

# CATHOLIC & STARTING OUT

5 CHALLENGES AND 5 OPPORTUNITIES

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PUBLICATIONS

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# INTRODUCTION

Life is an adventure.

As a young adult, finally on your own, you're no longer following someone else's path. You've started to blaze your own trail.

As a young Catholic, you're figuring out what it means to you to be a believer in and follower of Jesus of Nazareth, and deciding how your faith will guide you through those decisions.

You're in the river of life, but you know you're only at the beginning and it's a long river. Your task is to learn how to handle the currents, how to avoid the rocks, whether to stick to the shoreline or plunge into the rough and tumble of the waves. Will you let yourself be pulled along? Or, to the extent that you can, will you set your own course?

This endeavor is filled with challenges and opportunities.

In truth, every challenge holds the seed of an opportunity. And every opportunity will require you to face a challenge.

At times, you will be frightened. At others, you will be excited. Usually, you'll feel a bit of both.

This is your life. It doesn't belong to anyone else.

Live it with all your heart and mind and soul.

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# FIRST CHALLENGE

## **The world can be frightening**

Free at last! You've moved beyond childhood, beyond adolescence. And now you're an adult.

It may not feel that way. After all, you've spent your life viewing adults as other people — your parents, your teachers, store owners, bus drivers, carpenters, coaches, cops, TV personalities, firefighters, doctors, politicians, and all the rest.

You've lived in *their* world. Now, it's *your* world. Simply by virtue of your age, you have a place as an adult. Your task, from here forward, will be to determine what your place is.

That's the exciting part of being on your own. Your life is in *your* hands. You will choose which roads you will take. Which friends you will make. What work you will do.

True, this is something you *have* to do. No one else is going to take responsibility for you. Even more, though, it's something you *get* to do. You will shape yourself — your self.

But let's face it. Being an adult can be scary, especially being a young adult.

You're going to be getting lots of advice from just about everyone (probably too much advice), but gone are the days when a parent could make your decisions for you.

And you've got some big ones to make. To *start* making, actually, since you'll be making decisions for the rest of your life.

That's the thing to remember about decisions. They really do affect the course of your life. But, at the same time, they're rarely final and absolute.

What kind of work will you do? Where will you live? How will you live? Whom will you love? What sort of person will you be?

All of these are questions that you have to begin answering. And each answer you come up with will begin to define you as your own person.

## **A work in progress**

None of these questions, of course, will ever be fully answered. From the moment of your birth until your death, you'll be a work in progress.

Let's say, for example, that you get married. Okay, that settles the question of whom you will love, right?

It's not that simple. A marriage or any other relationship — a friendship, being a parent — is something that's constantly evolving. When a couple weds, each partner makes a choice to love the other. But that's a choice that has to be renewed daily, even hourly.

A friendship or a marriage is a healthy habit flowing from choices — big and small — made over and over again. Love can be as simple as carrying out the garbage...and as risky as being open and honest and vulnerable, exposed in all your you-ness. It's never settled by a simple "I do."

## Where faith comes in

But talking about marriage is probably jumping ahead. Most of the people in your generation are putting that decision off, at least for a few years. There are a lot of other decisions you're going to have to start making first. Such as your work.

Talk about scary. Getting a job is hugely stressful. You're putting yourself out there, over and over, to prospective employers. Your whole life is reduced to the thin sheet of paper containing your resume. If you're lucky enough to get an interview, you feel like a performing seal. Then, you wait and hope for the call-back that, many times, doesn't come.

Here's where faith comes in — faith of all sorts.

This is a moment when you have to believe in yourself. You have talents and skills. There are things you can do well. You need to find a job in which you can exercise some or all of your abilities.

God created us to enjoy working. God worked six days in a row, according to the Genesis, to create the universe, and part of that creation is us. We humans like to feel that we are doing our part in keeping the world turning. We get pleasure when we do a task right, whether it's crafting a software program, or analyzing columns of numbers, or swinging a sledgehammer.

Sure, it's comfortable to sit at home on the couch all day watching TV. But there's no sense of accomplishment there.

