

VOCATION GOD'S CALL

Marie Amore, SFO

*I have called you by name.
You are mine because you are precious in
my eyes, you are honored and I love you"*
(Isaiah 43:1)

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Outline of Presentation on Vocation

- I. Gods' Invitation
 - ✚ A call to share in the life of God for all people
 - ✚ God is love.
 - ✚ Love seeks union
 - ✚ We are chosen
- II. Personal Vocations
 - ✚ The Apostles
 - ✚ The rich young man
 - ✚ Gerasene demoniac
 - ✚ The call of Zacchaeus
- III. A Call to perfection
- IV. Aimed at Universal Salvation
- V. Total availability
- VI. The specific Franciscan Vocation
- VII. Discernment
- VIII. The Secular Franciscan Vocation

Ed note: Scripture quotes are taken or based on the New American Bible, Confraternity of Christian Doctrine or have been paraphrased from the original CIOFS formation material

VOCATION - GOD'S CALL

I have called you by your name. "You are mine because you are precious in my eyes, you are honored and I love you." (Isaiah 43:1b, 4)

In these times we are accustomed to getting calls by telephone and cell phones and text messages. Vocation is God's call. In the New Testament the word "call" is used forty times. The dictionary has more than twenty-six meanings for the verb *to call*. The best definition that fits for our purpose is "a request to come." It is an *invitation* to all people to share in the life of the Trinity. God wants every person on earth to turn from sin and be transformed by his love. (see *2 Peter 3:9*)

We begin the inquiry phase of a Secular Franciscan vocation with an analysis of God's **primary call to all people** and proceed to the **personal** vocation and then to the **specific** vocation to the Franciscan Order.

CALLED BY GOD'S LOVE

Essential to any analysis of vocation is the belief that **God is love**. "*Look into your experience; find the ways in which God has acted within your life, and then you will come to know that God is a God of love.*" (based on *Deuteronomy 4: 32-37*)

Don't we all have evidence of God's great faithfulness to us? Has not God also brought us out of some kind of troubles in our own lives? The whole Bible is the story of God's love. God loves each one of us personally and unconditionally not because we are good. We are good because God loves us.

Vatican II tells us that we are not called because of our good works but by God's design and grace.¹ The wonder and the mystery is this: we can speak of vocation because we recognize that we are loved by God, that we can one love God in return; that we can speak to God and sense God's call in our lives.

¹ *Lumen Gentium*, Chapter V The Call to Holiness, number 40

Because of love,

- God (the Father) created us
- God (the Father) made a covenant with us through the chosen people. “I will be your God.”
- God (the Father) sent prophets to communicate with human beings.

Because of love:

- Jesus (the Son) became human.
- Jesus (the Son) showed us how to live.
- Jesus (the Son) died for us.

Because of love,

- The Holy Spirit inspired the scriptures
- The Holy Spirit continues to guide, direct and comfort.
- The Holy Spirit dwells in us.

CALLED TO SHARE IN GOD'S LIFE

LOVE SEEKS UNION

*I pray... they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you that they also may be in us.
(John 17:20-21 (NAB))*

When we love someone we want to be with them. God wants to be with us. The ultimate vocation for all people is union with God. From the beginning of time everyone is in God's plan. “*He chose us in him before the foundation of the world.*” (Ephesians 1:4) We were not made to go it alone. God calls us from all eternity to share in His divine life; to be *united* with Him. What an awesome God!

By his life, death and resurrection, Jesus did for us what we could never do for ourselves. He gained for all people what they didn't have by nature, a sharing in God's own life. **Everyone's primary vocation is to share in that life.** This is not something that can be earned. It is pure gift. **Everyone has the choice to accept that gift or refuse it.** It is most important because other choices are based on that one.

CALLED AND CHOSEN

“You are the ones that I have chosen, that people may know and believe me and understand that it is I: (Isaiah 43:10)

Not only are we **called** but we are **chosen**. God is the initiator. Thomas H. Green, S. J. in his book, *“Come Down Zacchaeus”*, writes about being chosen. He writes that the gospel of John develops a theology of vocation.

1. God makes the first move either directly, as He did with Phillip (Jn. 1: 43-46) or through a human instrument, like John the Baptist. (Jn. 1:29 &ff)
2. He never forces us to respond. He always leaves us free to respond to his gracious initiative.
3. He deals with each one of us in a unique, personal way.

