

SEE – JUDGE –ACT

Secular Franciscans often ask “what am I supposed to do?” This question sometimes has a simple answer, for example, when it involves the specific mechanics of the functioning of the commission. The question becomes more complicated when it refers to a pressing work-related social problem – unemployment, sweat shops, the inequality of wages for women and men. The **See – Judge – Act** methodology is a means to respond to the needs of our times. It is another way of saying “gospel to life and life to gospel.” It has been used in Catholic circles for decades.

As we learn more about a Catholic and Franciscan understanding of the importance of work, we come to realize that the significance of our work extends far beyond our own parochial needs to earn a living. Work, in God’s plan, allows us to participate in the unfolding of the divine plan for the world. A plan takes work to implement. Our work – our commitment to act on behalf of building the kingdom of God.

This commitment to act and concretize dreams is buoyed by a sense of hope that what we do is the continuation of the birthing to good works that St. Francis and St. Clare initiated in the early 13th century. Works that continue to be done through men and women like ourselves who opt to follow in their footsteps. We dream dreams and we work together to make those dreams come true.

SEE

We begin to truly SEE by developing binocular vision. On one hand, we must see and understand God’s plan for the world as revealed in the Good News and interpreted by the Church. On the other hand, we must also see and be aware of the present condition of our world – the reality of our times – which often falls far short of embodying Gospel values. This is no easy feat.

The following excerpts correspond to the citations from the diagram above:

WE ARE CALLED TO BE AWARE OF GOD’S PLAN FOR THE WORLD:

John 1:1-17:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light. The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to

become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. (John bore witness to him, and cried, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, for he was before me.") And from his fulness have we all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 3: 1-21

For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles-- assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that is, how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.

This was according to the eternal purpose which he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confidence of access through our faith in him. So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory. For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

WE ARE CALLED TO BE AWARE OF THE REALITY OF OUR TIMES

Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (1965)

3. Though mankind is stricken with wonder at its own discoveries and its power, it often raises anxious questions about the current trend of the world, about the place and role of man in the universe, about the meaning of its individual and collective strivings, and about the ultimate destiny of reality and of humanity. Hence, giving witness and voice to the faith of the whole people of God gathered together by Christ, this council can provide no more eloquent proof of its solidarity with, as well as its respect and love for the entire human family with which it is bound up, than by engaging with it in conversation about these various problems. The council brings to mankind light kindled from the Gospel, and puts at its disposal those saving resources which the Church herself, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, receives from her Founder. For the human person deserves to be preserved; human society deserves to be renewed. Hence the focal point of

our total presentation will be man himself, whole and entire, body and soul, heart and conscience, mind and will. Therefore, this sacred synod, proclaiming the noble destiny of man and championing the godlike seed which has been sown in him, offers to mankind the honest assistance of the Church in fostering that brotherhood of all men which corresponds to this destiny of theirs. Inspired by no earthly ambition, the Church seeks but a solitary goal: to carry forward the work of Christ under the lead of the befriending Spirit. And Christ entered this world to give witness to the truth, to rescue and not to sit in judgment, to serve and not to be served.[2]

4. To carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other. We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its expectations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics. Some of the main features of the modern world can be sketched as follows. Today, the human race is involved in a new stage of history. Profound and rapid changes are spreading by degrees around the whole world. Triggered by the intelligence and creative energies of man, these changes recoil upon him, upon his decisions and desires, both individual and collective, and upon his manner of thinking and acting with respect to things and to people. Hence we can already speak of a true cultural and social transformation, one which has repercussions on man's religious life as well. As happens in any crisis of growth, this transformation has brought serious difficulties in its wake. Thus while man extends his power in every direction, he does not always succeed in subjecting it to his own welfare. Striving to probe more profoundly into the deeper recesses of his own mind, he frequently appears more unsure of himself. Gradually and more precisely he lays bare the laws of society, only to be paralyzed by uncertainty about the direction to give it. Never has the human race enjoyed such an abundance of wealth, resources and economic power, and yet a huge proportion of the world's citizens are still tormented by hunger and poverty, while countless numbers suffer from total illiteracy. Never before has man had so keen an understanding of freedom, yet at the same time, new forms of social and psychological slavery make their appearance. Although the world of today has a very vivid awareness of its unity and of how one man depends on another in needful solidarity, it is most grievously torn into opposing camps by conflicting forces. For political, social, economic, racial and ideological disputes still continue bitterly, and with them the peril of a war which would reduce everything to ashes. True, there is a growing exchange of ideas, but the very words by which key concepts are expressed take on quite different meanings in diverse ideological systems. Finally, man painstakingly searches for a better world, without a corresponding spiritual advancement. Influenced by such a variety of complexities, many of our contemporaries are kept from accurately identifying permanent values and adjusting them properly to fresh discoveries. As a result, buffeted between hope and anxiety and pressing one another with questions about the present course of events, they are burdened down with uneasiness. This same course of events leads men to look for answers; indeed, it forces them to do so.

