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A TIME FOR COURAGE

I have often wondered how the great Franciscan saints, such, as St. Clare of Assisi, just “knew” what God wanted. How did St. Clare feel so sure that the “privilege of poverty” was what God wanted from the Poor Clare nuns even when the Pope and many others, forced them to do the opposite? Why did St. Clare stand her ground, convinced that this was the path wanted by God for the Poor Clares? Did she have doubts when Pope Gregory IX (previously Cardinal Hugolino) insisted that Clare live a rule contrary to the privilege of poverty and her convictions?

I think this problem is one faced by many when we try to discern God’s path for us, especially when it comes to discernment for office in the Secular Franciscan Order.

As a member of a regional nominating committee, I have seen first hand, how many of our members try to discern God’s will for them when they have been nominated to an office. They ask themselves, am I available for meetings, visitations? Am I able to be free enough from family responsibilities to fulfill the office requirements? Am I physically able to undertake the traveling required for the position?

All these questions are right and just. However, if they asked themselves whether or not they would “like” to be in the office, it would be immaterial. Discernment is not about likes or dislikes at all! God can draw us past our own preferences. In fact, the correct discernment is whether it is God’s will for the individual and for the order.

But how do we do this?

How do we really know if it is God’s will for the order and for us?

Thankfully, we can rely on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit during the voting to confirm for us if we are to hold office in the Secular Franciscan Order.

However, I find that many people do not even allow themselves to get to the step of being on the ballot.

First, of all, let us not have any illusions about holding office in the Secular Franciscan Order. We are never worthy! We are never ready! We are never “old enough,” nor prepared enough, nor (fill in the blank) enough!

It has been said that God takes the unworthy, the unready and the most unlikely, to serve His purposes. We just have to be willing.

Recently, I had been nominated for an office, I felt unprepared to accept. I prayed about the “cons” and the “pros.” I discussed it with my spiritual director and still felt unsure. Then, a “Call of Jeremiah” prayer card fell out of my journal: (*Jer.1:6-10*):

“Ah, Lord God!” I said,
I know not how to speak:
I am too young.”

But the Lord answered me,
Say not, “I am too young.”

To whomever I send you,
you shall go;
Whatever I command you,
you shall speak

Have no fear before them.

Then the Lord extended

His hand

And touched my mouth,
saying,

See, I place my words in
your mouth!”

“OK, Lord, I thought. Maybe I need to accept this nomination.” This thought was confirmed through discussions with work when I discovered a way to allot more time if needed to the Secular Franciscan council position. Then doubts came flooding into my mind!

How can I do this?

There are others nominated more qualified than I.

Perhaps then, I don’t need to accept the nomination.

Again, an inspiration came to me and God wasn’t letting me off the hook. How dare I lack the courage for something God might be asking of me? Don’t I love Him enough? By refusing the nomination, am I just being selfish by staying in my comfort zone? Can I trust Him enough?

Am I willing to take risks for God and leave it up to Him to decide if I was meant to serve in this office? Is it my will and need for self-determination or is it God’s will?

Subsequently, I decided that I needed to show my love for God by having courage and being willing to take a risk. A Secular Franciscan friend also reminded me that the Lord makes us “ready” when it is the right time to be ready and not necessarily when we “think” we are. He gives us His grace, which is sufficient for us.

Think of accepting a nomination for office as a way to show your love to God in a radical freeing way. It is a time where we can demonstrate how we can rely on Him alone!

We don’t have to be perfect. We just have to be willing. God will do the rest.