Many stories in scripture tell of how God chose people like Abraham and Sarah, Moses, David, Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Mary, Peter and Paul. “God wants people who are *useable* as instruments. For starters though, the instruments have to know that they are not just doing their own thing, but, rather that they are doing God’s thing.....Being chosen does not mean that God likes one more than another or that they are more worthy than the rest. God’s chosenness is for the sake of communicating chosenness to everyone else.”²

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus takes his disciples up on a hill and called to himself the men he wanted. They came to him, and he chose twelve whom he named apostles, “*I have chosen you to be with me.*”. “*You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.*” (paraphrase of John 15:16 and Mark 3:13) The Apostles were called to be the first to witness to the divinity of Jesus; to preach and act in his name. This was their personal vocation.

CALLED TO A PERSONAL VOCATION

We can look at three scriptural examples from the New Testament of the way God calls people for a personal vocation.

² Richard Rohr OFM, *Things Hidden in Scripture*, Chapter 2, Chosenness, pp 42-43

The Rich Young Man. (Mt 19, 16-30)

The rich young man told Jesus that he had observed the commandments. Then the young man asked, "What do I lack?" Jesus said, "*If you want to be perfect, go sell what you have... and come follow me.*" It was God's call for his personal vocation.

The Gerasene demoniac (Mk 5, 1-20, Lk 8, 26-29)

After Jesus healed the man from whom seven demons had come out, the man begged Jesus to be allowed to stay with him. Jesus answered: "*Return Home and tell what God has done for you.*" A call to proclaim the good news was God's plan for the demoniac's personal vocation.

The call of Zacchaeus (Lk. 19, 5-7)

He was anxious to see what kind of man Jesus was, but he was too short and could not see him for the crowd; so he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus who was to pass that way. When Jesus reached the spot he looked up and spoke to him. Jesus said: "*Zacchaeus come down! Hurry because I must come to your house today.*" Jesus did not ask him to sell everything and leave to follow him. He said that He would come to the house of Zacchaeus. This too was God's plan for Zacchaeus' personal secular vocation.

CALLED TO PERFECTION

"This is the will of God, your holiness (1 Thessalonians 4:3)

*To ask catechumens: 'Do you wish to receive Baptism?' means at the same time to ask them: 'Do you wish to become holy?' It means to set before them the radical nature of the Sermon on the Mount: 'Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Mt 5:48)."*³

Can we be Holy? Of course, if God wills our holiness then God will provide us with the means of holiness. With the grace of Baptism, all people can be holy. Baptism regenerates us in the life of the Son of God; unites us to Christ and to his Body, the

³ John Paul II *Novo Millennio Ineunte*

Church; anoints us in the Holy Spirit.⁴ It is the grace of this anointing that helps us to reach the sanctity that God has planned for us.

Can we be perfect? The ideal of perfection is often misunderstood. Many believe perfection is just for a few very heroic people but Vatican II tells us that perfection is not reserved just for some extraordinary souls.⁵ Christians in *any* state or walk of life are called to holiness to accomplish what God has planned for them.

There is no one state of life that is more perfect than another one. (Romans 8, 23-30) *God sent the Holy Spirit to all to move them interiorly to love God with their whole heart, with their whole soul, and with their whole understanding, and with their whole strength and to love one another as Christ loved them* (Mk. 12:30, Jn. 13:34). God gives every individual the means to become holy according to their personal vocation.

In his address to youth, Pope John Paul II said: "It is therefore indispensable for each one to seek and to recognize day after day the long path on which the Lord is leading to personal encounter with God. Dear Friends, question yourselves seriously about your vocation and be ready to answer the Lord who is calling you to take the place God has prepared for you from eternity."⁶

CALLED TO BRING OTHERS TO GOD

The gift of vocation is not just for the person being called. It is a call to be used; to be an instrument to bring others to God. (Universal salvation) In her article on *Life and Apostolic Activity* Emerenziana Rossato SFO, wrote:

"The initiative was His, not ours. It is God who calls and continues to call and at each call chooses places and guides a person. God calls for a certain purpose and furnishes the means to reach it. He calls for the benefit of the person but also for the benefit of the community. And it is the answer of the person that fulfills or not fulfills the will of Him who calls. So each fulfillment of a vocation will never be a small matter, but a fullness of grace."⁷

⁴ John Paul II *Vocation and Mission of the Laity*

⁵ *Lumen Gentium*, Chapter V, number

⁶ Address to Youth, 1978

⁷ *LIFE AND APOSTOLIC ACTIVITY* Emerenziana Rossato SFO CIOFS Document not dated

St. Francis too, emphasizes that a vocation is a call to be an instrument that God will use not only for the one called but for the benefit of other people.

