

AS WE LOOK TO OUR OWN WELLBEING, THINK OF OTHERS

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

As part of our Franciscan charism, we have the idea that not only do we need to look to our own wellbeing, but we must also 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 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? This was not an easy task for one who had tried it and still continued 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 more than three-month stay in the ICU at the University of Denver Hospital. When I visited him in August 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 clichéd 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 that God's way is not our way; God's lack of fairness by human standards should 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 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 God gave him the grace 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, 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.

Remembering Lester

The Conference of National Spiritual Assistants extends our prayers and condolences to the Capuchin Friars of the Province of St. Joseph at the passing of their brother, Father Lester Bach. We have come to know and work with Lester as a Spiritual Assistant on various levels in the Secular Franciscan Order. His Franciscan spirituality as an author of many books on Initial and Continuing Formation deepened the vocation of the sisters and brothers living as Franciscans in the midst of world. Our grateful acknowledgment is given to Lester for initiating the "Life-Giving Union" course for preparing "suitable and well-prepared" spiritual assistants. We can say, then, with our Lord, "Well done, good and faithful, 'suitable and well-prepared' servant, enter into the joy of your Lord."