

As we look to our own wellbeing, think of others

By Alexander Escalera, O.F.M. Cap.

We have, as part of our Franciscan charism, the idea that not only do we need to look to our own wellbeing, but we must consider the welfare of others who surround us even if our own life is not going the way we want it. For this we have the example of St. Francis and his encounter with the leper. Francis was going through a major conversion point in his life (as he would go through conversion for most of his life). He was trying to find out what God wanted him to do with his life. Where was God leading him? Not an easy task for one who has tried it and still continues to do so. Yet God answered Francis in giving him the grace to embrace the leper. To be God's instrument in showing His mercy and love even though he still had so many questions of his own.

A modern day example. My brother, Deacon Stephen Gabriel Escalera, passed away on October 29, 2019, due to complications from a liver disease. He was a deacon at Christ the King Parish in Pueblo, Colorado, and leaves behind a wife and two children. Steve was 53, his daughter is a senior in high school, and his son is in junior high. My brother suffered greatly in his over three month stay in the ICU at the University of Denver Hospital. When I visited him in August of 2019, he was writhing in pain on his bed, he had a tracheotomy, and his face was contorting from all his suffering.

"God is not fair", "God works in mysterious ways" and "Why do bad things happen to good people" are almost cliché phrases given how much use they get. Many will see my brother Steve's suffering for such a long time before his final passing, dying so young and leaving behind such young children as tragic. Yet in the Introduction to his book, *"God Is Not Fair And Other Reasons For Gratitude"*, Daniel Horan,

OFM, states that the simple premise is God's way is not our way, God's lack of fairness by human standards should instead challenge and show us how inappropriate, inhumane, and unchristian we actually are. We would project how we see our own world view, put that on other people and even our own religion as if to say these things are not our way but God's way.

In the story of my brother, several days before he passed away, our parents were with him. At some point a cleaning lady came in to tidy up Steve's room. She told mom and dad how much she admired Steve because he was a fighter, fighting his illness till the end. She was a bit sad however. Her own daughter had just been taken to the hospital for having trouble breathing. Upon examination it was discovered she had a heart defect. The doctor examined further and found out she had diabetes. And upon even further examination, it was discovered she had a lump on her leg and the doctor couldn't figure out what it was. She was going to go visit her daughter after her shift ended. She turned to leave after she cleaned up and Steve, who could not speak due to the tracheotomy, motioned to get her attention. He then pointed to himself, clasped his hands like praying, then pointed at her. Translation, "I'm going to pray for you." Even as he lay there dying, my brother was given the grace by God to think of others in their need. Surely this was not where Steve had intended his life to go, but he was always open to God's will.

As I write this letter, the coronavirus is spreading throughout the world. I don't know if, by the time you read this, whether it will be under control or not. But in this time of uncertainty, be safe and healthy, and may God give you His grace to think of and help the other.

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