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One of the most common questions I get about my life as a Franciscan and a priest is, “So, when did you decide to become a Franciscan?” Or “When did you know you wanted to become a priest?”

Sometimes, the most honest answer I could give is, “It’s complicated.” I weigh in my mind how much I want to go into it, what parts of the story to share, what to leave out, etc.

Of course, there are certain elements that always make it into the telling—those peak moments when a turning point in the story happens, but I can’t help but feeling that other elements also had been key and the more I reflect on my life, the more I see the connections between all the strands and the more, well, complicated, it all becomes.

I know I’m not alone, not among the friars, but also not alone among others whose vocation is different than mine, but who also acknowledge the fact that their life was not one clear and certain decision after another leading to where they find themselves now.

A good friend of mine once exclaimed to me that there had been a moment when she realized she was going to marry the man who, if fact, did become her husband. I picked up on that right away. She realized it. It was as much a discovery as a decision. For me that has all the markings of the movement of the Holy Spirit, even though the discovery came while she was doing the dishes, I think, and not in the midst of prayer time or at Mass.

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When we go about the practice of discerning our vocation—what God is calling us to—that seems to me to be one of the best examples of the work of the Holy Spirit dwelling in our hearts. It's very personal work, but also work that goes beyond us. It's something we discover as much as we decide, maybe more.

The thing of it is, we do have to set out on that journey of inner discovery, and that's always an active process. As Christians we really can't hide behind what we learned in religious ed., as if all we need is a handbook where we look up how to respond to all life throws at us.

Jesus departs to heaven, not only to sit at the right hand of the Father, but more importantly to open up for us access to God's presence in a way that wasn't there before. And that presence, the Holy Spirit, is the person of God that we can most readily seek out and draw grace from. He is right there, dwelling in our hearts.

If you were to buy a house and the departing owner said to you, "Oh, by the way, I left a bag of gold coins in the basement. Feel free to use them as you need to." Who in their right mind would not take a look around?

We have access to just such a treasure residing in our hearts, and when we discover him, we find that the Holy Spirit is way better than a sack of gold, because we learn that the Holy Spirit has not been waiting to be found but has been active in a myriad of ways from even before we were born—knitting us together,

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inspiring our good actions, aiding us in our prayer, informing our consciences, calling us to compassion and justice, leading us to a fullness of life that can only be had if we respond to his ministry.

The Holy Spirit is our birthright as Christians, active in our very creation and bestowed upon us forthrightly in our baptism and confirmed sacramentally when we are at the age when we can know what to do with such a great gift.

The Holy Spirit is available to us as our advocate and confidant, but we do have to want to tune into his presence. That's really just about all it takes—just wanting the Holy Spirit is enough to get the whole ball rolling. And when it does, we discover what the Spirit has been up to all along, and something more of where it's all headed—fullness of life in the kingdom of God.