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2007

"Do It Yourself"

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Roche, Fr. Randy, "'Do It Yourself'" (2007). *Spiritual Essays*. 128.

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“Do It Yourself”

Many businesses and organizations offer products or ideas that we can use to do things ourselves rather than depend upon others to do them. Often, we find that many “do it yourself” projects require previous experience or involve a significant learning curve, and generally require much more time than we had imagined. Wallpapering a bathroom can be quite satisfying, but it can also be an exercise in frustration while learning about the properties of wallpaper and glue, or maneuvering with tools and supplies in a narrow space. What seems easy in concept can be quite difficult in practice. Even if we have many skills, we cannot do everything for ourselves.

When it comes to healing our emotional hurts, and working through needed changes of attitude as we mature, we might find that some things are definitely better accomplished with consultation, teamwork, prayer, or a combination of any or all of these. Self-help publications can state things so simply as to give the impression that personal growth and development can be accomplished through one’s efforts alone: “Just do this or think that.” But our experience is often a mixture of both acting and being acted upon. We did not invent ourselves, and we do not create our lives wholly on our own initiatives or by our own powers.

Some “do it yourself” advice about personal growth relies almost entirely on thinking, as if that were our highest and most powerful capability. But we have internal senses and powers that precede or transcend thought. We need to “think through” our decisions, but the act of deciding is a movement of spirit or “heart”, not a thought. We often say of decisions, “this feels right,” when we refer to that aspect of our inherent powers that goes beyond thinking. Thoughts and feelings are not the same; together, they manifest the wonderful combination of body and spirit that make up our humanity.

Thinking, considering, and pondering are not the same as loving or taking action that is in accord with our values. Thinking is at the service of loving and choosing, providing us with necessary information about the world, about ourselves, and about God. We can think great thoughts without resolving a painful conflict or deciding on a course of action that improves our life or that of others. Or, we can think about what is better for ourselves and others, and then, trusting in our values and in God’s good Spirit, we can choose to act in accord with our beliefs and graces.

Thinking and praying are compatible activities, but they are not equivalent. We do not just think when we are in contact with God, but bring to the encounter both our thoughts and our feelings of affection, fear, anger, or whatever is taking place that concerns us. In bringing ourselves – our whole selves – to God, we experience change that is positive, whether in our circumstances, attitudes or options. We can think about the desirability of peace, healing, or integration, but we do not cause them by thinking about them. God relates with us in and through our whole person, body, mind, and spirit.

Gratitude is not a thought, nor is joy, or love - though we can think about their meaning. We can think about anything we want, for as long as we are able, and still not find fulfillment in life. Though we might be pleased with ourselves for having acted courageously, or having written an excellent letter, our experiences of gratitude, joy, and love are not of our creation, but follow upon our right relationships with God, others, and all else that exists. The best thing we can do for ourselves and by ourselves is to find God in all things, even in our capacity to think.