

Leadership Bulletin # 4: “Prayer Towards Wise Decision-Making”

Introduction

It may surprise you that this fourth bulletin regarding leadership focuses on prayer. You might be asking yourself: what does prayer have to do with leadership? Or how is prayer a leadership skill? It is our hope that this bulletin will not only answer these questions but will convince you of the central importance of effective prayer, helping to enable you to fulfil your leadership responsibilities.

Where to Begin

We can take our fundamental guidance regarding the value and benefit of prayer from our OFS Rule. Article 8 asserts “...**let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do.**” And later on, this same article recommends: “Let them join in liturgical prayer in one of the forms proposed by the Church.” Article 9 also touches upon prayer advising **that we as Secular Franciscans “should pray earnestly and confidently.”**

The other primary encouragement we receive regarding prayer is from our Franciscan family patrons and co-founders St. Francis and St. Clare. Clearly, they both have much to teach us about prayer:

- As we know, Francis composed a number of prayers for his followers and many of these prayers are full of praise and thanksgiving. In this way, Francis has gifted us with prayers for our daily use and offers us guidance as to the nature of what our prayer should ideally be like.
- St. Clare was also a great proponent of prayer. Her advice and direction is seemingly complementary to that of Francis. Her prayer is characterized by more self-reflection and offers concentration on contemplative prayer. Similarly, her approach to prayer can be instrumental in influencing our prayer.

Prayer and Leadership: Some Initial Thoughts and Parameters

As a member of Council, we are often presented with difficult or challenging decisions. Such decisions are not always a choice between a “good” and a “not-so-good” option. There are times when the decisions we are presented with are between alternate beneficial opportunities. And the question we face is: what would be the best? Such a challenge calls for wise discernment and prayer can be an integral component to help lead us in the optimal direction.

Accordingly, Council meetings can be a primary locus for both individual and communal prayer. It has been said: “How goes our prayer goes our meeting”! We might ask: what is this saying or trying to tell us? Simply stated, the message is that prayer, particularly at the start of a meeting, can dispose us to be more open to each other and to enable us to listen more intently

to each other. The result can be improved dialogue and enhanced discussion within the context of the meeting, leading to improved decision-making.

To Whom Do We Pray and For What Do We Pray?

As we know, our Franciscan charism is Christo-centric, focusing on our relationship with Christ. Thus, it stands to reason that when we turn to prayer we would pray to Jesus, the Son of God. At the same time, in our prayer, we are often seeking guidance so naturally we would call upon the Holy Spirit for insight and understanding. Finally, there are times when our prayer is directed more to the Father, perhaps when we are engaged in prayers of thanksgiving for the gifts of God's creation or the blessings bestowed upon us.

When our need is discernment or clarification of God's will, we can invoke the aid of St. Francis and borrow the words of his prayer before the San Damiano crucifix:

*Most high and glorious God
Enlighten the darkness of my heart.
Give me right faith, certain hope and perfect charity
Insight and wisdom
To fulfil Your Holy and true will.*

Another common prayer offered by Secular Franciscans is a "Franciscan Morning Prayer" (Note: It is uncertain who composed this prayer). It is a beautiful way to start one's day. This prayer initially offers up the new day to Jesus with love, hope and thanksgiving for all blessings received. Ultimately, this prayer petitions Our Lord to "look upon me and leave in me peace, courage and humble wisdom...that I may serve others with joy...".

This bulletin on prayer and leadership would be incomplete if we did not make reference to our glorious Catholic gift of liturgical prayer, the sacrament of the Eucharist. As we know, Francis had a great devotion and respect for the Eucharist. In keeping with strong fraternal life, we are encouraged to celebrate Eucharist together. Some fraternities celebrate Eucharist prior to their monthly meetings. This is a wonderful practice! And, undoubtedly, as a result, the fraternity meeting time together can become blessed, rooted in prayerful animation.

What is the Essential Message?

As members of a fraternity Council, we know we have the obligation and responsibility to care for the well-being of our fraternity and our OFS brothers and sisters. Although there are many blessings associated with serving on Council, our duties are not without its challenges. Thus, in the interest of serving wisely and effectively, it is paramount that we take time to pray.

There is an old adage that says: pray as you can, not as you cannot. The message here is that not all of us pray in the same manner...and that is OK! Our prayer may be more rote or it may be more open and spontaneous. Either way, God hears our prayer.

Towards Contemplation

As previously noted, our OFS Rule in Article 8, calls us to contemplation. This is in keeping with Franciscan tradition. Many of the Franciscan saints (St. Francis, St. Clare, St. Bonaventure and others) spent much time in contemplative prayer. This form of prayer becomes more accessible with practice. It entails deep listening with the heart rather than voicing our concerns and requests verbally to God. We can share that some OFS fraternities use this quiet contemplative form of prayer as a way to prepare for meetings. Members relate that contemplation can reap deep rewards. We wish to encourage you and your Council (and perhaps your entire fraternity) to explore possibly using contemplative prayer at meetings. It may surprise us how fruitful this could be for our fraternities.

Paul's Comments/Insights re Leadership and Prayer:

Once again, we are pleased to call upon Paul Donovan (our Leadership Development Workshop facilitator) to share his thoughts/insights about prayer:

Most Church meetings begin with prayer. We light a candle, read a passage of Scripture, offer our intentions – and then we get down to business. The danger is not that we forget to pray, but that we quietly assume prayer is something adjacent to the real work rather the place where the real work actually takes place.

In Christian leadership, the deepest work is not problem-solving or decision-making in the ordinary sense. It is discernment: learning to recognize what God is doing and choosing how to cooperate with His action. Prayer is not a pause before discernment; prayer is discernment. It is the “space” where our agendas are slowly purified, our listening is deepened, and our leadership is re-anchored in trust rather than control.

This why the quality of our prayer matters. Prayer that is hurried, formulaic, or treated as an obligation can leave us unchanged. But prayer that is intentional – prayer that expects God to speak, to lead, to interrupt – forms leaders who are attentive, patient and free. Quality prayer shapes our ability to listen not only to the Holy Spirit, but also to one another, especially when there is disagreement or uncertainty.

When prayer becomes integral (rather than introductory), meetings change. Discussion becomes less reactive. Decisions become less driven by urgency. Over time, a different culture or attitude emerges – one marked by trust, humility and shared responsibility for discerning God's Will together. This does not make leadership any easier; but it does make it more faithful.

*Ultimately, prayer reminds us that fruitfulness in leadership is not manufactured. It is something that we receive. **Thus, our task is not to carry the fraternity on our shoulders, but to remain close enough to the Lord so that we can recognize where He is leading – and have the courage to follow.***

