



OFS-USA

NATIONAL FRATERNITY OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER-USA



NATIONAL MINISTER'S MESSAGE

by Jan Parker OFS

CHOSEN FOR EACH OTHER

When Mike and Michelle moved in across the street two years ago, I welcomed them to the neighborhood. Since then, we take time to chat when we see each other outside. Last fall, when I was diagnosed with cancer, I let my neighbors know that I would be away a few weeks, as I would be recovering from surgery at my son's house. Mike and Michelle immediately wanted to know what they could do to help me. I asked if they could keep an eye on the house and water my plants. Michelle quickly replied, "We'd be happy to do that. Please let us know if there's anything else, ok?"

Shortly after I returned home, Mike and Michelle walked over to say hello and see how I was doing. I shared that things were going well, but I had started chemotherapy and was tired much of the time. They again assured me that if I needed anything, they were there for me. Michelle said, "Jan, even if you just need a drink of water and you are too tired to get up, just call me, ok?" Then Mike, who has always struck me as more reserved, warmly added, "We're supposed to love our neighbor, so let us do that." To this day, their words remain in my heart. Those Gospel words spoke to me.

A book that has accompanied me during this past year poses this question: "Has it ever occurred to you that the people that surround you have, in some way, been sent to you by God?" It goes on to say, "They have been chosen, and you have been chosen to circle through one another's lives as a welcoming presence, a constant blessing."¹ I believe God chose Mike and Michelle to be in my life at this time, not simply because of my need for help, but for their witness of living and sharing the Gospel message. There is now a wonderful bridge of caring between their home and mine, a bridge built upon the words of Jesus.

Being *chosen for each other* has great significance for us as Franciscans, both in our fraternities and in our everyday lives. When we focus on others as "a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ" we will approach them with a certain reverence. Our encounters and interactions will be marked by holiness, conversion, and transformation. Without this perspective we miss the blessing of others whom God has chosen to be part of our lives. We close ourselves off to grace-filled possibilities.



Enjoying some homemade chicken soup at Jake and Megan's after surgery

As the Father sees in every person the features of his Son, the firstborn of many brothers and sisters, so the Secular Franciscans with a gentle and courteous spirit accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ.

OFS Rule, Art. 13

I found a good example of this in the film series *The Chosen*.² The early episodes unfold the call of the apostles, and we clearly see how these first followers of Jesus were real people, with distinct personalities and quite different backgrounds. We see how the apostles question why Jesus chose this person, or that person. In particular, we see Simon struggling when Matthew, the tax collector, is invited to follow. While the apostles realize they have been chosen to follow Jesus, they do not yet see how they have also been chosen for each other. It would take Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit to unite them.

We can experience a similar situation in fraternity life as we struggle with the faults and shortcomings we see

¹ Macrina Wiederkehr in *The Flowing Grace of Now*, p. 98

² *The Chosen* is a television drama based on the life of Jesus Christ, created, directed, and co-written by American filmmaker Dallas Jenkins. It is the first multi-season series about the life of Christ, and season one was the highest crowd-funded TV series or film project of all time. The series portrays Jesus through the eyes of those who met him. (Wikipedia)

in our sisters or brothers. The temptation is to shake our heads, look up to heaven and say, "Lord, you are certainly giving me many opportunities to practice patience!" But is this really what God desires, that we put up with each other?

If we genuinely believe that *we are chosen for each other*, we will look at our sisters and brothers much

differently. We will no longer see their faults and shortcomings, but we will connect at a deeper level. Spiritual growth does not come from putting up with each other, but from our openness to the presence of the Spirit among us, conforming us to the way of love. It is for this we were chosen.

"The Lord, therefore, cries aloud to us to come and drink, if we are thirsty within; and he says that when we have drunk, rivers of living water will flow from our heart...What is the river that flows from the heart of the inner man? The love of his neighbor. For if he thinks that what he drinks ought to only satisfy himself, there is no living water flowing from his heart. But if he does good to his neighbor, the stream is not dried up but flows."

St. Augustine, Tractates on the Gospel of John

May the fraternal bonds of community always be our help, so that we may reach the goal of perfect Christian love."

from the Secular Franciscan Rite of Profession to the Gospel Life

