Chapter V

I

Francis’ Humility and Obedience—God’s Condescension to His Slightest Wish

6. Because Francis preferred humility in himself and in his friars to any earthly honor, God who loves the humble judged him worthy of the highest honor. This was revealed to one of the friars, a virtuous and holy man, in a vision which he had from heaven. He was travelling with St. Francis when they went into an abandoned church, where they prayed fervently. There this friar was in an ecstasy and saw a vision of a multitude of thrones in heaven, one of which was radiant with glory and adorned with precious stones and ranked higher than the rest. He marveled at its splendor and fell to wondering whose it was going to be. Then heard a voice telling him, “That throne belonged to one of the fallen angels. Now it is being kept for the humble Francis.” When the friar came back to himself, he followed the saint out of the church as usual. As they continued on their journey conversing together about God, the friar remembered his vision and discreetly asked the saint what he thought of himself. “It seems to me,” Francis replied, “that I must be the greatest of all sinners.” When his companion reproached him, declaring that he could not possibly say that with a good conscience, or really believe it, Francis continued, “If Christ had shown such mercy towards the greatest criminal in the world, I am convinced that he would be much more grateful to God than I am.”

7. On another occasion, while he was praying in an abandoned church near Monte Casale in the province of Massa Trabaria, it was revealed to saint Francis that a number of sacred relics had been left there. He was sorry to see them deprived of the honor due to them for so long and he told the friars to take them to the friary. However he had to leave immediately afterwards and the friars forgot to do what he had told them, neglecting the merit of obedience. But then one day when they were preparing for Mass and the cover was taken off the altar, they found there a number of glistening clean bones which gave off a beautiful perfume. They were astonished, as they saw before their eyes the relics which had been brought there by God’s power, not by any human agency. A short time afterwards, St. Francis returned and he asked whether they had done what he told them to do with the relics. The friars confessed humbly that they had been negligent in obeying his command and Francis forgave them, imposing a penance on them. Then he added, “Blessed be my Lord and God; he did himself what you should have done.”

We should never let ourselves forget the care which God in his providence has even for our mortal remains; and the regard which he has for Francis’ incomparable holiness. When human beings failed to carry out his command, God himself condescended to do his wish.

Bonaventure—Major Life of St. Francis (1263)
Today as we celebrate this glorious Feast of All Saints, we are reminded that one does not have to be among the most extraordinary of human beings who have ever walked the face of the earth, but that holiness is attainable by each and every one of us, and that each and every one of us has everything we need to be able to get to heaven. Now the question, of course, is whether we are cooperating with the grace of God so that we can live holy lives. Most of us, I suspect—happily, all of us—would certainly say that we want to go to heaven, but do we want to do what is necessary to get there? That is the real question we have to ask. As we consider this feast, from the greatest being Our Blessed Lady, all the way down to the least, the little babies who are destroyed through contraception, through abortion, and through all of the other unfortunate things that medical people are doing with little embryos these days, all of these souls that have entered into glory are praying for us. They are praying that we too are going to choose Christ, not in a generic way but in a very specific way: to do His Will.

When we think about all of the things that the saints have done, we then need to go to prayer and ask the Lord: What is it that You want of me? Now one thing that we can all know is that God wants obedience to the duties of our state in life; that is always a given. But even beyond that, what is it that He is asking for? We need to understand that with the condition in the world today as it is, and with the things that are to come very soon, the world today needs saints more than it ever has before. And if where sin abounds grace abounds all the more, and if God raises up His saints where He needs them the most, then the principle is a very simple one: We are going to see in our day the greatest saints that have ever lived. These people have not yet come to the fore. They will come to the fore as soon as it is time, and you could be one of them. There is no reason in the world why you cannot be. The question is whether we are willing to be.

What does it require to be one of these great saints? It simply requires a great love for God; that is all. Now that does not mean a gushy emotionalism when we think about God, but rather what it means is spending time in prayer seeking the Will of God and trying with all our might to carry it out. Knowing that we cannot do it ourselves, we look to God for the grace to do it. It is just that simple. It does not require doing huge extraordinary things. As Saint Therese made very clear, it means doing the ordinary things with extraordinary love. The one who loves the most is the greatest saint. It is just that simple.

