a friend? Do you have a sense of humor? Can you keep perspective about the most important things in life?

I trust that most students answered “yes” to these questions! Most of you have what it takes fundamentally to be a priest, brother, or sister. Now, two more questions, the most important questions.

4. From time to time, do you wonder, “Maybe I could be a priest, ..., brother, ... or sister?” Studies show that at least 20% of today’s college age men and women seriously consider or have considered vocation to priesthood or religious life.
5. The most important question is this: “What does God want you to do with your life?” In your daily prayers, please ask God, “Lord, what do you want me to do with my life?” Vocation is a calling. Vocation is not something that the individual chooses for him/herself. Rather, God calls the individual in that person’s heart of hearts, in the center of their being. That calling occurs through the events of daily life, through our interactions with other people, through perceiving the real needs of the society in which we live. Most especially, we hear this calling in moments of silence; the Psalms say, “Be still and know that I am God.” … We hear God calling us in quiet prayer … here in the chapel before, during and after Mass; in quiet reflective moments at morning, noon and night; like Jesus at a lakeside, a mountainside, or in the midst of people clamoring for help.

Now, I want to tell you a humorous story about my vocation discernment. When I was a junior in high school, I told my mother privately, that I wanted to be a priest. She replied, “Vincent, that is a noble vocation. But if you want to be a priest, maybe you should learn how to be more patient with your sister, Cathy.” My mother was more impressed by actions than words.

At the end of my first year in the college seminary, I came home that summer, and in August, with my whole large family gathered in a circle, I announced that I thought that I should not go back to the seminary. I explained that I thought I was not capable enough to do what a priest does. I could never imagine myself teaching in front of a classroom, or preaching from a pulpit in a church. My father quickly agreed with me, that I was not capable enough. Each of my eight siblings in the circle also shook their heads up and down, agreeing, “Vincent, you don’t have what it takes.” My mother spoke last. She said, “Vincent, no 18 year old college student is capable of teaching in the front of a classroom, or preaching in a church. Why not return to the seminary, and ask your seminary professors what they think about your capabilities for priesthood?”

At the end of my second year in the college seminary, I came home, and in August, with my whole family gathered in a circle, I announced that I thought I should not return to the seminary. I explained that I thought I was not good enough to become a priest. My dad spoke up first. He agreed wholeheartedly with me. Each of my siblings like the previous August, shook their heads in agreement with my father. Yes, they knew that their brother had lots of faults. My mother spoke up last. She said, “Vincent, nobody is good enough to be a priest. No priest lives as well as Christ lived. Why not go back to the seminary and ask your seminary priests if they think you are good enough to be a priest?” Thanks be to God for my wise mother.

I tell you this story of my vocation discernment because any of you who might be thinking about priesthood or religious life will meet many family members, relatives, friends who with the best of intentions will try to discourage you from following this vocation. Expect that. Counter that by discerning your vocation possibilities with someone who is wise, with someone who is learned, experienced and close to God. It may be one of your parents, a priest-confessor either at home or here on campus, a best friend, a coach, a professor. But in all these things, please remember that the most important thing is to pray, “God, what do you want me to do with my life?”