

Franciscan Living



Entitlement and Gratitude

By Francine Gikow, SFO, Staff Editor

“Please give me this Lord... God, please fix that... Take care of this problem... why did you allow this to happen? WHY ME?”

Have you ever prayed with those words? I sure have! We feel entitled to having God fix things that are beyond our control, and when He doesn't fix them to our satisfaction, we get angry, depressed and lose faith in Him. In other words, we feel entitled.

We see this entitlement in society when the already rich feel that they have earned the right to bend the rules (e.g. Bernie Madoff and the AIG scandal), or when people cut in front of lines because they have an important business meeting, or even when they ask for exceptions to a rule because they are so important!

As my kids were growing up, I realized how our society instills an “entitlement” mentality among our youngsters. We have all seen entitlement's effects: self-importance, selfishness, and pride. I wondered how to teach them gratitude.

Since entitlement is so insidious and pervasive in our culture, we fall into its trap and before we know it, we feel entitled in our spiritual life as well. How often do we complain about the unfairness of life? Why do I have a life filled with sorrows and crosses? Why me? Poor me!

We might also feel entitled because we are His special friends. After all, haven't we earned special treatment

since we pray so much and live exemplary lives? Why shouldn't He answer our prayers in the way we want? Then why did St. Theresa complain that if God treats his friends this way, then it is no wonder why He has so few?

Well, I hate to say it, but we earn...nothing! It is ALL GIFT! We do not earn our way in the spiritual life except by love and perseverance. We are nothing by ourselves, for as Francis has stated, “What you are before God that you are and no more.”¹

Well then, why *not* me? Why *shouldn't* I get a life filled with sorrows and crosses? After all, don't I realize that I *am* getting specialized treatment? Those sorrows and crosses are there to refine my love so that I can love more perfectly. I am called by my profession to “follow Christ”² and that “Christ, the gift of the Father's love, is the way to Him.”³

*“Likewise, even if you were more handsome and richer than everyone else and even if you performed wonders...all these things would be an obstacle to you and none of them would belong to you, nor could you glory in any of these things. But in this we can glory: in our infirmities and bearing daily the holy cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*⁴

Isn't that a reason why I should be grateful? I am becoming closer to the Crucified! It is the love of the cross - the Crucified One who shares my troubles and my very life and I share in His!

St. Francis was a person filled with gratitude! He never took anything for granted. He revered the gifts God had given him and never attributed anything to his own efforts. Because of holy poverty, Francis relied totally on God for everything, so it is no wonder that Francis saw everything as GIFT! In reality, nothing is really ours - not our bodies, not our talents, or what we own. When we realize that all is gift, we become grateful. How can we *not* be grateful for all the good things that we receive? The secret is in seeing the Gift! All is gift; all is love! Gratitude follows.

*“...all good, supreme good, totally good. You who alone are good, may we give You all praise, all glory, all thanks, all honor: all blessing, and all good things. So be it. So be it. Amen.”*⁵

¹ Admon. XIX, 2.

² SFO Rule 1, #1

³ SFO Rule 2, #4

⁴ Admon. V, 7-8

⁵ Praises To Be Said At All Hours: 11