JUDGE

WE ARE CALLED TO JUDGE OUR REALITY IN LIGHT OF GOD’S PLAN

To JUDGE is to evaluate an aspect of our present reality in light of the wisdom of our faith and our Secular Franciscan calling. We judge the present from the perspective of the Gospel and the values inherent in the Good News. Take unemployment as an example. Economists say that unemployment is an unavoidable by-product of our economic system. Our society provides benefits for those who cannot find work but not always the training needed to find work. Our culture also limits our understanding of “work” primarily to activity which brings us a paycheck.

Let’s see what the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says about the importance of working:

2428 In work, the person exercises and fulfills in part the potential inscribed in his nature. The primordial value of labor stems from man himself, its author and its beneficiary. Work is for man, not man for work. Everyone should be able to draw from work the means of providing for his life and that of his family, and of serving the human community. 2429 Everyone has the right of economic initiative; everyone should make legitimate use of his talents to contribute to the abundance that will benefit all and to harvest the just fruits of his labor. He should seek to observe regulations issued by legitimate authority for the sake of the common good.

We learn from the *Catechism* that work is fundamental, “primordial” to who we are and who we are meant to become. If we don’t work, we don’t realize our full humanity. St. Francis somehow understood the fundamental importance of work when he spoke of “the friars to whom God has given the grace of working...” Our Secular Franciscan way of life, following St. Francis, asks Seculars to “...esteem work as a gift and a sharing in the creation, redemption and service of the human community.”

All the above confirms that work is very important indeed. When we cannot work, human beings are not only being short-changed of a paycheck but of their own humanity. This puts unemployment in a different perspective – it is not just an economic issue but a spiritual and moral issue as well.

ACT

WE ARE CALLED TO ACT FOR THE REALIZATION OF GOD’S REIGN

We are called to ACT for the realization of God’s reign on earth. To build more just and human communities where the Gospel values of Justice, Truth, Love, Peace, Unity and Freedom are embodied. We are to act with commitment and purpose. We are to act in concert where possible, together as sisters and brothers in Francis and the Lord.

Let’s return to the example of unemployment. Perhaps we can do something to find paying jobs for those without work. But we realize that the importance of work transcends what we do for pay. Perhaps we create volunteer opportunities for those temporarily without paying jobs. We do this because we know how important work is to the well-being of a person. Perhaps we do something smaller – like having housebound members of the fraternity call other members or

write to prisoners. But we act, we work, with creativity and compassion, following the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, because that is what our God wants of us. Perhaps it is in simply reminding our older members that their “work” isn’t finished yet, at least in the vision of Pope John Paul II: “I remind older people that the Church calls and expects them to continue to exercise their mission in the apostolic and missionary life. This is not only a possibility for them, but it is their duty even in this time in their lives when age itself provides opportunities in some specific and basic way.” (*The Lay Members of Christ’s Faithful People*, 48)

When we are weary and in need of inspiration, the words of Secular Franciscan and diocesan priest, Fr. John Bertolucci can hearten us:

“We are not supposed to be men and women who are letting history happen to us. We are supposed to be happening to history. God wants to equip us and lead us forth in mighty ways that will actually make history happen. We are not to wake up in the morning and all life to just occur to us. We are to be aggressive, outgoing and assertive in desiring to change things in accord with the principles we have learned in the Word of God.” (from *Disciplines of a Disciple*)

* Diagram prepared by Sr.Dorothy Ortega of the Phillipines and used in a presentation for the *Correspondence Course on the Franciscan Missionary Charism* known in the *United States as Build With Living Stones*. Used with permission. Quotes used from the Bible and from the Second Vatican Council are those cited in the diagram. Text by Ed Zablocki, SFO.