



2 February 2010, #224

Capuchin Vocation Update

Province of St. Joseph

Capuchin Novice Shares Deeply

by Br. Quan Nguyen

(Br. Quan is currently in his second year of full-time Capuchin formation. After finishing his year of postulancy at St. Conrad Friary in Milwaukee, he and his four other classmates gathered with the rest of the postulants from the other Capuchin provinces in North America, Guam, and Australia to live at the Inter-Provincial Novitiate residence near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The Novitiate year mainly focuses on prayer and interior growth but also includes local ministry, informal studies, and the nurturing of community life. Quan is originally from Milwaukee, Wisconsin.)

“One often meets his destiny on the road he takes to avoid it.” That is what Oogway the turtle says to Shifu in the movie *Kung Fu Panda*. You are probably asking yourself, “Why is this guy quoting an animated children’s film in a Vocation Update?” Well, the answer is simple—that is what I did. This movie line sums up my journey to where I am today. I ran away from and avoided my destiny for years, and it just ended up there anyways...The Capuchins.



Life was a struggle in every way after I graduated from St. Lawrence Seminary, a Capuchin operated prep school in Mt. Calvary, Wisconsin. I could not do anything right. Every goal turned into a failure. Breaking the promise I made to my father on his death bed, “I’ll be the best man I can be and be someone you can be proud of.” I had come short in every way possible. I had the responsibility of keeping my father’s name respectable and was failing in every way possible.

I was scared, maybe even terrified. So, I did everything in my power to avoid joining or even talking about joining the Capuchins. There was no way I was going to let another thing that I wanted like the Capuchins or the priesthood, which I had dreamed of since the tender age of five, be added to my long list of failures. I always said I was not ready, hoping to follow through with some kind of accomplishment before I would think of entering the order. The accomplishments never came.

The fear grew and grew, and I let that fear engulf my life until life wasted away. I wanted the world to just stop moving until I was ready to move with it, but I knew as well as anyone else that the world was going to keep moving with or without me. I needed some kind of change or for a better use of terms, conversion. This is when I learned my all-time favorite Bible passage, Jeremiah 29:11.

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

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Vocation Update

It hit me that maybe things were not prospering because I was running away from what God had planned for me. To quote Oogway again “Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, but today is a gift. That is why it is called the present.” I needed to stop living in the past and start embracing the gifts God blesses me with everyday. With all of that in mind, I took the plunge.

Now, I am here in Novitiate and am not going to lie. It has been a struggle since joining Capuchin formation, but why should I be surprised? My whole adult life, which literally began the day my father passed, has been a struggle. But I will give you this - Capuchin life has been one of the most if not the most prosperous times of my entire life. Being here in Novitiate has given me a lot of time for reflection. The same question has always challenged me. Why me, God? Everyone here is so talented and gifted while I am so average. So, why me? Do not think that I am selling myself short. God has blessed me with the awareness of what I am capable of and what I am not. He has blessed me with the ability to do well enough in all things and not do terribly at anything. Hence, my talent is being average.

After spending countless reflection time on the matter, I have finally come to a conclusion. It reminds me of another quote from another children’s animated film, *Ratatouille*. In *Ratatouille*, Chef Gusteau says, “Anyone can cook.” Anyone can follow Christ. With Christ by one’s side, one can accomplish anything. Christ calls anyone and everyone to follow Him. He calls us all to something more and to do something more with our lives, which can be done through all types of vocations whether that’s the priesthood, religious life, single life, or marriage. No one vocation is better than the others, but what fits the best for me is the Capuchin life. I just need to find a gift I can contribute being in a “world” where so many have extraordinary talents and I do not stand out.

Yes, so far, Capuchin life has been a struggle. I am about halfway through my Novitiate year, and it really is not getting any easier. But why fret about it? Life in general is a struggle. Why do we fall down? So we can pick ourselves back up. God gives us the means. We just have to put forth the effort. With my trust in God and Christ by my side, I have found a life where I can truly be prosperous and bring the gift of fraternity which I learned from my years at St. Lawrence. Anyone who has ever gone to or has been connected to St. Lawrence has to agree that the fraternity and brotherhood that are instilled there are some of the greatest things one can experience in life. So, what better way to live life than as a Capuchin friar, spreading that sense of fraternity to the world and maybe one day even teaching it and instilling that same sense of fraternity in the young men of tomorrow?

Upcoming Vocation Weekends

Feb. 26-28 Milwaukee Ministry and Discernment Weekend

March 12-14 Pre-Postulancy Information Weekend, Milwaukee, WI

April 1-4 Triduum Retreat
St. Lawrence Friary and Seminary
Mt. Calvary, Wisconsin

Reservations are required.

New inquirers are welcome!

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