You owe it to yourself to find some job where you get paid for doing some kind of meaningful work, to move

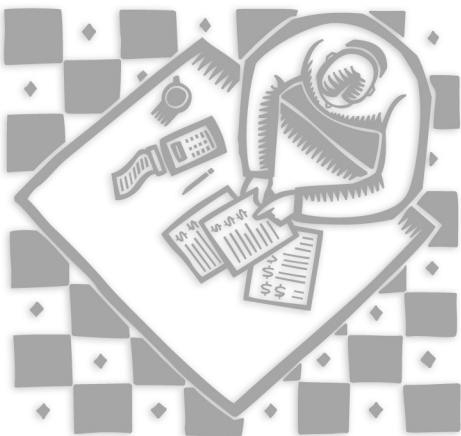
heaven and earth, to pound on dozens of doors, to endure the hells of repeated rejection, until you finally hear “You’re hired!” from an employer.

## **A warning**

Let me warn you as someone who’s been through this: You might not get a perfect job right away. In fact, you probably won’t get a great job at first (or at least you won’t recognize it as a great job until later). Don’t be afraid to start at the bottom of the bottom. Don’t be picky. Waves of immigrants over the past two hundred years — including your ancestors, maybe even your parents — have come to this country and have done some of the worst jobs America had to offer. And most of them have built solid, happy lives. You will too.

Once you have your first job, then you’ll have the beginning of what is called a “work history.” That will help you get your next job...and your next...and your next....

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You need to remember that your first jobs probably won't bring in a lot of money. First jobs usually don't. But it will give you a feel for one sort of occupation and one possible career path. It will also give you a sense of purpose and independence (and a few bucks in your pocket, which is always a good thing, but you already know that).

Initially, you'll want to make at least enough money to keep body and soul together. As a young adult starting a first job and having a limited income, you may have to live with a roommate or two or even, for a short time, with your parents. That's to be expected. It will end.

What you'll find is that you'll adapt your expectations to your income. If you don't have enough savings to visit friends in Albuquerque, you won't visit your friends in Albuquerque. If you can afford to eat out only once a week, you won't eat out more than once a week.

This isn't something to be concerned about. As long as you have a roof over your head and enough food to keep you from starving, the challenge of living within your budget will be a kind of life test. It will feel good to be able to face that challenge and succeed.

## **What's essential**

What you'll find is that salary isn't the most important measure of a job.

Much more essential is whether you feel you are accomplishing or learning something. Do you feel you are making the lives of your customers or co-workers better? Do you find meaning in what you're doing?

We live in an American society that celebrates individuality and success and, in many ways, selfishness. This may cause some tension — or even a *lot* of tension — in your life. As Catholics, however, we believe in working for the good of all people. We believe that morality and ethics trump the bottom line.

Also, you'll find that you like a job a lot better if you feel part of a team. This doesn't mean that you need to work in a place without a boss. But if you have the sense that the people at your workplace — the leaders and the led — are striving together to put out a good product or provide a good service, you'll feel good working there.

Not all jobs are like this, by the way, not by a long shot. Especially first jobs. But you'll discover as you move through adulthood that higher pay won't make up for a job that seems meaningless or a workplace where you feel isolated and disrespected.

That's really something to be scared about.

## QUESTION

- What is essential in your life right now? Make a list. Tape it to the mirror in the bathroom. Look at it once in a while and make sure you are at least moving toward fulfilling it.

# FIRST OPPORTUNITY

## **The world can be exciting**

Your bank account may be empty. You may be having trouble landing a good job. But the world is laid out before you.

You have an almost limitless array of options you can pursue, and you are the one who will choose which ones to go after.

For instance, some people spend their entire lives traveling. Now is the time to find out if that is something you love. You could find a job that keeps you constantly on the go from neighborhood to neighborhood, from city to city, from country to country. Some careers, like that of a flight attendant or truck driver, are perfect for that. And, if you have a job that doesn't allow a lot of travel, then go places in your imagination or virtually on the Internet. And, when you do have the chance to travel, grab it, even if you have to travel on the cheap and stay with friends or relatives.

A lot of travel or no travel? The point is that it's up to you. Just don't put anything off until "later." Later may never come.