*“Let us take thought of our vocation. God in his mercy has called us to it not so much for our sake as for the sake of the many. So let us go out into the world and remind everybody by example as well as word to turn to God. If you seem feeble and of no importance and wisdom, never fear but urge contrition in a plain way without misgiving, trusting in the Lord, who has overcome the world, since it is He who by the operation of his Spirit speaks through you and in you.”*⁸

CALLED TO TOTAL AVAILABILITY

In Philippians 2: 5-8 St. Paul says that Christ emptied himself for the sake of humankind. Though he was God, he was born of woman and became man. When we follow Jesus as our model, and say our “Yes” to God’s call, we need to recognize that our “yes” includes the offering and surrendering of ourselves in giving ourselves back to God. St. Francis wrote in the *Letter to the Entire Order*, that we are to hold back nothing of ourselves for ourselves, so that he who gave himself totally to us may receive us totally. By our choice, our yes, we become God’s property to be used for the specific mission God has planned for us.

Can I willingly offer the total and best gift of myself without conditions or time limits? Vocation demands one’s entire life. In scripture we find models of those who answered God’s call with that kind of desire to serve.

- Samuel: *“Speak Lord, your servant is listening.”* (1 Samuel 3:10)
- Isaiah: *“I will go, send me.”* (Isaiah 6: 8)
- Mary: *“Be it done unto me according to your word.”* (Luke 1:38)
- Ananias answers the Lord’s call to help St. Paul. Ananias uses the familiar words that we pray and sing. *“Here I am Lord.”* (Acts 9: 10)

Total availability is expressed in two words-willingness and surrender. If we are willing, then we are ready to do whatever God asks. If we surrender we *yield control* to the God who loves us so much. Guided by the Holy Spirit we become aware of the opportunities to be used by the Lord in every aspect of our lives, in our families, work, and community. That Spirit will lead us to be and do what God has planned for us.

⁸ I found the exact quote in *The Words of St. Francis, An Anthology by James Meyer, O.F.M.*, pages 172-173, but I’m not certain which number is represented in the Three Companions

THE SPECIFIC FRANCISCAN VOCATION

One of Francis' early followers, Brother Masseo, asked Francis, "Why does the whole world run after you and everyone want to see you and hear you and obey you? Francis, why after you?"⁹ People are inspired by Francis. He is called the universal saint and almost everybody's favorite.

Why not?

The Francis that people read about is truly an inspiration. He is so like Jesus. It has been 800 years since Francis gave his gospel message to the world. Yet people still run after him because Francis reminds us of Christ and leads us to him. In reality it is Christ we seek.

"When Francis looked back, he saw Christ; when we look back, we see Francis. The difference between him and us is all there, and it is enormous. Question: In what, then, does the Franciscan charism consist? Answer: Looking at Christ with the eyes of Francis! We do not cultivate the Franciscan charism by looking at Francis, but by looking at Christ through Francis' eyes."¹⁰

Many people are attracted to St. Francis and believe they have a Franciscan vocation. However attraction is not enough. To have a Franciscan vocation includes the willingness to bind oneself permanently to a consecrated religious life as the friars and sisters do, or to a consecrated form of life for lay people, as the Secular Franciscans do. One can be inspired by Francis but not be destined to serve in a consecrated Franciscan form of life.

It's necessary to tell the difference between just being attracted or inspired by Francis and the call to follow Christ in the way that Francis did. One who is thinking about a call to the Franciscan life style and is looking into his/her heart as to whether or not a Franciscan vocation is for them, the answers to the following questions can be of some help.

1. Can I put aside feelings of romanticism, sentimentalism about St. Francis?
2. Do I identify with the things about Jesus that Francis discovered and on which he based his way of living and serving? Can I see Christ with the eyes of Francis? Can I live that way too?

⁹ Fioretti 10

¹⁰ Cantalamessa, OFM CAP April 18, 2009

3. Looking at my own life experiences do I find myself ready to learn more about this way and make the effort to embrace the Franciscan path?
4. Can I accept living and nurturing the charism of Francis to make it present in the world?

CALLED TO A FRANCISCAN LIFE STYLE

DISCERNMENT

Generally to discern means to make a judgment about something that is not clear. For our purposes discernment is a word that describes the *process* of coming to understand whether or not the Lord is calling and inviting an individual to a Franciscan life style.

How then does one discern a true *Franciscan* vocation? We begin with prayer. Pray each day to fulfill God's will and purpose in the life that is being discerned. We don't always know what that is, but sometimes we are given clues.

