

Conference of National Spiritual Assistants

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CELEBRATING 40 YEARS THE RULE OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER (Part 14)

5. and build a more fraternal and evangelical world.

Ritual Ch. 3.

Yes, fraternity begins with a smile! Then it leads to talking together and sharing our joyful memories and becoming friends. A good friend is also someone with whom we can share our troubles. Joyful memories strengthen us, but sorrowful memories can lead us into sadness and depression. It is very important to get those things that cause us anger and depression “out there” from inside of us and before others, who are perhaps also suffering too, in silence. We are not alone in our *sea of troubles*!¹ So, the challenge - not the problem - is to find someone to speak to especially about our difficulties.

Talking to taxi drivers, barbers, and hairdressers may help, but most of all we need someone who knows us through and through so we can share our deepest thoughts. There is, of course, someone who does know us more than anyone else. We need to speak about our troubles with God. It is incorrect to say, “*God already knows my troubles and does not seem to do anything!*” Yes, God knows; God cares. We need to invite God into our inner dialogue. We need to pray about “things” and remember that if the Jewish people have taught us anything about God, it that God does listen to prayers of the heart and perhaps more importantly winging prayers are better than no prayers at all.

Let me introduce you to a powerless God. Our God is made powerless by love. The foundation upon which love stands is Freedom. Let me say that again: FREEDOM IS THE BEDROCK OF LOVE. To allow this freedom to angels and men, God had to hide in the depth of humility - away from us, from our point of view. A visible, all-powerful, and beautiful God, would remove our freedom instantly by God’s very presence. God had to leave us alone if we are to have the freedom to make “the choice” to let God into our lives or not. Once that choice is made, everything changes. If we say yes to God, we are on the Way,² not just on the journey from birth to death, but on our way to life everlasting. Both Saint Peter, “*We are **strangers and pilgrims** on the earth; because our true home is really in heaven.*”³ and Saint Francis, tell us “*always be guests [here] as pilgrims and strangers.*”⁴ In fact we can also quote St Mary Mackillop, “We are but travellers here.”⁵

This matter of freedom is dealt with a couple of times in the book by J. R. R. Tolkien⁶ Lord of the Rings “Fellowship of the Ring.” It is not just a fantasy book about good and evil, war and peace, Tolkien, ever a Catholic, leads us into a scene where this sense of freedom comes into focus. The young little hobbit, Frodo Baggins, suddenly aware of the extreme danger of the evil “Ring of Power” wants to give it to Gandalf, the Grey Wizard. But Gandalf is immediately alarmed and says:

"Don't tempt me Frodo! I dare not take it. Not even to keep it safe. Understand Frodo, I would use this Ring from a desire to do good. But through me, it would wield a power too great and terrible to

¹ William Shakespear (1564 – 1616). Hamlet, Act III, Scene 1 “*Or to take arms against a sea of troubles, And by opposing [them] end them?*”

² St Clare Testament.

³ 1 Peter 2:11.

⁴ St Francis: Testament.

⁵ This is one of the quotes written on her tomb. See also: <http://sosj.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/07.pdf>

⁶ G.K. Chesterton, who wrote a life of St Francis, was a huge influence on both J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. In fact, C.S. Lewis, an atheist, became a Christian (Anglican) because of the influence of Chesterton and Tolkien.

imagine."

What Tolkien is telling us is that power without respect for the freedom of others is evil because it would enslave us. This is also true of God. If we could see God, the infinitely Beautiful, face to face, then God's "Power" and "Beauty" would ensnare us instantly.

Tolkien again leads us into the scene where the beautiful Elven Queen Galadriel and Frodo are speaking about the "One Ring to Rule Them All." Frodo says to Galadriel:

"If you ask it of me, I will give you the One Ring."

Opening his palm, he offers the Ring to her.

"You offer it to me freely. I do not deny that my heart has greatly desired this."

She approaches Frodo and places her hand over the Ring, her hand quivering. Her appearance begins to change. She towers over Frodo, her cloak running ragged in a wind, her eyes like dark hollows, arms flung high. She screams:

*"In place of a Dark Lord, you would have a queen!
Not dark, but beautiful and terrible as the dawn! Treacherous as the sea!
Stronger than the foundations of the earth!
All shall love me, and despair!"*

Tolkien, the great Catholic apologist, is telling us that absolute beauty would enslave everyone and thereby rob them of their freedom. Here, Tolkien has attempted to help us to understand that the very nature of God is freedom and therefore – Love.

Did I just hear you say, what has all this to do with us as Secular Franciscans? Well, Saint Francis following Saint Paul declared the whole world redeemed by Christ to be his cloister.⁷ For Saint Francis, the whole *world is charged with the grandeur of God.*⁸ If your Rule of 1978 now defines your mission as Secular Franciscans, then this mission is to bring Christ to the Secular world. "*Your mission, should you accept it*"⁹ is perhaps, a mission impossible. As Gandalf says to Frodo when Frodo despairs at the responsibility given to him to carry such a burden: "*So do all who come to such a time in their lives, but all we have to decide is what to do with the time, that is given to us.*"

We do not carry this responsibility of being a leaven of Gospel fraternity to the Secular world on our own. We are part of a fraternity; we are working with Christ, not for him. We do not leave Him behind, He comes with us or more correctly we should go with him when we minister to others. We must understand that it is not our work that we are engaged in, it is Christ's work, he asks us to cooperate with him, to share in his ministry to share in his glory.

Talking to God is sometimes like sitting with your beloved in a pitch dark night, sensing their presence, knowing they are there. Talking to God is called prayer. It's as simple as that; it is a personal, "one to one" dialogue with the One¹⁰ who knows our innermost memories, our joyful, sorrowful, glorious memories and our memories of the times we received light and wisdom.

***PLEASE distribute this Monthly Spiritual Message to all MEMBERS of your FRATERNITY.
(This includes Spiritual Assistants and isolated members)***

⁷ Sacrum Commercium 63

⁸ Gerard Manley Hopkins, Psalter Poem 104. "God's Grandeur"

⁹ Mission Impossible title of the series of films in which Tom Cruise is the main actor. Tom was a Franciscan seminarian before he left and became an actor.

¹⁰ The mystery of three divine persons in One God. It is extraordinary to understand that we are loved by three Divine Persons in One God. This God has a personal relationship with the upwards of seven billion people who presently inhabit this Earth. God, remembers their first smile, their first steps as if they were happening right now because God is omnipresent and everything is omnipresent to God. It is the first and most natural dialogue we have in all our relationships. It is the most beautiful because it is with the All-good God.