

Servant Leadership

St. Augustine's Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit,
that my thoughts may all be holy.
Act in me, O Holy Spirit,
that my work, too, may be holy.
Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit,
that I may strive for what is holy.
Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit,
to defend all that is holy.
Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit,
that I always may be holy. Amen.

I chose this prayer to set the context of this presentation, because if we don't get this right, we aren't going to get the rest of it. Saint Augustine's prayer is inspired by God's declaration in Leviticus, "*you shall be holy; for I, the LORD, am holy.*" (Lv 20:26) Saint Peter also insists, "*...as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in every aspect of your conduct.*" (1 Pet 1:15-16) How do we conform our conduct and our lives to the qualities and standards of divinity? What does the word holy mean? What is holy conduct? Jesus tells us, "*...be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.*" (Mt 5:48) So does holy mean to be perfect? How does it sound when we substitute the word perfect for holy?

Breathe in me, O Perfect Spirit,
that my thoughts may all be perfect.

I am not sure that quite captures the meaning. What does perfect mean in this context? Jesus explains his meaning of the word perfect, "*I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father.*" (Mt 5:44) He is referring to unconditional love. When he speaks about being God's children he means to have the same nature; the same DNA. What is the DNA of our heavenly Father? Saint John expresses clearly, "God is love." (1Jn 4:8) God's DNA is love and His love is unconditional, "*for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust.*" (Mt 5:45) He proves his unconditional love for us, "*...in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.*" (Rom 5:8) Jesus says to

Servant Leadership

follow him and gives us two commandments which sum up his teaching, the law, and the prophets,

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mk 12:30-31)

Saint Paul confirms and encourages, “...put on love, that is, the bond of perfection.” (Col 3:14) He insists, if I do not have love, “I am nothing” and if I do not have love, “I gain nothing”. (cf 1Cor 13:2-3) Love, then, is everything. Love is perfection. To be perfect means to be loving. To be holy means to be loving. To be, “merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Lk 6:36) means to be loving. How does it sound when substituted in our prayer?

Breathe in me, O Loving Spirit,
that my thoughts may all be loving.
Act in me, O Loving Spirit,
that my work, too, may be loving.
Draw my heart, O Loving Spirit,
that I may strive for what is loving.
Strengthen me, O Loving Spirit,
to defend all that is loving.
Guard me, then, O Loving Spirit,
that I always may be loving. Amen.

How does it sound? What do you think?

So how does this relate to our topic on leadership? As leaders of our groups and communities, too often we equate something other than loving to the word holy. Sometimes we think the word “sacrifice” means holy. The following quote illustrates this point.

“I know what it is to suffer, look at my eyes, they burn like the very fires of Hell. Why? Because they need sleep--they need rest which I will not give them. My throat is parched from constant prayer. My hands are gnarled from serving God in humiliation. My body is pain-wracked from stone floors. Yes, I have suffered, because I know it is the only true road to Heaven.” (“The Song of Bernadette”)

Servant Leadership

Who recognizes this quote? It is Sr. Mary Therese, the nemesis from “The Song of Bernadette”. Is what she said true? Is suffering the only true road to heaven? Remember, Saint Paul, “...If I do not have love, I gain nothing.” Later she falls prostrate before Jesus in the tabernacle confessing, “*Oh God, I have tried to storm the Gates of Heaven, by sacrificing myself. ...[but] I was filled with hate and envy.*” She was trying to be holy, but she was not loving. Jesus says clearly, “*Go and learn the meaning of the words, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.*” (Mt 9:13)

Jesus was speaking to, “*those who were convinced of their own righteousness and despised everyone else.*” (Lk 18:9) Sometimes we think following the rules makes us holy. “*I follow all the rules, no one could be a more perfect Carmelite than I am.*” Or sometimes we equate length of service to being holy, “*I have been a Carmelite for 20 years. I must be in the seventh mansion by now, there is nothing you can teach me!*” Pope Francis speaks strongly against this attitude. He uses the story of Jonah to illustrate his point.

“Jonah is a devout man, with a tranquil and ordered life, which causes him to have a clear-cut way of seeing things and to judge everything and everyone accordingly. He has it all figured out: this is the truth! He is rigid!”

