



Letting God Change us while Being Still is Action Leading to Understanding

With the pressures of the work environment, seeking to walk with Christ and let the Holy Spirit guide all one's work decisions can often be challenging. How can one seek to be a Business Executive Leading with Integrity, Entrusted Values, and Expectancy (BELIEVES) in the work environment?

How do we continuously invite God into _____ and find real joy – even if it's messy?"

The 2024 BELIEVES season maintained its focus on this overarching question on Tuesday, July 9th, with a discussion focused on "Letting God Change us while Being Still is Action Leading to Understanding," prompted by reflections and thoughts from Cathy Garcia-Prats, President of Nativity Academy of Houston.



Garcia-Prats, who has been married to her husband Joe for 51 years, comes from a background in education.

"I taught in school until we started our family, but during the time raising the boys, I always stayed engaged in education in different ways," she said. "Education's been very important."

Garcia-Prats then went on to share a bit about the school she leads.

"San Francisco Nativity Academy is based on the Nativity Miguel model, which is faith-based and non-tuition-based. The faith foundation is Christian, but the archdiocese unfortunately hasn't adopted the Academy as one of its Catholic schools."

Garcia-Prats said the Academy opened in 2016 with 20 Pre-K three-year-olds with the goal to get those kids to middle school.

“Three years ago, I was on the Board and the Board Chair came and asked me to be President,” she recalled to share. “I had never done it, but said, ‘Yes.’”

In the last year, some controversy from a Board member was encountered because she did not want to have the Pre-K kids in the same school with the middle school students, according to Garcia-Prats.

“We’re in Gulfton, the 2nd lowest income area in Houston,” stated Garcia-Prats. “Most Catholic schools here do go through middle school. The Board member’s kids had been in a K-8 school.”

In the end, everyone worked through things and finally stayed with the original plan.

However, then another issue arose related to needing to find a new Development Director. The Board was set to hire the person, but it is not their role to hire for that position.

“Then in October of last year, the Board gave me 60-days’ notice,” she mentioned. “It was a trying time to lean into faith.”

In the weeks that followed, October and November came and went, but they hadn’t given Garcia-Prats a termination date.

Garcia-Prats had planned to announce the change to the staff before the next semester. However, on the day she was going to do so, the Board Chair came and said not to announce because the person who was to replace her wouldn’t commit. She had only planned to work 10 hours a week.

“I was working for 40 hours each week,” said Garcia-Prats. “I think what I laid out as what was needed scared her. In the end, I’m still here. Several Board members resigned, and we have had new ones come on.”

One of the Advisory Board members who she now has on her Board is someone she’s known for 51 years.

“I taught her daughter,” Garcia-Prats mentioned. “The Board member started a school called The Monarch School and Institute – a school dedicated to providing an innovative, therapeutic education for individuals with neurological differences. I also now have a new Board member who is a Dominican sister, and another Board member who is a graduate of the Nativity School in New York.”

As Garcia-Prats was then asked to reflect on her faith amidst all this, she turned to something significant for her that happened when she was raising her boys.

“The introduction of adoration at St. Thomas More Catholic Church where we attended was significant when it was introduced many years ago,” she remarked.

She said she remembered when the priest announced it at church during a homily/announcement one day, and said, “I promise you one hour of peace and quiet.”

“I wanted that,” she said succinctly. “From this I realized how important silence is in our prayer lives.”

Garcia-Prats and her husband raised 10 sons – with 18 years difference from the youngest to the oldest – and now have eight daughters-in-law, and 22 grandchildren.

“One son went to Creighton for college,” she said. “I remember when reading something from the university one time, I saw an article by Richard Hauser related to his book *Moving in the Spirit*. It opened my eyes up to the Holy Spirit. One page stood out saying, ‘Are you doing things in a selfish way, or is it out of love for the children being served?’”

When then asked how she opens up space with or for others to discern from the Holy Spirit, Garcia-Prats had this to say.

“When I bring up faith, it means we don’t just pray, you have to do your part,” she said. “I told my boys when they were in school, ‘You can pray to the Holy Spirit all you want, but if you don’t do your part to prepare for the exam, you can pray all you want for a miracle on the exam, but it’s not going to happen.’”

She added, “A Jesuit once said, ‘When Christ talked, not everyone listened.’ We try to live what we believe, open hearts that believe, and pray for those to be opened that can. This has been a trying year.”

Thinking more about one of her sons following this reflection, she told of something he experienced recently coaching his college soccer team.

“Chris is a soccer coach at Luther College in Iowa. He has a no-drinking policy for the team. However, a player got picked up for a DWI. Chris made the decision to not let those that broke the policy play.”

Sharing more about this moment of discernment her son had to go through, Garcia-Prats went on to say that the parents of the players who were impacted were upset.

“However, in the end, Chris said things took a turn for the better.”

Shifting to another reflection she directly experienced, Garcia-Prats then spoke a bit about issues she has had with her eyes.

“I have had eye issues since I was young,” she remarked. “I had some eye challenges surface when I had a 3-month-old and 15-month-old around 2008. I couldn’t take care of my own children. I realized there are times to give and times to receive. In 2008, when the eye issue came up, the condition worsened, and I lost my left eye. Ironically, I was seeing lots of scriptures about sight around this time, but how you see with the heart.”

While she was going through this, she said one of her sons, Timmy, was worried and expressed his concerns.

“Someone at his school told me that he asked people to pray for me every day.”

With all that had been shared, one session attendee was curious to know if Garcia-Prats knew if there were any other families with 10 boys that she knew of.

“There are some out there,” she replied. “I came from a family of five girls – tell me God doesn’t have a plan.”

Having chuckled after saying this, she went on to tell everyone that the experience of having 10 boys opened her up to talking.

“The first talks I wound up getting invited to do about raising 10 boys were all Q&A – some four hours long. There was just a hunger to learn on how to parent. At a talk in Plano, an affluent suburb in the Dallas area, there were lots of young parents there. They wanted to know, ‘What do we do as a family to make this work?’ You can throw it out there, but they have to choose to do stuff to make it work.”

She then closed with a few other different remarks to leave people with.

“Hauser, in one of his books, writes about the difference between self- versus selfish love,” she said. “We are all children of God. The discernment is, ‘Are we doing it for God?’ Is it for the greater glory of God, or my glory?”

Thinking about this in context of her current work, she told the audience, “There are 65 Nativity Miguel schools out here. The impact is clear.”

Then on a more personal basis for everyone to think about, she commented, “People watch. People see how you act, and how you say things. Each of us have that responsibility – ‘They will know us by His love.’”