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Discernment and the Gospel of John

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The Gospel of John points to a hope that goes beyond any decision or indecision that we will ever make. There can sometimes be an underlying feeling during periods of discernment that if we make the wrong decision that God will sort of abandon us like a disappointed boss who abandons a worker who cannot get the job done. The Gospel of John can be very complex, multi-dimensional, and difficult to understand. On another level however, the basic message of John is very clear and simple. That message is that Jesus clearly reveals God's intense love for the world. It is a simple message that goes very deep. Throughout the Gospel of John Jesus keeps repeating that he is in the Father and the Father is in him. Therefore we have confidence that what Jesus says reveals what the Father is trying to say. In his prayer in the seventeenth chapter of John, Jesus says, **"...you loved them even as you loved me. Father, they are your gift to me. I wish that where I am they also may be with me..."** If we read these lines carefully, what we find is a very personal, secure type of love. A person's attempt at belief in the faithfulness and intimate love of God for them, no matter what happens, is a crucial backdrop for discernment. It is what gives us hope.



That you may have life and have it more abundantly

My experience of discernment is not a very rosy one. Without getting into a whole theology of discernment, let us just say that discernment can often feel confusing, stressful, and full of grief and loss. Hints of God's presence are pure gift. Why discernment often feels this way, I'm not sure, but what I am sure of is God's intention for us and for others. That desire is for everyone to have life and have it abundantly. Everyone continues to discern for the rest of their lives, but that discernment most likely will be less stressful than vocational discernment. With time and healing, one actually begins to accept God's peace and the abundance of life by the grace of God that comes with a new way of seeing the world and new relationships in our lives. Beautiful relationships that are sometimes lost because of the commitments to religious life are held precious by God and will be healed, restored, and brought to fulfillment at the resurrection or when God decides. The signs and sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John point to an abundance of life that seems to contradict the poverty and restriction that some associate with religious life. The difference is that as a person grows closer to God's way of loving, they begin to notice and appreciate the relationships that most people do not notice. These are relationships with the poor, the suffering, and with our sisters and brothers around us that we often take for granted. We stay with people in the midst of suffering. This is the suffering, the truth, the depth, and the richness of life.

Vocation Update

He took a towel and wrapped it around his waist

Again, Jesus kept repeating that he is in the Father and the Father is in him. It was difficult for Peter to grasp the notion of God's service to humanity. For Jesus to wash the feet of the disciples says something about the character of God. God, our teacher and master, shows us that authority and humility are bound together by love. Grounded in God's love for us, discernment now takes us to the constant question of how can we best wash the feet of our brothers and sisters. The humility of washing feet was similar to the humiliation of the cross. "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." Although sometimes circumstances tragically result in this such as the case of Oscar Romero and countless others, I do not think that our discipleship will normally lead to death for the sake of others; God's desire is abundant life for us. Perhaps instead God might be asking us to lay down our arrogance, to lay down a self-controlled future for a Holy Spirit inspired future, to take up listening to honest feedback from others, to take up an imitation of God's faithfulness to the suffering or those of whom we dislike, and to take up the willingness to listen for the cry of the poor. By pondering and practicing these things daily, we come to a greater clarity of whether we are called to consecrated life, married life, or single life.

A charcoal fire on the beach

The night is over. It is morning. Jesus, at a charcoal fire on the beach, grills bread and fish and says to the disciples, "Come, have breakfast." Entering into a period of discernment (sometimes we choose to do this, sometimes we can not avoid it) is to enter a process that we do not have the personal resources to complete. It is like being swallowed by a 90 day storm with only 4 days worth of food. We know we will have to ask for help from God and the people around us to get through each day. We struggle to trust that things will turn out all right. The key is that in the discernment and the struggle we come to know something of God. We also learn more about ourselves by feedback from others. Our relationship with God deepens and we get a better sense of trust and of how God operates even though this is an incomplete knowledge. It is like God and yourself have been through some tough times together and you have scars as a result. As Thomas examined the scars of Jesus, allow God to examine yours. For the disciples, this time of storm was nearing its completion and the dawn was breaking, but there was unfinished business. The God of healing is continually at work. Jesus asked the question that stings and heals at the same time, "Do you love me?" "Of course," we say. Jesus replies, "Feed my sheep." There are no quick answers for how to figure out how to make this more real and practical in our lives. We are not programmed robots. We are all constant seekers living with constant questions, but we do develop a more matured relationship with God as we grow older that normally helps us feel more certain of God's love and more sensitive to God's call to serve. We are all human beings sharing grilled fish, bread and our various paths together on the morning beach with Jesus our healer, our companion, and our Way.

April 1-4, 2010 Capuchin Candidate Triduum Retreat

St. Lawrence Friary, Mt. Calvary, Wisconsin
Presenter: Gianluigi Pascuale, OFM Cap.

***Please pray for the Capuchin Candidates and Cap
Corp Volunteers in attendance.***

How does one begin to discern a religious vocation?

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or visit www.CapuchinFranciscans.org

and click on <How to Begin>

April 6-9, 2010

The Spirituality of Padre Pio

St. Francis Institute Milwaukee

1927 N. 4th Street, Milwaukee, WI 53212

This event is open to the general public

Visit www.thecapuchins.org/sfim/index.shtml

for registration procedures.