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Squirrels

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Squirrels

On a neighborhood street, when a car approaches, cats and dogs are quite adept at getting out of the way, but squirrels often seem to vacillate, heading in one direction, then the other, rather than going directly away.

All of us learned early in life about not stepping out into the path of oncoming cars, though present-day pedestrians with hand-held devices are at times so unaware of their environment that only careful drivers spare them from almost certain injury. We encounter other dangers in daily life that are interior threats to us rather than material or physical menaces. We have developed habits of dealing with some, such as consistently and readily refraining from taking something that does not belong to us or from doing violence to another person. But we might act more like squirrels in face of other decisions, especially those where we have conflicting feelings or values.

We do not have either training or learning experiences for each and every hazard to our integrity that can suddenly confront us. But we can develop habits of mind and heart that will serve us quite well in all kinds of unforeseen challenges. We have been specifically educated by family members and teachers, for example, to be honest, and have probably learned through a variety of personal experiences that dishonesty is really not worth the interior consequences of knowingly living with lies. But we also have access to a Teacher who is always with us, and we can also learn from reflecting on experiences as to general ways of making decisions that will apply in most particular situations, including those that are new to us.

When we trust God to help us form practical and helpful habits of decision-making, we can grow beyond our squirrel-like hesitancy in circumstances that require us to make choices, even those never before encountered. We do not thereby avoid our personal responsibility, as if God would make decisions for us. Rather, we seek inspiration to recognize better options from those that are less good, based not only on our reasonable information-gathering but also on spontaneous interior movements of peace or disturbance that go beyond rational considerations. We can take these movements into consideration as gifts and graces or we can ignore them, but the decisions are ours alone.

A self-help book might list a number of rules for making decisions. But God acts, in those who wish, as a personal Guide who helps us develop sensitivity to our inner compass which always points toward the better option whenever our welfare or that of others is involved. When we reflect on our experiences of inspiration, and upon the consequences of following

them (or not), we learn those patterns that help us move decisively to safety rather than in a direction opposed to our purpose in life.

God is always present to support the better options open to us at the time we must decide, with interior affirmations of peace, of trust, hope and love. But if we are pulled in opposite directions by conflicting feelings, we must first bring each of those feeling-thought combinations to prayer, to make a decision as to their relevance, whether they are connected directly with a truth that is affirmed by peace and interior consolation, or are aligned with disturbance, diminished trust, hope or love. Once we recognize where the feelings and their accompanying thoughts fit or do not fit, we are then ready to decide on the option under consideration.

For dealing with unforeseen dangers, the Spirit of God is our guide, not the example of squirrels.