There is a particular spiritual style for those who are Franciscans. We will address this life style briefly because it is covered in other places during formation. The following are some characteristics that are found in a person who is called to be a Franciscan. These can help us discern if we have an authentic Franciscan vocation:

- A very intense Eucharistic spirituality (Seeing Christ present in the Eucharist and the ideal of self giving like Jesus did and continues to do in the Eucharist)
- A very strong fraternal communion: (We are united as brothers and sisters to each other in our fraternities and in the world. Our spirituality includes the support and encouragement and inspiration of others in our Order.)
- Simplicity (A spirituality that is genuine ; without pretense)
- Poverty (Love of Gospel poverty develops confidence in the Father and creates internal freedom)
- Humility (The truth of what and who we really are in the eyes of God; freedom from pride and arrogance)
- A genuine sense of minority (The recognition that we are servants, not superior to anyone.)
- A complete and active abandonment to God. (Trusting in God's unconditional love)

- Conversion (Daily we begin again the process of changing to be more like Jesus)
- Transformation (What God does for us, when we are open and willing)
- Peacemaking (We are messengers of peace as Francis was.)

Those who, through proper discernment recognize that their call is to follow Jesus in the footsteps of Francis will then accept his way of living through a public, solemn and perpetual commitment called profession before God and the Church. This is true for all called to the Franciscan way of life including Franciscans of the first, second and third Orders.

CALLED TO THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER?

Does one have a vocation to the Secular Order of Franciscans? Father Lester Bach, OFM Capuchin in his book “*The Franciscan Journey*” lists ten signs that a person *may* have a vocation to the Secular Franciscan Order.

The individual:

- Is a good, practical Catholic.
- Has a desire to follow Jesus and his Gospel, the heart of our life.
- Has a personal faith relationship with Jesus, not just simply an intellectual knowledge about Jesus.
- Is hope-filled and willing and able to deal with life’s issues.
- Realizes that we are all sinful and in need of conversion.
- Has some knowledge of St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi.
- Is willing and able to commit to the Rule of the SFO and to live in fraternity.
- Trusts God and realizes the importance of God in their life.
- Has a reverence for all creation and a sense of courtesy and respect for it.
- Is willing to embrace a counter-cultural stance that is part of life in fraternity and are able and willing to share creative ideas and life with others.

OBLIGATIONS OF SECULAR FRANCISCANS TO THE FRATERNITY

A Secular Franciscan agrees to

- Personal presence at gatherings
- Witness to the Gospel
- Daily Prayer
- Active collaboration, in accordance with each one's situation and possible obligations for the animation of the fraternity.

(Article 30.2 Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order)

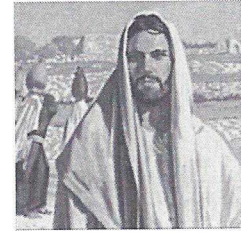
During the formation process one will learn more about the Secular Franciscan way of living by studying scripture, the *rule*, constitutions and many other resources. A person can learn even more about the Order by experiences with the brothers and sisters in a local fraternity. They inspire, encourage and support us in our efforts to live the rule of life that we profess.

Those who begin to live this way of life will find their prayer life growing richer, their love for God and neighbor grow greater. They will experience God's transformation in themselves.

The vocation to the Secular Franciscan Order is truly a gift. Do not be afraid to commit to it. God gives an abundance of grace when you respond with all your heart to this CALL of God to be a Secular Franciscan.

"Do not be afraid, I will be with you. (Exodus 3:11)

Reflection Questions:



What Do You Want of Me Lord?

As you consider your call to union with God, reflect on the way God has called you and write the answers to the following questions. If you are journaling, use your journal for these questions or if not a separate sheet of paper

1. God makes the first move either directly, as He did with Phillip (Jn. 1: 43-46) or through a human instrument, like John the Baptist. (Jn. 1:29 &ff) How has God called you?
2. God never forces us to respond. He always leaves us free to respond to his gracious initiative. What is your response?
3. God deals with each one of us in a unique, personal way.
Describe the personal way in which your vocation was made clear to you.

