

Franciscan Living



Another Poverty: Letting Go

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I remember when I was undergoing initial formation in the Order; one of the questions asked of me was “What would be a difficult thing for you to give up?” My response then was that “things” would not be difficult since I was not into status or acquiring things, but “people” would be a hardship for me. As a person with early losses of family, the remaining family I possessed was near and dear to my heart. The idea of giving up certain people through death would be hard for me. I still have this fear today.

For those of us who have been parents, parenting can be an experience of loss of control and “letting go.” We have to let go of our wishes for our children as they grow to make their own decisions. Sometimes, we have to let them go to make the wrong decisions, so they can learn from them what is truly important.

However, I have also realized that besides people, I have difficulty in letting go of many other things. Letting go of my own desires, assumptions, and concepts of how things should or shouldn't be, top the list. I am a person of opinions and goals, with comfortable routines and structure in my life. What if these were taken away? Would I despair, get angry about the “unfairness” of life or embrace with gracious love this new gift of subtraction?

We tend to forget that *all* is “gift.” Who we are and what we have is all gift! We do not “earn” things; we are given them by our Lord and Father. If these gifts were taken away, could I say like Job, “The Lord gives and the Lords takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord?”

Francis had a profound sense of “gift.” Since he chose to live with such material poverty, he never assumed his next meal or bed. When it was provided, he directly attributed it to God and thanked Him for the gift. However, even Francis had difficulty “letting go.” Although Francis was no longer Minister General of the Order, he found that it difficult to see a different path the Order was taking than the one given to him by the Father. Francis was stripped and

given the gift of a new type of poverty which forced him to rely even more on God alone.

Voluntarily letting go or giving up something may be hard but if we are stripped, like Francis, of what we hold near and dear to us, well that is something we are not prepared for! No one likes doing something which we have no control over, but sometime in our lifetime we are led to a place where we do not want to go. You can count on it - it is part of the spiritual life! We suffer with our loss of control and grieve over what might have been. It is not easy.

It has been said that we all suffer because we are all human and we live in a sinful world. However, the more we cling to the past, our desires, and our control over things, the more we miss out on the real gifts that the Lord has given us. He has given us the chance to grow closer to Him without the trappings of “things” and without “us” getting in the way. As we are stripped of what is not of God, then perhaps we are free to share His life more abundantly.

This can also apply to our spiritual life. We can cling to our consolations and the ways we have always “heard” our own personal voice of God. Recently, I pondered the scene of the Resurrection in John's gospel. (John 20:13-18) Mary Magdalene went to the tomb, and pleaded with “the gardener” to tell her where they had put the Lord. Then she realized that the person she was already talking to was the Lord, but she failed to recognize Him! Mary tried to grab onto Him but was told not to hold onto him because he had not yet ascended to the Father.

Sometimes, we too cling to our concept of what God should be or how He should act. We fail to recognize Him because we have not let go of our own perceptions and wishes. We get angry when our prayers are not answered or when dryness occurs in our prayer life. We cling to our consolations but God may be saying to us: grow up and let go of even our expectations of Him! He may be teaching us not to box Him into preconceived notions based upon our past, but to be free to find Him in new ways. We may need to let go of our control over our spiritual life and let God lead us, even when we do not know where we are going. The Lord desires us to be wholly His, without reservations, expectations or attachments. The more we trust in Him, the more we show our love for Him.

The Lord and My All!