

## GRACE TO BUILD THE KINGDOM

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Gordon MacDonald wrote: “The world can do almost anything as well or better than the Church. You need not be a Christian to build houses, feed the hungry, or care for the sick. There is only one thing the world cannot do. It cannot offer grace.”

At a time long ago, and at a place far away...I went to a Secular Franciscan fraternity meeting, just to see what it was all about. The only Franciscan charism to have touched me before that meeting was the Conventual Franciscan priests and brothers. I had no idea what I was in for!

At that meeting, the Spiritual Assistant, himself a Secular Franciscan and Diocesan priest, told me and another visitor, that it was not us who brought ourselves to this place and this time, but by the GRACE of the Holy Spirit we were led here.

So there I was, thinking what is grace?

As a young child I learned that grace was a free gift from God. Not usually asked for, and in no way earned. I knew grace was bestowed on us through the

Sacraments and we all needed God’s grace to make it to Heaven.

So how did this grace creep into my life and get me to arrive at this meeting?

I am sure we all have similar Franciscan Journey stories. The true question presented to us today is...have we accepted this grace, this free gift from God, to enable us to live as Secular Franciscans in the world today, and use this grace to build up the Kingdom of God?

First we must truly understand grace, and reach beyond ourselves to accept it as God’s gift.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us that grace is the “...free and undeserved gift that God gives us to respond to our vocation ...Sacramental grace... help(s) us live out our Christian vocation.”

The Secular Franciscan Order’s F.U.N. Manual teaches us that “God does not allow us to make promises that He is not willing to help us keep... At Profession, one is also graced with the Holy Spirit who has given the vocation in the first place.”

Our Irish Franciscan brothers and sisters write “In God’s grace we grow to love ourselves as He wants – all of ourselves, even the parts we wish were not there, the parts of us we wish God hadn’t made, the parts of us we lament.” Through this grace we learn to accept our whole self, and thus we can accept others, especially in our fraternities.

If grace is a free gift from God, and grace helps us to respond to our vocation, and the same grace helps us to live out our vocation, then isn’t our Profession a grace-filled gift from God also? If we believe all this about grace, then how should it affect our Secular Franciscan vocation?

Grace gives us the strength to be Secular Franciscans. Grace gives us the strength to expand the knowledge of our vocations. Grace gives us the strength to be a brother or sister to each in the fraternity. Grace gives us the ability to step beyond our fears and serve our Order in whatever ways are needed, such as serving as a Council member, sharing our stories and knowledge as a Formation team member, or to serve wherever the fraternity has a need. Grace has brought me here and grace will see me through (sound familiar?) this vocation which God has bestowed on me.

Grace is a gift to be cherished, to be lived-in and to be given back to God through our living-out of our Secular Franciscan vocation. Accept this grace and go build up the Kingdom of God!

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