Quotes from Scripture and Francis

I have called you by your name. "You are mine because you are precious in my eyes, you are honored and I love you." (Isaiah 43:1)

God is love and love seeks union

Essential to any analysis of vocation is the belief that **God is love**. *"Look into your experience; find the ways in which God has acted within your life, and then you will come to know that God is a God of love." (Deuteronomy 4: 32-34)*

I pray... they may all be one, as you, Father. are in me and I in you that they also may be in us. (John 17:21)

Called and Chosen

"You are the ones that I have chosen, that people may know and believe me and understand that it is I: (Isaiah 43:10)

Personal Vocation

"Return home and tell what God has done for you." (Mk 5, 1-20 Lk 8, 26-29)

This is the will of God, your holiness" (1 Thessalonians 4:3)

To ask catechumens: "Do you wish to receive Baptism?" means at the same time to ask them: "Do you wish to become holy?" It means to set before them the radical nature of the Sermon on the Mount: "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48).¹⁰

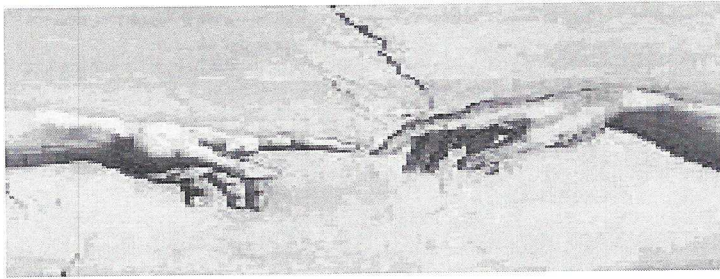
Called to bring others to God

"Let us take thought of our vocation. God in his mercy has called us to it not so much for our sake as for the sake of the many. So let us go out into the world and remind everybody by example as well as word to turn to God. If you seem feeble and of no importance and wisdom, never fear but urge contrition in a plain way without misgiving, trusting in the Lord, who has overcome the world, since it is He who by the operation of his Spirit speaks through you and in you."¹¹

¹⁰ John Paul II *Novo Millennio Ineunte*

¹¹ *Legend of the Three Companions*

"Do not be afraid, I will be with you. (Exodus 3:11)



Prayer Service

Presider: Come let us worship the Lord God as we are his people.

All: To you Lord we give glory and praise.

Presider: Let us pray. Eternal God, we, your chosen people, gather in your presence. You have called us by name to be united with you. Every mindful of our call, we now pray.

Liturgy of the Word:

First Reader: Romans 8:28-30

We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined he also called; and those he called he also justified; and those he justified he also glorified.¹²

Response: We praise you, O Lord.

Second Reader: 2 Peter 1; 3-11

¹² Confraternity of Christian Doctrine. Board of Trustees, Catholic Church. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, & United States Catholic Conference. Administrative Board. (1996). *The New American Bible : Translated from the original languages with critical use of all the ancient sources with the revised Book of Psalms and the revised New Testament* (Ro 8:28–30). Confraternity of Christian Doctrine.

His divine power has bestowed on us everything that makes for life and devotion, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and power.

⁴Through these, he has bestowed on us the precious and very great promises, so that through them you may come to share in the divine nature, after escaping from the corruption that is in the world because of evil desire.

⁵For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, virtue with knowledge, ⁶knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with devotion, ⁷devotion with mutual affection, mutual affection with love.

⁸If these are yours and increase in abundance, they will keep you from being idle or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹Anyone who lacks them is blind and shortsighted, forgetful of the cleansing of his past sins.

¹⁰Therefore, brothers, be all the more eager to make your call and election firm, for, in doing so, you will never stumble. ¹¹For, in this way, entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ will be richly provided for you.¹³

Response: God, our God has blest us. May all peoples praise you..

INTERCESSIONS:

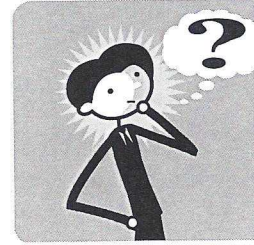
Presider: Let us pray to the Lord our God who has chosen us to be his own by praying together, The Lord's Prayer.

Presider: Lord, bless and strengthen your people

All: Let your face shine on us and bring us peace. Amen

¹³ Confraternity of Christian Doctrine. Board of Trustees, Catholic Church. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, & United States Catholic Conference. Administrative Board. (1996). *The New American Bible : Translated from the original languages with critical use of all the ancient sources with the revised Book of Psalms and the revised New Testament* (2 Pe 1:3–11). Confraternity of Christian Doctrine.

Additional Journal and discussion Questions



What is my answer to these questions?

1. Can I put aside feelings of romanticism, sentimentalism about St. Francis?
2. Do I identify with the things about Jesus that Francis discovered and on which he based his way of living and serving?
3. Can I see Christ with the eyes of Francis? Can I live that way too?
4. Looking at my own life experiences do I find myself ready to learn more about this way and make the effort to embrace the Franciscan path?
5. Can I accept living and nurturing the charism of Francis to make it present in the world?