Are we willing to do what God needs? We do not need to start all kinds of new social programs and all sorts of things that are already out there, causing us to run here and there; there are plenty of those already there. What we need are people who are willing to pray. We need people who are willing to spend time before the Blessed Sacrament because absolutely nothing—ZERO—will be accomplished without prayer. Nothing. You can spin your wheels all day long and rev your engine; it will sound great and it will look impressive but nothing will happen unless we are praying. All the things that are already in place, they are only going to succeed if people are praying. That is what we need more than anything right now. We need people who will pray.

So what do we need to do to become a great saint? We need to pray. We need to love God. We need to spend the time with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. It is a very simple proposition. The more time you spend with Him, the more obedient you are going to be to the duties of your state in life. If you spend the time in prayer, you will be a better husband or wife; you will do better at your job; whatever it is that God is calling you to be, you will do in a way that is much better than you have ever done before because you are united with Jesus in prayer. Beyond that you will find yourself growing in virtue (your family will probably be much appreciative!), more patient, more charitable, all the virtues that we need. It is very simple, yet it is the single most difficult thing you will ever do. It is the greatest privilege we can have. Are we willing to do it?

The world today needs saints. Are you one of them? Is God calling you—and He is—to be a saint? The call is there; the question has to do with the answer. God needs saints. The world needs saints. Are you willing to be among them?

* This text was transcribed from the audio recording of a homily by Father Robert Altier with minimal editing.
ADMINISTRATOR'S MESSAGE...
A little history, and the Fast of St. Martin

We have perhaps already shared, more than once, that we, the Administrators of the BSP, were once professes Secular Franciscans. Bruce professed on August 7, 1983, and Shelley professed on December 12, 1987. We professed as founding members of St. Crispin of Viterbo Fraternity, which was then located in Little Canada, Minnesota, and met at St. Patrick’s Church on Magnolia Avenue, in St. Paul. We were very happy to be members of the Secular Franciscan Order, and we were very active and good members. We attended all meetings and Bruce became a leader in the Secular Franciscan Order. Among our friends were Paul and Donna Beery. Paul is now a professed BSP member, and he contributes monthly to the newsletter and is minister of Morning Star Chapter of the BSP in St. Paul, and Donna is still active in St. Crispin of Viterbo Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order. We have many members of the BSP now who also were, or are, SFO members.

Sometime after we joined the Secular Franciscan Order Shelley bought an Omnibus of Sources on the life of St. Francis of Assisi and in it we discovered, besides many original writings on the Franciscan Order, the First Rule of the Third Order of St. Francis, given by St. Francis in 1221 to the laity. We immediately were interested in living that Rule ourselves, and we made other members of the Secular Franciscan Order aware of it, gracefully, as the subject came up. However, the Rule of the SFO is nothing like the original Rule and so in time we found ourselves at odds with the SFO. This friction, as gentle as it was, generated the energy that resulted in the founding of the Private Association of the Brothers and Sisters of Penance. We did so with the blessing and support of our visitor and friend then, Father Valerius Messerich O.F.M., who is now with the Lord, and of the Church through several bishops.

The BSP is a worldwide family, and thank God for the Internet, for virtually everyone who joins this BSP does it through the Internet. Because we are worldwide, virtually everyone who joins the BSP now is bound to do so on their own. The ministry of the BSP, of promoting penance in our own lives and the lives of others and the Church depends very much on the efforts of us all.

If the Association is to grow, individual members, wherever they live, need to form Chapters of the BSP, and promote it in their own town and place. Those of us in the BSP need to answer the question: what do we each want the BSP to be in our lives? And, then, we need to live it quietly and peacefully, without making a big deal out of it. Invisibly, we say. The fruits of our life will blossom if we do that, and we will be powerful witnesses for Jesus Christ.

