The Will of God

Francis was accustomed to go to Clare for counsel and advice. She was a source of such enlightenment that Francis saw in her a reflection of the Divine Wisdom. As the moon receives the glory of its brightness from the sun, so Clare received her splendour from the grace of God.

Whenever Francis wanted to know what was the will of God, he always asked the Sister at St. Damian’s.

From the start of his conversion, the saint had been torn between the desire of contemplation and the duty of preaching.

“Does the good Lord wish me to be a hermit or a missionary? Should I dedicate myself to a life of prayer in the woods and among the rocky hillside, or ought I to preach in the squares and the towns? Does He call me to the contemplative life or the active life?”

Now and then this doubt tormented him, in the solitude of the wood where he felt the need and the sweetness of contemplation as well as in the company of men where he felt the satisfaction of spending himself in charity for their salvation.

To settle this doubt once for all and to clear it up, he wanted a definite sign of what the will of God was in his regard. Francis could, indeed, have asked this directly from God; but, instead, he had recourse to Clare. She was a sure messenger of the will of the Lord.

Francis called Brother Masseo to himself and said: “Go along to Sister Clare and ask her to gather together her more spiritual nuns and to pray that the Lord might reveal to them what is better for me: to preach or to pray. Then, go along to Brother Sylvester and tell him the same thing.”

Brother Sylvester was the first priest among the friars and lived like a hermit near a large canal of Mount Subasio. Because of this, Francis held him in great respect.

Brother Masseo therefore went to St. Damian’s and made his message known to Clare, who gathered her companions together in prayer before that same crucifix which had spoken to Francis.

Then Masseo went off towards Subasio in search of Sylvester. The first Franciscan priest had already had a vision from which he was easily able to deduce what was to be Francis’ work. For instance, one day while he was praying, he saw a cross of gold come from the mouth of Francis. The cross became bigger and bigger until it embraced the whole world and reached to heaven. To him this meant that the preaching of Francis would go out over the whole world, leading all men to heaven.

The answer of Sylvester was crystal clear: “This is what God says, and you are to tell Fr. Francis: The Lord has not called you for yourself but also for the souls that will be saved through you.”
Brother Masseo came down from the mountain and back to St. Damian’s. Clare also had received an answer, and it was the same as Sylvester’s: “Tell Francis that God wishes him to preach in the world.”

When the brother eventually returned to the Portiuncula, Francis was much concerned about him after so long a journey. He washed his feet, dirty after the walk, generally assisted him, prepared the table for a meal, and then in great humility served him.

After the meal, he took Brother Masseo to a quiet place out in the woods. There he knelt down before him, drew his hood over his head, extended his arms in the form of a cross, and without seeking the answer of Clare or Sylvester, simply asked: “What command did my Saviour Jesus Christ give?”

For him Clare and Sylvester were the mouthpieces of God. Masseo answered: “To Sister Clare and to Fr. Sylvester the Lord has revealed His will: that you go through the world and preach, because He has not chosen you for yourself alone, but also for the salvation of others.”

Francis rose from his knees, and returned to the brothers. With great assurance he then said to his companions: “Let us go out in the name of God.” He took his stick and went off into the country in the direction of Montefalco.