July Teaching Chapter 20 – Freedom to Love - Rule 12

…Francis’ father hurried to the palace of the commune complaining to the city magistrates about his son, and asking them to make him return the money he had taken from the house. When the magistrates saw how distraught he was, they sent a messenger to summon Francis to appear before them. Francis told the messenger that he had been made free by God’s grace and, since he was a servant of almighty God alone, he was no longer bound by the magistrates. The magistrates, unwilling to force the issue, told Francis’ father, that “because he is in the service of God, he no longer falls within our power.”

(*read slowly Rule 12)* …. Witnessing to the good yet to come and obliged to acquire purity of heart because of the vocation they have embraced, they should set themselves free to love God and their brothers and sisters. *(Then read the commentary)*

There was a well-known idiom of the spiritual journey that is attributed to St. Jerome and became a staple for those persons seeking to live a more committed Christian life in the Middle Ages, “Walk nakedly following the naked Christ.” The directive of St. Jerome was clearly a call to spiritual nakedness, to a stripping of all things in one’s life that stands in the way of a complete, dependent relationship on God. St. Clare shares this bit of spiritual insight with Agnes of Prague when she writes: “You also know that one who is clothed cannot fight another who is naked, because she is more quickly thrown who gives her adversary a chance to get hold of her.”

As Francis renounces his previous life, he is now truly free to love God and his brothers and sisters. Being with the lepers, the untouchables, the living dead, is just the beginning of a life-long endeavor of Francis to fulfill the Two Great Commandments of the law that Jesus places before each of us. Francis came to love all people because each was created by God. This was not a love that he kept to himself, rather he chose to demand it of his brothers in his letter to a Minister. The command to love others is given three times in this letter; each is accompanied by its own directive:

Love……… And do not expect anything different from them…

Love……….And do not wish that they be better Christians.

Love……..And always be merciful.

These precepts serve our lives as well as they did the early followers of Francis. Imagine how our lives would change; how our expectations of others would change; how our outlook on life would change; how our world would change.

*(repeat the precepts…Love ….)*

This is the challenge of Article 12 – like Francis, we can witness with our words or with our actions, but the summons is clear: ours is to make known the reality of the kingdom and God’s goodness as the ultimate goal of our being.

One way to give witness is the fulfillment of the obligation to be pure of heart. “Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God” (Mt 5:8). Remember what St. Jerome said: “Walk nakedly following the naked Christ.” What is it that we cling to? In our day and age we must go beyond material goods; possessions take many forms. What about possessions of the heart?

In the Admonitions, Francis warns against these negative habits of the heart: self-will, disobedience, love of power, pride, gossip, following only the letter of the law, envy, blaming others for our own faults and failings, anger, impatience,

These possessions are more a barrier to our being set free than any amount of material possessions we own. Setting ourselves free of the cares of this world and of the self-centred habits that nag us all allows us to be open to God’s sharing his life with us.

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| *\*\* Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People – Vatican II (paragraph 4)*  The success of the lay apostolate depends upon the laity’s living union with Christ, in keeping with the Lord’s words. “He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit, for without me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). This life of intimate union with Christ in the church is nourished by spiritual aids which are common to all the faithful, especially active participation in the sacred liturgy…..only by the light of faith and by meditation on the word of God can one always and everywhere recognize God in Whom “we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28).  \*\*\* Richard Rohr in his June 17 meditation, speaks about how everything belongs and no one needs to be scapegoated or excluded. Evil and illusion only need to be named and exposed truthfully, and they die in exposure to the light. Discernment invites people into “yes/and” thinking, rather than simplistic “either/or” thinking. Once we have learned to discern the real and disguised nature of both good and evil we recognize that everything is broken and fallen, prosperous and poor – while still being the dwelling place of God – you and me, your country, your children, your marriage, and even your church and mosque and synagogue. This is not a put down of anybody or anything, but actually creates the freedom to love imperfect things! As Jesus told the rich young man, “God alone is good!” (Mark 10:18) |
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\*\*\* In his book, Immortal Diamond, Richard Rohr calls God “the Great Allower.” God allows us to make mistakes and God allows acts of great evil to take place. And this is not something anyone likes. Rohr writes, “God’s total allowing of everything has in fact become humanity’s major complaint. Conservatives so want God to smite sinners that they find every natural disaster to be a proof of just that, and then they invent some of their own smiting besides. Liberals reject God because God allows holocausts and tortures and does not fit inside their seeming logic.

Rohr goes on to suggest that if we were being honest, we would admit that “God is both a scandal and a supreme disappointment to most of us.” Despite our professed love and desire for autonomy, “we would prefer a God of domination and control to a God of allowing.”

Why doesn’t God just “force” us into doing the right thing, rather than risk blowing it. Our Rule 12 tells us that allowing us our freedom to choose is a great gift.

Rohr speaks of “allowing the Great Allower to allow us, even at our worst.” If we do, he suggests, we learn, “to share in the divine freedom” and to “forgive God for being too generous.”

In our Catechism of the Catholic Church, we see reference to Man’s Freedom:

*(read No. #1730, # 1731, #1733, #1741 and #1742)*

Sister Evelyn Ann Schumacher, from the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity, wrote a paper entitled “Initiative or Passivity” in which she explored the relationship between freedom, responsibility, and religious obedience. In that paper she insisted on the exercise of freedom. In it, she wrote that the structures safeguarding obedience are “good only to the extent that one’s freedom is exercised, for that element in human dignity, which makes obedience and freedom compatible is the **use** of personal freedom. Without personal freedom, a person is reduced to conformity which stems from fear and leads to servility. On the other hand, if a religious is allowed to exercise freedom, she enters into true obedience prompted by love….no one, not even a superior, can deprive a subject of her God-given right to freely think and to act for herself.

Other points from Chapter 20 I feel are worth noting:

# Pg. 217 speaks about how freedom functions best when it has borders – adhering to the rules requires “respect” for the “other”. When the rules don’t work – people change them to keep it fair for all. Christ said “I came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it”.

#Pg 221 – speaks about the inter-connectedness of the articles in our Rule*…(read the 3 marked paragraphs).*

#Pg. 223 – *(read bottom paragraph).*

**Question for the group:** After reading this chapter and hearing the teaching, has your concept of “Freedom” changed in any way and if so, how?