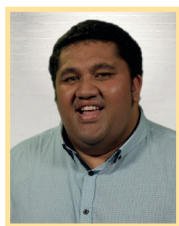


Blessed, broken and given



remembering



Michael Tanuvasa Kelemete

Hello, my name is Michael.

I am a fifth-year seminarian and currently in my internship at the parish of Our Lady of the Rosary, Kenmore-Moggill. This year the Church has dedicated a year for youth and vocational discernment.

I would like to share with you my journey of vocational discernment so far.

The foundations of my vocational pathway had its early beginnings in Auckland, New Zealand. I was raised and immersed into the Samoan culture. I was deeply rooted in our faith by my grandparents.

They gave me my first exposure of understanding my religious identity and gave me an ongoing formation in the faith. Our grandparents also immersed us into the life of the parish. We attended Sunday school, we were part of the youth group, and involved with altar serving. Our faith formation was not limited at Church. It was ongoing at home where we continued a cultural practice from Samoa where every evening half an hour was dedicated for evening prayer, as well as a time to gather as a family.

As the years progressed I took on leadership roles within the parish. I was asked to carry on the teaching that had been handed on to me and took up the role of a Sunday school teacher. Beyond the walls of the parish I volunteered my time with YouthTown and Auckland City Youth Council where we ran free events for young people in Auckland. I was excited as I looked towards the future. My employment at the time was in the fields of warehousing, pathology, and hospitality. I was looking at the possible options of pursuing a dream of running a catering business or being a chef.

Reviewing my career pathway, I wasn't expecting any sudden obstacles until I had encountered the death of my grandpa, who was the pillar in my faith. Everything that I planned to achieve – and hopefully be successful in – came to a sudden stop and the idea of being a chef vanished as well. This had been the most challenging obstacle to overcome. I was trying to adjust to making amendments and seeking support in my time of grief. I was seeking sources, or avenues, to fill these wounds, but they were temporary. It was the encounter with my uncle, who is a priest, that helped me to get back on track and to reconnect into my spiritual life.

I felt that this was the churning stage of my discernment, re-establishing my connections with the parish life and beyond. There was a time when I thought that the parishioners had been cued to say to me every day either 'You will make a priest', 'I can see you being a priest', and 'Have you thought of being a priest?' At this stage I was not fazed by these ideas but was more focused on reaching that goal of potentially being a chef or running a successful catering company.

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

Blessed
+
Broken

However, I felt that every time I wanted to reach and achieve this goal it felt like I was being side-tracked. I had an opportunity to talk with my parish priest and he said to me that 'people can see potential aspects of a priest in me and I can also see that you will make a good priest.' I just didn't know how to react and felt confused and not sure which path to take, either priesthood or fulfil this dream of a running a successful catering company. It was at World Youth Day, 2008, in Sydney at the closing Mass where the Holy Father said:

Dear young people, let me now ask you a question. What will you leave to the next generation? Are you building your lives on firm foundations, building something that will endure? Are you living your lives in a way that opens up space for the Spirit in the midst of a world that wants to forget God, or even rejects him in the name of a falsely-conceived freedom? How are you using the gifts you have been given, the 'power' which the Holy Spirit is even now prepared to release within you? What legacy will you leave to young people yet to come? What difference will you make?

Once World Youth Day had finished I wrestled with these questions for a long time. My parish priest challenged me to be open to the Holy Spirit. One way I felt I could test these waters was volunteering my time to be a missionary and I signed up with NET (National Evangelisation Teams) Ministries Australia. It was in my second year of NET when I gave up fighting and wrestling this call. I felt a sense of peace.

After NET, I journeyed alongside the Vocations team here in Brisbane, going through Canali House and then to Holy Spirit Seminary. I recall the day leaving New Zealand and getting a blessing from my former parish priest. The words I will never forget are 'If I am dead or alive I believe that you will be a great priest, or, you will working with young people.' He died on my birthday some time later.

During my fourth year of study, I undertook CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education). It's a course at Logan Hospital. CPE is an ecumenical course and it was a great opportunity to be immersed in, and be enriched by those from other faith communities and seeing their faith in action. Being sent out to Logan hospital was a challenge. I needed to meet the demands of a wide variety of cultures. It would have been easy to find people of my own ethnic background and relate to them. However I learnt to be there for all the patients as well as their families as I offered pastoral care to them.

There was one instance that really brought home for me the pastoral role I will play as priest; a bridge between people and God. Earlier this year, in March, I lost my grandmother, who was very dear to all of our family. One day at the Logan hospital, not long after her passing, I was called to assist a nurse with translating the words of a dying Samoan lady. It was incredibly hard because the first thing I noticed was the lady's perfume, which was exactly the same as my grandmothers. Fortunately the lady was blind so she could not see that I was, somewhat choking up. The nurse too was very concerned for me but as I held that dear patient's hand I found the strength to perform my role; to minister to her, and also help the nurse. The Lord turned my brokenness into a strength.

It was a transforming experience for us all – the patient, the nurse and myself. These little points of connection, and acts of kindness, I believe, can help heal the broken and raise up the lowly. I hope to live out this vocation daily through being a priest and serving the people of God.

Thank you for listening to my story. Please pray for me as I continue my journey.

