



WHY SPIRITUAL DIRECTION IS GOOD FOR ANYONE WHO TAKES FAITH SERIOUSLY

By Russell Shaw (June 26 2015) ... from Ignatian Spirituality website

Is spiritual direction intended only for a small elite group composed of clergy and nuns and a handful of laity with special vocations? Not really. Direction is for serious Christians generally, whether cleric, religious, or lay. But since that is seldom said these days, it needs explaining. Here goes.

Spiritual direction can be described many ways, but the best way is to emphasize its role in helping people see, accept, and live out God's will in their lives. Speaking specifically of the laity, Pope St. John Paul II says the "fundamental objective" of their formation is "ever-clearer discovery of one's vocation and the ever-greater willingness to live it so as to fulfill one's mission." Spiritual direction is a big help in that.

As the quote above (from St. John Paul's landmark document on the laity, *Christifideles Laici*) makes clear, everybody has a personal vocation. It's his or her unique role in accomplishing God's redemptive plan through the life of "good works" which, as the letter to the Ephesians says, "God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph 2.10).

Spiritual direction doesn't give you a personal vocation. The vocation is already there. But direction assists people in discerning their vocations and carrying them out.

Which, of course, is a lifetime job. People tend to imagine that a vocation comes whole and entire in a sudden lightning flash, and that's the end of it. But the unfolding of a vocation is a lifelong process, and discerning it a daily task. As Cardinal Newman says, God's call is "a thing which takes place now," and the "accidents and events of life" are prominent among the ways in which "the calls I speak of come to us."

One obvious conclusion is that there's nothing esoteric or mystical about spiritual direction. It isn't reading tea leaves or gazing into a crystal ball. Think of it as a conversation between friends. But, you may ask, a conversation about what?

There are lots of possibilities, but topics that typically arise include establishing and maintaining a plan of life—a program of spiritual practices helpful in the daily struggle, rooting out stubborn faults, spiritual reading, improving relationships and being of service to others. And that’s for starters.

Someone who’d read something I wrote on this subject remarked that if you took seriously what was said, it would mean even plans for the family vacation were potential material for spiritual direction.

My critic evidently considered the very idea absurd. I don’t. Although planning a family vacation usually doesn’t call for much soul-searching, there may be times when chatting with a spiritual director really will be helpful in making up your mind about what will be best for the others.

Note, though, that spiritual direction isn’t about telling people what to do. It’s about helping them to consider their options in the clear light of personal vocation. Then it’s up to them to make their own free choice.

Direction isn’t a form of confession either. If the director is a priest, sacramental confession may be involved. But spiritual direction and sacramental confession are two different things.

Finding a director isn’t necessarily easy. Prudence and sensitivity, availability and personal compatibility—these and much else are necessary. But it’s worth the effort. For as St. John Paul says, “personal vocation and mission define the dignity and the responsibility of each member of the lay faithful”—and spiritual direction can go a long way in helping us see what “personal vocation and mission” look like for us

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION IS A CONVERSATION

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