Jonah is a devout man, but he is rigid, not holy - not loving. Pope Francis cautions us, in Joy of the Gospel,

“More than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe...” (paragraph 49)

He is referring to structures which make us feel holy, while not being loving, and is emphasizing our obligation to practice fraternal charity to the people in our groups and communities and outside them. Holy means to be loving and to be a leader means to serve. Again, Pope Francis, in “The Joy of the Gospel” explains that,

Servant Leadership

“God’s word teaches that our brothers and sisters are the prolongation of the incarnation for each of us: “As you did it to one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40)

This is the context we must apply to our leadership. We are serving other Christs. I hope this all make sense? I want you to hold this thought for a moment while I transition to another aspect of this topic.

I want to thank Lucy, for her amazing presentation on creatively describing the Ideal Council. I will now give you a little quiz to verify your comprehension. Who has the authority for a group or community? Let me repeat paragraph 46 for emphasis,

Constitutions VII. Organization and Government, The Council, composed of the President and three Councilors and the Director of Formation, constitutes the immediate authority of the community. The primary responsibility of the Council is the formation and Christian and Carmelite maturing of the members of the community.

Does anyone think this is unclear? Of course a Group or Study Group has a Group Leader, not a President, and may not always have three councilors, but the paragraph still applies.

What about the council itself, who has the authority within the council? Again, our constitutions are clear, that each member has equal authority. Paragraph 52 states,

The responsibility of the three Councilors is to form, **with** the president, not under the President, the government of the community and to support the director of formation.

Provincial Statutes Section XXII: The Provisions for Council Actions (cf. Const. #46, #47 & #48) 5. The President, the three Councilors and the Director of Formation shall actively work together...

Then what is the particular purpose of the president or group leader? Paragraph 51 states,

The President has the duty to convoke and preside over the meetings of the community. He should show **fraternal service** to all the members of the community; foster a spirit of Christian and Carmelite

Servant Leadership

affability, being careful to avoid any demonstration of preference for some members over others.

The President also has the authority to cast an additional vote if necessary to break a tie. (Sec. XXII para. 3.c) This should rarely happen, because it can only occur when a vote is taken while a member is absent. A vote on an important matter should never be taken while one of the council members is absent.

So, although all members of the council have equal authority according to our constitution and statues, this is not always the case in practice. We on the provincial council sometimes hear of leaders that usurp the authority of the council and rule as dictators and sometimes even tyrants. Those of you who attended the Portland Congress may remember Father Jerome Earley, OCD, speaking on the 5th dwelling place of the Interior Castle. He asked, *“Did you ever notice that the most fearful people are prideful people; dictators, tyrants, CEOs, Masters of Formation? You must do it my way!”* At this everyone laughed! Why does associating our Council leadership with dictators and tyrants cause people to laugh? Was the idea so unbelievable, or was it funny because it contained an element of simple truth and irony?

As many of us know, through being victim or offender there are several ways to bully and manipulate a weak council. An unscrupulous member will identify two weak or passive council members that can be dominated through fear of reprisal or loss of friendship, or maybe enticed by the promise of friendship or other advantage. Remember what the constitution says about, *“being careful to avoid any demonstration of preference for some members over others.”* This is not just for the president, but a practice for all council members. So already, the unscrupulous member is disregarding our constitutions, as are the council members complicit with him or her.

With two council members in his pocket, anything the offender decides is assured to pass with a 3 to 2 vote. I have heard of situations where, the unscrupulous member did not even communicate to another member with a dissenting opinion, that a vote was taking place. When confronted later, they said they didn't

Servant Leadership

think it was necessary to contact him or her because their vote would not have affected the outcome. Thereby avoiding any unwanted discussion, that may have allowed the Holy Spirit an opportunity to influence the decision. As we have seen in our constitutions and provincial statutes, this is not how a council is supposed to function. Our leaders are not supposed to be dictators or tyrants, but team members working in an atmosphere of equality. Voting should only happen when the council meets all together in person and important matters should never be settled over the phone or through email.

