

**Sisters of St. Francis of the Martyr St. George**  
***Veni si Amas* Retreat Mass**  
**St. Francis Convent – Alton, IL**  
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My dear sisters in Christ, it is my pleasure to be with you today during the *Veni si Amas* Vocation Discernment Retreat here in Alton with the Sisters of St. Francis of the Martyr St. George. God's love for you has drawn you here this weekend to take the opportunity to step away from your ordinary routine so as to spend some time in prayer as you discern your vocation.

When we speak about discernment in the context of vocations, we are speaking about trying to discover how it is that we are being invited to respond to the call that God has for each and every one of us. At the most basic level is the call to holiness whereby we "follow in His footsteps and conform [ourselves] to His image seeking the will of the Father in all things."<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the way that call to holiness is lived out is unique to each of us, and this is the work of discernment that all of you are undertaking at this point in your lives. It is a journey that is at times exciting, at other times confusing, at times frustrating, and even sometimes

frightening. In the end, though, we know that it is a journey worth taking because it leads us along that unique path that has been designed especially for us and by following it, we will come to find the greatest amount of peace and joy as we do God's will.

In our first reading for today, we have the figure of Abraham presented to us. The life of Abraham is a very fitting one to reflect on in the context of discernment as his journey of following God offers us some helpful insights for our journey. First of all, we can consider the initial encounter of Abraham with God. The Lord tells Abraham: "Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father's house to a land that I will show you" (Gen. 12:1). At this point, it would have been very easy for Abraham to raise his objections and concerns about setting off on a journey to an unknown land. He was comfortable and prosperous where he was, not to mention the fact that he was already 75 years old. But the Scriptures tell us very simply that he "went as the Lord directed him" (Gen. 12:4).

This response of Abraham to begin this journey shows an openness on his part to whatever the Lord had prepared for him. Even though the future in store for him is hidden from his sight, he goes forward in faith. In his first encyclical, Pope Francis comments on this when he writes: "The

sight which faith would give to Abraham would always be linked to the need to take this step forward: faith 'sees' to the extent that it journeys, to the extent that it chooses to enter into the horizons opened up by God's word."<sup>2</sup>

It is because Abraham takes that initial step in faith that he will later be able to see more clearly where God is leading him. The same is true for us. God calls each of us to follow Him with this type of openness and faith. This can be difficult because the future is so uncertain. It can be easy in the initial stages of discernment to want to try to have all of our questions and concerns answered. Only then, if we are satisfied with those answers, will we give our consent and begin to follow Him in the way that He desires.

This is not how discernment works. If we wait until all of our questions are answered, we miss the valuable experience of learning to trust God by following Him in the midst of those uncertainties. This is an experience that will be valuable not just for the beginning of our journey, but for every step of the way as well. In addition, taking this approach of waiting until we are absolutely certain makes the journey more about our initiative as a decision that we make, as if it were a job, as opposed to a response to an invitation, which is at the heart of a vocation.

There is an important part of the story of Abraham that cannot go without mentioning and which is crucial to our journey of discernment. Even though the future in store for Abraham was so uncertain, there was something that he was able to keep as a reference point that would give him the courage to persevere in his journey. The reference point I am speaking of is the promise that God had given to him on the occasion of his initial call. God had promised to Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation and that He would bless Abraham and his descendants.<sup>3</sup>

Pope Francis comments on this point in the same paragraph of his encyclical on the light of faith when he writes: “As a response to a word which preceded it, Abraham’s faith would always be an act of remembrance. Yet this remembrance is not fixed on past events but, as the memory of a promise, it becomes capable of opening up the future, shedding light on the path to be taken.”<sup>4</sup> This shows us that in addition to having that openness to God, the path before Abraham is made clearer by remembering the promise of becoming the father of many nations.

It is this reminder that gave Abraham the ability to go so far as being willing to even sacrifice his only son, Isaac, trusting that God would remain faithful to His promise. We, too, are given promises by God to encourage

us in our journey of discernment. The greatest promise that He gives us is that by believing in Him and following Him, we will inherit eternal life.<sup>5</sup>

This, ultimately, is what a vocation is all about. It is the unique path that God has for each of us in order to get to Heaven. That is not to say that if you have a call to religious life and do not follow it that you will not get to Heaven. God respects our freedom and does not force us into anything. However, as a loving Father, He knows what is best for us and what will bring us the greatest amount of peace, joy, and fulfillment in our lives. God will never call us to something that He will not at the same time give the graces for us to persevere in that call. Nor will He call us to a life that will lead to disappointment and sadness. That is not to say that we will not experience challenges in our vocation. The Lord reminds us that the Cross is a part of every Christian's journey of faith.<sup>6</sup> But we do not let the possibilities of encountering some bumps on the road of our journey to discourage us because of the reminder of the promise that lies at the end of our journey, the promise of eternal life.

As you are all gathered here for this retreat, you are likely at different points on this journey of discernment. This journey, as I mentioned earlier, can be a joyful experience at times, while at other times, it can be a time of

great uncertainty. Whatever the case may be, you know that God is calling you to something. Your presence here is a sign of the openness and faith that you have as you continue to discern that call. By keeping that attitude of trust, you will continue to have that path made more visible before you.

May you continue to be reminded of the promises from God as you proceed on this journey. In addition to the promise of eternal life, may you also be encouraged by the promises God gives that are specific to the journey, that He is with you always<sup>7</sup> and that with Him, all things are possible.<sup>8</sup>

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 40.

<sup>2</sup> *Lumen Fidei*, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Gen. 12:2-3.

<sup>4</sup> *Lumen Fidei*, 9.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Jn 3:16.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Mt. 16:24.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Mt. 28:20

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Mt 19:26, Phil.4:13.