What if I Make a Mistake in Discerning God's Personal Call for Me?

So many times over the years, in my experience, sincere people of faith who seek God's will in their lives fret about making the "right choice."

"What is it," they wonder, "that God wants from me?"

Whether these be lifelong decisions, like a career path, marriage, ordained ministry or Religious life, or the more immediate day-to-day choices that confront us, our belief that God is very interested in what we do and how it fits into His providential plan can weigh heavy on the faithful soul.

In previous Seeds of Faith posts, we have looked at some of the basic ingredients to discerning the will of God in making life decisions. In all of it, God only asks that we make the best judgment we can in any given situation, based on what we know in the moment, and entrust the rest to His loving mercy. Inasmuch as we confess our sins, seek to keep God's commandments, strive to love Him by loving others, remain faithful to daily prayer (keeping us in tune with His voice), and listen to wise and honest friends and mentors, we can proceed in peace and press ahead with confidence.

Though the discerning process itself is relatively simple, carrying it out in practice is never easy.

But there are times in life when all of us at some point realize, mostly in retrospect, we have made poor decisions that emerged not out of good judgment or a desire to please God, but rather were rash or sinful judgments motivated by selfishness or driven by blinding emotions like fear, envy, or lust. Seeing and accepting with humility the truth of each failure we recognize is the bedrock of growth in maturity as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

It's true that the real saint is the one who falls again and again, but then is lifted up by grace again and again. This is the only way wisdom is won.

What is most marvelous in all this is that Jesus, on the cross, has made our worst sins and failings into "happy faults" by which His mercy draws forth even greater goods than would have been had we not fallen. As St. Paul says in Roman 8:31, "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

What hope this gives us all!

But as with everything in our faith, this divine plan isn't magic, and God can only draw out maximal good from our falls if we cooperate with Him by honestly facing our failures and sins—and the consequences of both—with humility, contrition, a firm resolve to do better and an even greater trust in His grace to save sinners. Here is our God-given hope: Even if I come to realize that a major life decision was made wrongly, I can begin again afresh and discover in my future a new quest to finish the race fully confident that God will glorified in all things…if we trust Him to do so.

All these thoughts are eloquently captured in a well-known prayer written by Thomas Merton. I invite you to pray them with me now and entrust your past, your present, and your future into His loving hands:

>My Lord God,
>I have no idea where I am going.
>I do not see the road ahead of me.
>I cannot know for certain where it will end.
>nor do I really know myself,
>and the fact that I think I am following your will
>does not mean that I am actually doing so.
>But I believe that the desire to please you
>does in fact please you.
>And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
>I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
>And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,
>though I may know nothing about it.
>Therefore will I trust you always though
>I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.
>I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
>and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

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