

FRANCISCAN LIVING

GOD TAKES OVER

By Francine Gikow, OFS

“Profession is the act by which a person places him/herself into the hands of God, enabling God to take hold of him, with the result that from the precise moment of Profession, the person no longer belongs to him/herself, but is considered as totally “expropriated” and at God’s entire disposal. By virtue of Profession, the person becomes God’s property, and therefore “sacred.”¹

By these words, Br. Felice Cangelosi, OFM, Cap., described how we give ourselves totally to God at the time of our profession. We have given to God what Fr. Richard Trezza, OFM, terms, “a blank check” with our lives! This is a pretty scary promise when you think about it! The full ramifications of this pledge are hard to imagine when we are called to live with God being in charge of our lives and not ourselves.

In actuality, we are never really in charge of our lives. God is! However, we think we are in charge, and we delude ourselves when it is really our self-centeredness trying to control rather than giving all to God.

Francis surely knew about giving himself over to the Lord and letting God direct his life! It is one of the wonders of Francis! God had a mission for Francis, but Francis needed to let go of his own wishes of knighthood, heroism and pleasure. It is the same with us. As St. Paul writes: “...How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord?”² Only God knows His plan for us. We only have to offer our lives to Him so He can do with it what He wills.

The words, “the person no longer belongs to him/herself, but is considered as totally ‘expropriated’ and at God’s entire disposal” are quite daunting when we have learned from infancy to rely only on ourselves. Our American culture revels in our independence and self-sufficiency. What we have promised has gone against some of the deepest ingrained values of our society. It is no wonder that we find it difficult to voluntarily offer our lives to God who is inexplicable and powerful! It may sound beautiful in concept to offer myself to the Lord, but the reality of it is difficult and hard. Only by the constant renewal of our profession, as well as our prayer-filled efforts of detachment and conversion, can we hope to progress in our offering of self to God.

One of the on-going ways we turn our lives over to God is through discernment. There are many ways to discern, but the end result is our search for how God wants us to act or “be” in a certain situation. We listen

to Him through scripture, through prayer, through the people in our lives. It is His will, not ours. As Jesus prayed to His Father in the agony of the garden, “...yet not what I want but what you want.”³

We have to reorient ourselves from “what I want” to “what God wants,” and that is not always easy! It takes a certain “poverty” of self or detachment. Of course, we can’t remove all our preferences as to what we may wish to happen, but we must remain open to God’s will as revealed in our lives. This humility, detachment of our will, is our offering. It is our sacrifice.

We also have to ask the Lord for the confirmation of our discernment, since we can deceive ourselves and unknowingly build up barriers, especially in those areas where we do not want to go. We have to let go of our feelings about the results of our discernment, since then we can be truly open to the Lord. The best outcome for us is to be neutral in our wishes for the result, because then it is truly God’s will and not ours. Sometimes I wrestle with a discernment trying to be free of my own wishes and offer it up to God in sacrifice. Sometimes after discernment is done, I find that the result is not really what God had in mind after all. Sometimes, I think God just wants me to offer myself to Him to do with whatever He wills. It may be my intention and willingness, rather than the end result, which matters most to God. In short, it is my love for Him that matters.

When God is truly in charge of our lives, our future life becomes a mystery: a mystery of where we are going and what we will be doing. Our future plans become more open to the often times unknown ways of the Lord. We find that this takes trust. Little by little we learn to trust the unknown God. Slowly, God peels away our sense of autonomy as we begin to rely on Him and follow His ways. God becomes greater while “I” become smaller. He has expropriated us for Himself; we become His property and therefore become “sacred.”

As Secular Franciscans, we have committed ourselves to live a penitential life with detachment and continual conversion toward God. It means letting go of our self-determination for God’s way of being. This self-sacrifice is what pleases God. As Br. Cangelosi added: “They, by promising to live the gospel life, make themselves entirely available to God and place their own bodies (persons) on the altar of Christ’s sacrifice as a holy victim pleasing to God... It is a commitment of life and for life.”⁴

1 Br. Felice Cangelosi, OFM, Cap. “Profession in the SFO: Gift and Commitment,” Address to the International Chapter, OFS, 2008, II:10.

2 Rom.11:33-34.

3 Matt.26:39

4 Cangelosi, II:6.