

INTO YOUR HANDS – NOVEMBER 2025

Living Your Vocation with Joy is a Powerful Witness

As a young seminarian serving at St. Agnes of Bohemia parish in Chicago's Little Village neighborhood, I came to appreciate many customs and traditions that I had never heard of as the son of an Irish immigrant. One of these customs was *la mordida* or "the bite." This custom is a playful Mexican birthday practice wherein the birthday person's face is pushed into the cake for the first bite, often accompanied by guests shouting "Mordida!" and resulting in great laughter, memorable photos, and enduring memories.

Most people would be taken aback if someone shoved their face into a birthday cake, but the custom of *la mordida* is rooted in love and serves as a blessed reminder of the family and friends who accompany us through life, whether we are together in joy, as at a birthday celebration, or gathered in sorrow.

The mess that one is left with (a face covered in cake and frosting!) can be a fitting reminder to the birthday boy or girl that life's journey will be messy. With each passing year, we are invited to take a big bite out of life and choose to live fully engaged in the adventure with which God has blessed us. And yet, many of us are fearful of that bite, unable to give ourselves over to the potential messiness that life can bring. When we surrender ourselves to the will of God, which may involve subordinating ourselves to others, it can be frightening.

God calls each of us to a moment of surrender, to give ourselves over to the purpose for which God has made us, whether that be through the priesthood, religious life, marriage, or the single life. Our vocational call comes as a gift from God through the community that surrounds us.

There are the voices inviting us to take the bite, *Mordida!*, and give ourselves over to God's call, regardless of the mess or even humiliation that may come with it.

In a culture that generally puts personal freedom above all else, we may struggle to discern and give ourselves over to our life's vocation. If we look around, we see that fewer of our neighbors are seeking marriage or considering a call to the priesthood or religious life. Yet, while the world around us might find it odd to surrender ourselves to God and commit to others, doing so results in life's greatest joys.

The first time I witnessed the custom of *mordida* I found it quite strange – a crowd of people shouting at someone to take a bite out of their cake and then shoving their face into that cake. That did not make sense to me! However, as I came to know the people and their traditions, I began to embrace the beauty of their customs. That birthday tradition became for me a celebration of life and a reminder that no one should live alone or isolated. As I have allowed my own face to be shoved into a cake, I have experienced the joy of being loved by others, who have encouraged me to embrace my vocation and experience the utter sweetness that a life well-lived can offer.

By joyfully and faithfully living out our vocations, we become witnesses for others. We must be bold in revealing ourselves and our Catholic traditions to the world around us. As others come to know us and see the commitment with which we live our vocations of marriage, holy orders, consecrated life or single life, they too might choose to embrace our traditions. Our vocational witness today may serve to invite others tomorrow to be unafraid, trust in God, and take a big bite out of life.