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For God's Kingdom: *A Tertiary viewpoint*

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It has been said that The Third Order plays at being Franciscan. Indeed, how can anyone 'living in the world' presume to follow Saint Francis in his uncompromising and abandoned literal following of Christ? But we do share with our First and Second Order brothers and sisters – as is clear from The Way of Saint Francis in our Tertiary Manual – the three ways of service: prayer, study and active work.

These are things which Tertiaries do take seriously and I know many who are shining examples. They were also Francis' own ways of service. One could argue about study, but his intimate knowledge of the scriptures shows he studied them deeply. As for prayer and active work, his whole life was a tension between the desire to be contemplative (prayer) and the passion to be active (works). So you are close to Francis if you feel a tension between prayer and active work.

Artificial division of the three ways of service

When I was noviced in 1971, active work for Tertiaries was still viewed as special ministry to the poor and marginalised, and the order had great difficulty in accepting that, as a busy managing director, my time for this was very limited, and that I viewed my work itself as dedicated to bringing about God's Kingdom. Nowadays, this is less of an issue, but my desire was not to divide up my life into prayer-time, study-time and active-time. My ideal was (and is) to be constant in prayer, to pray as I work, to work as I pray, and to study (in the sense of learning from God) as I work and pray. In this way, I can continue to respond to the many pressures on my time, and minister as God wishes me to, but stay in touch with God all the time, and rejoice in his presence, and to see his wonderful work unfolding in front of me.

There are times, particularly recently, where illness and semi-retirement mean a more passive role, but in responding to nurses or company officials, I still need to be constantly in prayer, and to learn from them.

Prayer

But this is my desire, mostly not realized. I now know the warning signs if prayer is needed: I become anxious, find myself giving obsessive attention to the problem in hand and become over-involved emotionally with the problems

of those to whom I am ministering. My head is down, nose to the grindstone. I need to look up, to God. My way of fixing this is – I think – unusual, although I have found one other Tertiary who found it useful: I don't 'save up' for a long prayer time ('God, you and I need to talk'), I pray for a few seconds – just a look at God, no words, usually. Not an 'arrow prayer', in the sense of a prayer about a specific problem, just a glance at God. Normally, I find that a few seconds' deep silence – I just stop what I'm doing – is what is required. Then the presence of God becomes more tangible during the day.

Study

The sign that study is needed for me is a lack of direction, drifting with every wind of doctrine. I need to get back to the Truth, away from the banalities and political correctness of the world. Again, as with prayer, although longer periods of study are a privilege, the way back for me is to look there and then at a short passage from the gospels, or a Christian poet.

Active Work

The sign that action is needed is, for me, that I am turned in on myself, feeling depressed and isolated. The real red-light situation is when a need (like Lazarus) turns up on my doorstep, and I realize some time later that I failed to react. This can happen when I am very busy – it's just that my busyness is unloving. The technique I use is to 'watch and pray' - to prepare myself by cultivating an attitude of love towards that person or that type of person, so that when a sudden challenge arrives, I will react instinctively as God wants me to do. *f*