

Discernment and Workforce Warnings

Recent studies affirm that many potential monks, nuns, priests, sisters, and brothers experience drastically increased opportunities to NOT become religious sisters and brothers and priests when entering the workforce. Its not just that they get distracted by the glitter of glamour or fall victim to the habitual patterns of the work-a-day world but that by simply being in the workforce they can't help but build a life, a structure, a foundation of paying bills, buying things, forming friendships that by nature become increasingly difficult to dissemble.

Once we go into the workforce we begin to blend with others by the sheer nature of the experience, blending that would take a large degree of support to undo, we can't help become one with commerce once we have placed our hands on the plow of economic stimulation. This field of productivity in the workforce that we begin to farm becomes a life investment of one's time and naturally many can't help but anticipate a harvest looking ahead for greater gain financially, in achievement recognition, etc.

Unless there is an immaturity, a thwarting of growth spiritually, such as the discerner simply wanting to escape parents by entering the convent or monastery etc. why not let them enter? Why not allow them to "act while the grace is there" before the work-a-day patterns, the hired-hand identity, and lack of support (or even mockery) for a religious vocation or priesthood flourish? Why take a good seed ready to be planted in the fertile ground of religious and priestly vocation and cast it onto the secular brambles

of unbelief hoping it will survive? Why unnecessarily test the Spirit and in the process most likely place the discerners in undue spiritual hardship?

Each discerners is a unique individual. There has never been anyone exactly like this discerners or that discerners in the course of human history. Jesus said, "Behold I make all things new." Each discerners is new. Each situation is new and the discerners themselves are new to the community and the community to them in terms of joining. Through the baptism of every individual Christ comes alive like never before. In other words, its not a one size fits all when venturing into the workforce. Let's be attuned to what is the best measure to safeguard the spiritual wellbeing and potential of each discerners according to the movement of the Holy Spirit amidst their individual history, maturity, and giftedness.

How do we know which course of action is (or is not) Jesus moving in the life of the discerners? The answer: If the course of action stabilizes the discerners to grow in Jesus, stay focused on Christ, to be a champion for Christ, to exert oneself on all levels for Christ as an Olympian running the race to win. If the discerners themselves, though they have the emotional and mental skills to enter the work-day-world, yet would rather not for love of Christ, isn't that a valid use of freewill? The best use, that is to say, a free offering of one's life that is pleasing to Christ and encouraging for all? Isn't it actually the opposite which is the problem of which Jesus spoke, that is to say, that many are called to enter religious life and the priesthood now but that few are choosing to respond now ? (Matt 22:14)?

Ninety-nine point nine percent of the time discerners voice their concerns that they do not want their primary interaction with the world as one of commerce. The vast majority of discerners are seeking a connection rooted in the communion of saints rather than a business commerce connection, that is to say, they long to live the heavenly life now on the earth, in service and in love, sustained by Jesus in the Eucharist. They long to live out the true freedom enjoyed by the religious brothers, sisters, and priests, the freedom to live the resurrected life, the redeemed life, openly as the Spirit moves relying solely on divine providence. This total immersion in the Spirit creates a sense of incredible adventure as we step into the eternal realm of lived out unification whereby “everyone gives what they can and takes what the need” Acts 4:32 (unlike the temporal commerce realm where everyone gets as much as they can and steps over and on many in the process). True vocation discerners rightly anticipate the demeaning bite of a self-worth rooted in competitive financial elevation and wisely recoil.

Discerners who did not know the option of religious vocation or the priesthood prior to entering the workforce often voice a sense of sadness that they are deprived of the freedom to speak overtly (and honestly) about their love for Jesus without having to edit as they must in most secular business situations. Many working discerners have gotten caught in a whirlpool of consumerism lasting years (or even decades) not landing on the shores of clarity until they have passed the age limits of most communities and dioceses. Sad.

Lastly, let's consider trusting the discerner's healthy hopes to enter soon if for no other reason than we do not know how long they have to live. Think of St. Therese of Lisieux who longed to be in the convent young and who also died young. Thank God she wasn't put off any longer and sent to the fields to work perhaps never to return. Perhaps the youthful desire of eager discerners is veiled in the mystery of the Holy Spirit spurring them to act quickly because time is short. Yet even if they live a hundred years why waste a single minute unnecessarily as each moment is an investment made as illustrated in the parable of the three men and the talents. (Or as in the fig tree's obligation for bearing fruit, why not let them bear fruit now?)

As a mother to all, a sister to all, a brother and friend to all, I believe we owe it to the discerner to listen to the desires of the Holy Spirit within them. St. Bernard when speaking of the validity of the experience of desire said, "Desire is the down payment for the desire to be received". God puts desire to enter into the heart of the perspective discerner as a promissory note of the desire (the passion and abounding joy) to come. If a discerner is balanced, has settled their desire in their mind without a lot of work experience, then who are we to dampen the Spirit within them with doubt for no reason other than having a general experience of commerce (an experience from which they will most likely not return).

When is the best time to enter into the joy of our vocation? The answer: "Now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor 6:2). "Now" is the time to enter (if the discerner is suitable and the joy of their desire is as such therein lies our answer as to "when"). Why put off,

why delay, the coming of the kingdom in this “abundant” way (Jn 10:10). The world is waiting. Those that suffer are waiting for the compassion of Christ to reach them through this new vocation.

Thank you for your kind readership and finally let’s listen to where the joy in a discernment lies, from what movement it is nurtured, because joy never lies, it never deceives. You can almost tell the movement of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the discernment by the ebb and flow of perceivable and intuited joy. Let’s approve of and affirm them by rejoicing in their ability to make right choices, to trust their judgment (Christ within), to know what is best for them.

Encourage the discernment; allow them, to go where the color is. Go where the smiles are as far as joining a community or diocese. As St. Ignatius instructed, concerning the discernment of spirits, let’s communicate to the discernment that they would do well and be wise to “embrace consolation and avoid desolation” the more often than not “desolation” of the work-a-day workforce.