

The Local Fraternity the privileged place

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So states Article 22 of our Rule. Privileged place for what? *For developing a sense of church and the Franciscan vocation and for enlivening the apostolic life of its members.*

For this brief reflection, I'm going to focus on developing the Franciscan vocation.

Anne and I were privileged, recently, to partake in an International Formation Seminar. The material I choose to share with you comes from this endeavor.

The entire essence of formation is centered on this very theme, developing the Franciscan vocation. Formation begins by helping the persons in Orientation discern whether or not they have a Franciscan vocation. Formators and Spiritual Assistants must be aware of the intricacies of discernment and aid those persons seeking information about the Order. Anne addressed the gathering on this pertinent topic.

The importance of the call, the vocation, was addressed by Fr. Martin Bitzer, OFM Conv. He equated its importance to the call of Abraham and that of Moses. He insisted that God has placed an unrepeatable call on each of our hearts. No one else can accomplish the mission God has chosen for each of us individually. If each of us does not answer this call to its fullest, that portion of God's mission is left undone. We must help those in formation discern exactly what is the charism given specifically to them. Once discerned, we must help them decide how to put this charism into practice.

Yet, why is the fraternity is the privileged place for developing the vocation? Fr. Felice Cangelosi, OFM Cap. gave an incredible account as to the importance of Profession. This act in its component parts, the individual act made by the candidate coming into the Order and the communal act of the fraternity in accepting this new person, opens anew the entire fraternity to the working of the Holy Spirit. Fr. Felice claims that each profession is to be experienced as a new Pentecost!

Profession is seen first of all as an act of commitment, a renewal of one's baptismal promises. In full freedom and in full awareness of the change that is being exacted on their lives, persons dedicate their lives to God. They no longer belong to themselves but to God.

They give themselves over to God's service to live out the mission God has chosen for the individual. God responds to this dedication, by consecrating, gracing, these persons to live out their particular charisms.

Fr. Felice went on to say that when God gives the fraternity a new member, God is in effect re-founding the local fraternity. The fraternity is, in a sense, melted down and re-formed by God. It is no longer, nor can it ever be again, the fraternity it was before the profession ceremony. It is forever changed; it is forever graced by the addition of this new member. The new member need not adapt to our routine; we must be willing to adjust the way the fraternity does things in order to incorporate (make part of the body) the new member. With the addition of this new sister or brother, the wealth of the fraternity is enhanced. Not only is the vocation of this newest member to be developed, but all members' vocations will develop, be nurtured, and will grow because of the dedications made by all persons in the fraternity.

It is this response to the action and grace of the Holy Spirit that makes the local fraternity the privileged place for our Franciscan vocation to develop. May you be open to the new Pentecost that is in your midst!

Formation on the Road—a Workshop

This is a weekend full of interesting ideas and concepts that deal with the ministry of formation. We share such topics as the aspects and agents of formation, discernment and conflict resolution, secular spirituality, nature of our Franciscan vocation, an understanding of our profession, the how and why of ongoing formation, how to use and adapt the ritual. We take a look at the various formation materials that are available for your use. We have set in Q & A time, and there is time for you to interact with the other participants. A binder of materials is given to each participant. We would be glad to bring the workshop to your Region. Please contact us at Tbakersfo@aol.com or Anne_Mulqueen@juno.com.