

Consolation and Desolation

We sat across from each other at the coffee house. He raised his head. He looked into my eyes and began to speak from memory, "My mission is to love when others have failed to love and notice when others have failed to notice. I will love with the tenderness and compassion of God." As he spoke, tears fell. My friend had discovered his purpose, the meaning that would animate and bring wholeness to his life.

My friend was severely neglected as a child. His father was in jail. His mother suffered from bipolar disorder. He grew up in a household of poverty and addiction. He was bullied in school. He suffered from a rare genetic disorder called, Trimethylaminuria (TMAU), which causes a person's sweat, urine, and breath to give off a strong almost unbearable fishy/body odor. He was now homeless, couch surfing with his sister.

At the urging of his cousin, he came to the young adult group I facilitated. We were studying an 8-week series called, "Healing the Purpose of Your Life." based on a book by Dennis, Sheila, and Mathew Linn of the same name. The book used Ignatius' spiritual exercises. It was through this experience that my friend found healing and purpose.

The Spiritual Exercises grew out of St. Ignatius of Loyola's experience of feeling lost and finding his way. Ignatius had been a soldier who lived a wild life. He often daydreamed about the gallant deeds he would perform and the worldly glory he would obtain. Then on the battlefield of Pamplona, a cannonball shattered his leg. During his recovery, Ignatius read a life of Christ and a book of the lives of the saints. As Ignatius meditated on what he read, he experienced consolation and he remained "cheerful and satisfied." As he meditated on the dreams of worldly glory that he previously enchanted him, he experienced desolation and felt "weary, dry, and dissatisfied." As he pondered these two different movements of consolation and desolation, he discovered his personal vocation.

Discerning Your Vocation:

While discerning your personal vocation to love God and neighbor, it is important that you become aware of these two movements of consolation and desolation within your life. You will need to put on and practice the "habits" of the friars in order to discover if it brings you consolation or desolation. These two movements will help reveal your personal vocation.

As you reflect on your experiences with the friars and those they serve you will ask yourself, "Did I experience desolation? Did I feel weary, dry, and dissatisfied? Did I feel consolation? Did I feel cheerful and satisfied? Was I able to engage in these activities with a joyful spirit?" These two movements can help you discern your vocation, but only if you *try* on the "habits" of friar life.

Peace and all Good,
Bro. Scott Slattum, OFM

Prayer before the San Damiano Crucifix - St. Francis of Assisi

Most High, glorious God,
enlighten the darkness of my heart.
Give me true faith,
certain hope and perfect charity,
sense and knowledge, Lord,
that I may carry out
Your Holy and true command.
Amen.

Personal Reflection:

What are you most grateful for today? What are you least grateful for today? If you were to ask yourself these questions every day, what pattern would you see? How could these questions help reveal the movement of consolation and desolation within your personal discernment?

Peace Prayer of Saint Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen.