

Be very wary of people who know for sure what they have to do and say in order to do God's will. Paul is a prime example of this:

I studied under Gamaliel....I was as full of duty towards God as you are today. I even persecuted this Way to the death...when I set off it was with the intention of bringing prisoners back . . . to Jerusalem for punishment.

Paul was as zealous a Jew as any, doing what he thought was God's will. Through the lens of the Law it was all very black and white; followers of the Way were heretics and had to be punished in order to be saved and to deter others. This mindset, of course, has infected Christianity itself: there's only one way and it's mine, and hence our week of prayer for Christian unity, to make amends, to recognise the damage such a mindset has done and that it's not God's way after all. But this shift from egocentricity to love is not easy. It demands a whole new way of seeing; a complete change of culture; a painful reassessment of all that has gone before. In short, a conversion. And the egocentric person is the person least capable of doing this for themselves though they are very likely to think of themselves as the best person possible for doing it for others, for putting them right, for showing them the way.

No, we have to come to God empty of self if we are to see God's will for ourselves and others clearly. It's the bane of both the priestly and monastic vocation to be approached by a candidate who knows only too well their own gifts and wants to offer these gifts for the service of 'the Church'. But, fortunately, such a person is not beyond God's capabilities and, if their search for God is genuine, despite all their egocentric failings, God can bring them round, knock the stuffing out of them, reduce them to a state of helplessness and a realisation of their total dependence on God. This is not a state we can conjure up for ourselves, though our egocentricity can bring it on us: that hubris that brings empires down: that happy fault that eventually lets God in, gives God a chance to get a word in edgeways. For some of us it's a mega-event that, like St Paul, changes everything around in an instance, but I suspect, for most of us, it's a daily event, a process of continual conversion, of falling and rising again.

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