And, remember that for those of us who are professed in the BSP, or others who wish to do so, the fast of St. Martin begins on November 12th. This is a special 40 day fast that prepares us for Christmas and is unique to our Rule. The Rule and Statutes define this fast as follows:

**RULE: ARTICLE 9**

9. They are to fast daily, except on account of infirmity or any other need, throughout the fast of St. Martin from after said day until Christmas, and throughout the greater fast from Carnival Sunday until Easter.

**STATUTES: ARTICLE 9**

a. Penitents are to observe a pre-Christmas fast from November 12, the day after the Feast of St. Martin, until Christmas and a pre-Easter fast from Ash Wednesday until Easter.

As we observe, in some way, this special time of fasting let us do it without fanfare or notoriety, quietly and invisibly, for the love of God and the good of our souls and our holy Church. Let’s keep it between us and God.

May the Lord give us all His Peace.

Bruce and Shelley Fahey BSP Administrators

Morning Star Chapter, Minnesota
NO GREATER LOVE by Paul Beery, BSP

"I give you thanks, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to babes." [Matthew 11:25]

A confluence of events has mandated the following article: Pope Francis visiting Assisi on the Feast of St. Francis! Much of the following will be taken from the Homily of Pope Francis at the Basilica of Francis on the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi. All members of the Franciscan family have been rejoicing that we finally have, as our Chief Shepherd, one who has taken the name of our holy father Francis, after a period of almost eight hundred years! In typical Franciscan fashion he begins his homily:

Peace and all good to each and every one of you! With this Franciscan greeting I thank you for being here, in this Square so full of history and faith, to pray together. Today, I too have come, like countless other pilgrims, to give thanks to the Father for all that he wished to reveal to one of the "little ones" mentioned in today's Gospel: Francis, the son of a wealthy merchant of Assisi. His encounter with Jesus led him to strip himself of an easy and carefree life in order to espouse "Lady Poverty" and to live as a true son of our heavenly Father.

Pope Francis then goes on to describe three different ways the witness of our holy father Francis speaks to us today. Words are easy to come by. His witness is his life!

1. **His first and most essential witness is this:** that being a Christian means having a living relationship with the person of Jesus; it means putting on Christ, being conformed to him.

Where did Francis's journey to Christ begin? It began with the gaze of the crucified Jesus. With letting Jesus look at us at the very moment that he gives his life for us and draws us to himself. Francis experienced this in a special way in the Church of San Damiano, as he prayed before the cross which I too will have an opportunity to venerate. On that cross, Jesus is depicted not as dead, but alive! Blood is flowing from his wounded hands, feet and side, but that blood speaks of life. Jesus' eyes are not closed but open, wide open: he looks at us in a way that touches our hearts.

The cross does not speak to us about defeat and failure; paradoxically, it speaks to us about a death which is life, a death which gives life, for it speaks to us of love, the love of God incarnate, a love which does not die, but triumphs over evil and death. When we let the crucified Jesus gaze upon us, we are re-created, we become "a new creation". Everything else starts with this: the experience of transforming grace, the experience of being loved for no merits of our own, in spite of our being sinners. That is why Saint Francis could say with Saint Paul: "Far be it for me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." [Gal 6:14] We turn to you, Francis, and we ask you: Teach us to remain before the cross, to let the crucified Christ gaze upon us, to let ourselves be forgiven, and recreated by his love.

By following the Rule of St. Francis, we are daily remaining before the Cross of Jesus Crucified. It forces us to continuously strive to rise above our human weakness to be "Recreated by His Love!" This way of life is not for the faint-hearted, but for those with courage and tenacity.