This issue is of particular relevance today because some of our group and community leaders demonstrate the world's practices and teachings regarding power structure, authority, control, entitlement, distinctions, titles, and status. Scripture clearly makes a distinction between civil and a new type of authority, servant authority. It often contrasts the two, allowing civil authority to continue in this world for a time, but forbidding it in the church, and over God's people. In Jesus' own words,

"You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:42-45)

Let me repeat for emphasis, *"It shall not be so among you!"* How many times with different wording does Our Lord proclaim, *The leaders among you must serve the rest. (cf. Mt 23:11)* The same message is declared by the Apostles as Saint Peter confirms, *"Do not lord it over those assigned to you, but be examples to the flock."* (1Pt 5:3)

We know how the kingdom of this world works, *"I'm in charge and that makes me right, do it my way!"* Such practices are not permitted in the kingdom of God and have always been strongly denounced, as we see Ezekiel censuring the leaders of his day, *"You did not strengthen the weak nor heal the sick nor bind up the injured. You did not bring back the stray or seek the lost but ruled them harshly and brutally."* (Eze 34:4).

Servant Leadership

The problem with those leaders is they were not being children of their Father, they were not being loving, they were not being life giving. Pope Francis, as a prophet of our day, explains the importance of being life giving.

“Life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort. Indeed, those who enjoy life most are those who leave security on the shore and become excited by the mission of communicating life to others. For here we discover a profound law of reality: that life is attained and matures in the measure that it is offered up in order to give life to others.”

As leaders of our groups and communities of faith we need to be aware of the treasure that we possess and not “dictate to” but “*show fraternal service to all the members of the community*”. Always seeking their best interest and supporting and assisting them “*to foster a spirit of Christian and Carmelite affability.*” (const. para. 51) Even in our modern day, this still constitutes what our Lord said through Ezekiel; to strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bind up the injured, bring back the stray, and seek the lost; to be loving, live-giving, and to serve.

We have an obligation to set the tone for the other members. We should be life giving springs of spirituality that flow out to nourish the weaker members. Thomas Merton explains, “*unless the waters of the spring are living and flow outward, the spring becomes only a stagnant pool.*” It is sad to say, but this is true of some of our failing groups and communities. If a person is struggling we should, think how can I support him or her and inspire him to see the beauty of Carmel that inspires me.

This is how our councils are supposed to operate. First remember we are never alone. Pray as a council invoking the Holy Spirit for guidance. Make sure all council members are present when any important business is discussed. Meet in person for important matters and never settle them over the phone or by email. All members must contribute to the discussion and give their thoughts and opinions. If a member is not joining in, invite them to share their thoughts and opinions. As responsible council members they have an obligation to do so. Always stay calm and

Servant Leadership

know the Constitutions and Statutes well enough to be able to explain with clear concise reasons why you feel the way you do.

Establish boundaries so your discussions can take place in an atmosphere of mutual respect, trust, and harmony. We should feel the freedom to say what we feel and the right to be listened to. Do not be emotionally attached to your ideas or opinions. Voice them and let them go. Trust in the *“influence of the Holy Spirit”* to carry it forward or not. If, after appropriate discussion, your idea or opinion is not selected, support the majority consensus even if you don't agree with it. We should trust the majority of the council members more than we trust ourselves. This is what dying to self is all about. As our sister, Saint Therese explains in her beautiful quote from *“Story of a Soul”*,

“I understood that to become a saint one has to suffer much, seek out always the most perfect, [loving] thing to do, and forget self.

She is of course echoing the scripture,

“If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” (Lk 9:23-25)

As leaders of our groups and communities, what type of leadership do we embody? Here is a test. Ask yourself these three questions, *“Do you trust the Holy Spirit working through the council or do you only trust the Holy Spirit working through yourself? Do you believe in our constitutions and provincial statutes to guide Carmelite life? Do you value your Carmelite promise of obedience to these constitutions and statutes?”*

Finally, if your local council is one of the ones described above what can you do about it without causing serious conflict or in-fighting? Serious prolonged conflict is never the right thing to do. The answer is simple. First know the constitutions and statutes, especially the ones pertaining to leadership. Second, help others to become aware of them. Third, follow them, even if you are the only one. Let me conclude with an inspiring quote from Pope Francis illustrating the dynamic of leadership and our journeying together. He says,

Servant Leadership

“I think this is truly the most wonderful experience we can have: to belong to a people walking, journeying through history together with their Lord who walks among us! We are not alone, we do not walk alone. We are part of the one flock of Christ that walks together. What could be more beautiful than this? I repeat it often: walking with our people, sometimes in front, sometimes in the middle, and sometimes behind: in front in order to guide the community, in the middle in order to encourage and support; and at the back in order to keep it united and so that no one lags too, too far behind, to keep them united.”
(Address to the Clergy in the Cathedral of San Rufino, Assisi Friday, 4 October 2013)