Another option you've got is where to live. City or suburb or small town? An apartment in a looming residential tower or a single-family home with a back yard? A quiet cul-de-sac or a bustling commercial strip? You decide.

## Living and praying

And, when it comes to living your Catholic faith, it's also up to you. You can sleep in every Sunday if you want, but you may find that you are missing something: a sense of a mission or purpose in your life, a community of like-minded people you can relate to, a place where you can "practice" your faith (which is the best way to look at being a Catholic anyway).

As an adult you'll see how the people around you at work live out their religious beliefs, whether they're Jewish, Mormon, Baptist, Muslim, Methodist, Buddhist, Hindi, or people of no formal faith at all. You'll hear what the Pope has to say about how you live your life. You'll also hear the same from priests, your relatives and friends, the people in your parish, and other believers. You'll listen to debates about moral and ethical issues and understand the many ways of approaching these difficult but fascinating questions.

And then you'll decide what it means for *you* and how *you* intend to live your life. How do you respond to all these voices and ideas? Only you can say, because you're now the one who is in charge of *you*.

## Circumstances

Obviously, circumstances will play a big role in your choices as well. For example, as a young adult, you're probably not likely, or even able, to run out and buy a house. But, depending on how you — *you* — want your life to develop, you can begin working toward some of your goals. You can start saving money so that someday you can afford a down



**You decide what's most important to you. Then, you build the rest of your life around that.**

payment on a home. If you're stuck in a desk job, you can hike through a national forest or backpack through Europe on your vacation.

Maybe you want to live in a small town, but the best job for someone with your skills is in a big city. OK, you're going to have to compromise, and that's part of life, too.

You decide what's most important to you. Then, you build the rest of your life around that. If that big-city job is what you really, really want, you'll put on hold the dream of living in a small town. If you love the idea of living in a downtown high-rise but have a job in the far suburbs, you'll choose to put up with the long daily commute. Or you won't — you'll find a place to live near your work.

## **Free time**

Adults get to decide how they spend their time. Now you are one of them. What are you going to do with your free time?

You can spend hours on your computer or smartphone. You can jog. You can do volunteer work. You can go to church. You can host a party. Read. Lift weights. Shop. Dance. Have a picnic. Tinker with your car. Sky-dive. Write poetry. Sing in a choir. Act in a play. Tend a garden. Swim. Cook. Dine out. Whatever. The world can be an exciting place, but only if you make it so.

Life offers a huge menu of options. Sit there, study it — and then start ordering.

## **Friends and lovers**

You'll have some friends from the old neighborhood or from your school days with whom you will keep in contact. In addition, you'll meet new people wherever you work, and you may become friendly with some of them.

But, really, the world's open to you now when it comes to finding new friends.

Of course, you'll meet people at parties and at bars, but a great way is to join groups, including young adult groups at your parish or in your diocese (if they're not too lame).

The more groups you join, the more you'll get to exercise and express different aspects of yourself. You'll get to know more about yourself. Also, you'll get to find people who share your views and interests and enjoyments and pas-

sions. This is especially true if you volunteer somewhere and somehow to help make the world a better place.

Do tutoring at a local school one night a week. Join a political campaign or a community organization. Feed the poor. There will be other men and women, young and old, who will be doing the same thing. You'll share the same desire to help others. And that's a good basis for developing friendships. Or a romance.

The idea of loving one person can be scary, but it is also exciting. You'll have to allow yourself to be vulnerable, and recognize and respect the vulnerability of others.

Ideally, your parents are supposed to love you, and you're supposed to love your parents. The same is true with siblings and other relatives. Romance, though, is a different story. You'll get to look for and find someone whose spirit, values, and enthusiasms fit yours. Not perfectly — that's impossible. But closely enough and in the right ways. Someone to love.

Love is a journey of discovery. You'll learn more, understand more, about the one you love and in the process grow to love the person even more.

And, in that same process, you learn more about yourself. In a reflection of the other's love for you, you'll come to see yourself better and understand yourself better. And even learn to love yourself better.

## QUESTION

- What are the most exciting options in your life right now? Discuss them with your friends. Make at least one choice and stick to it for at least a year.