2. **In today's Gospel we heard these words:** "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart." [Mt 11:28-29]

This is the second witness that Francis gives us: that everyone who follows Christ receives true peace, the peace that Christ alone can give, a peace which the world cannot give. Many people, when they think of Saint Francis, think of peace; very few people however go deeper. What is the peace which Francis received, experienced and lived, and which he passes on to us? It is the peace of Christ, which is born of the greatest love of all, the love of the cross. It is the peace which the Risen Jesus gave to his disciples when he stood in their midst and said: "Peace be with you!" and in saying this, he showed them his wounded hands and his pierced side (cf. Jn 20:19)

The peace of Saint Francis is the peace of Christ, and it is found by those who "take up" their "yoke", namely, Christ's commandment: Love one another as I have loved you (cf. Jn 13:34; 15:12). This yoke cannot be borne with arrogance, presumption or pride, but only with meekness and humbleness of heart. We turn to you, Francis, and we ask you: Teach us to be "instruments of peace", of that peace which has
its source in God, the peace which Jesus has brought us.

With the fall of Communism and the disintegration of the Soviet Union we thought there would be peace in the world. At Fatima our Blessed Mother said Russia would be converted and there would be a time of peace. That is still a work in progress. However, it’s notable that the former head of the KGB, Vladimir Putin, is lecturing the world on the necessity of protecting young people from the palpable evil of the gay rights agenda, so maybe there is hope. Meanwhile Radical Islam and a kind of Militant Secularism are threats to Western Christian Civilization. Muslims are killing millions of Christians for their faith, while militant Atheists are killing the faith in millions of Christians, especially in halls of alleged higher learning. More than ever, we need to be instruments of peace, peace in the hearts of individuals that is found only in Jesus.

3. “Praised may you be, Most High, All-powerful God, good Lord. by all your creatures.” [FF, 1820]

This is the beginning of Saint Francis’s Canticle. Love for all creation, for its harmony. Saint Francis of Assisi bears witness to the need to respect all that God has created, and that men and women are called to safeguard and protect, but above all he bears witness to respect and love for every human being. God created the world to be a place where harmony and peace can flourish. Harmony and peace! Francis was a man of harmony and peace.

From this City of Peace, I repeat with all the strength and the meekness of love: Let us respect creation, let us not be instruments of destruction! Let us respect each human being. May there be an end to armed conflicts which cover the earth with blood; may the clash of arms be silenced; and everywhere may hatred yield to love, injury to pardon, and discord to unity. Let us listen to the cry of all those who are weeping, who are suffering and who are dying because of violence, terrorism or war, in the Holy Land, so dear to Saint Francis, in Syria, throughout the Middle East and everywhere in the world. We turn to you, Francis, and we ask you: Obtain for us God’s gift of harmony and peace in this our world!

God has revealed the mysteries of His Kingdom to little ones, to those who become as little children. St. Francis is a perfect example for us. According to Pope Francis, his witness is threefold: a living relationship with the person of Jesus - putting on Christ, being conformed to him; the reception of true peace that Christ alone can give; and the ability to be an instrument of peace and harmony to the world. Let us become like little children!

Pope Francis concludes: Today Italy celebrates Saint Francis as her patron saint. I make my own the prayer of Saint Francis for Assisi, for Italy and for the world:

"I pray to you, Lord Jesus Christ, Father of mercies: Do not look upon our ingratitude, but always keep in mind the surpassing goodness which you have shown to this City. Grant that it may always be the home of men and women who know you in truth and who glorify your most holy and glorious name, now and for all ages. Amen.” [The Mirror of Perfection, 124: FF, 1824]

Paul Beery BSP, Morning Star Chapter, Minnesota

“Salt comes from water, yet when it is put back again into water it disappears. Our penance comes from grace, and when we put it into the source of grace—that is, when we unite it with Christ’s Passion—it is no longer visible. In this lies its greatest safety. Thus it is not the penance that appears outwardly as the most heroic that is the most pleasing to God, but the penance that is secret and the most humbling.” [Spirit of Penance, Path to God by Dom Hubert Van Zeller, p. 31]
Trust in the Lord
A MEDITATION by Janet Klasson, BSP

From the Second Reading for the Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

"When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for such things must happen first, but it will not immediately be the end." Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be powerful earthquakes, famines, and plagues from place to place; and awesome sights and mighty signs will come from the sky.

"Before all this happens, however, they will seize and persecute you, they will hand you over to the synagogues and to prisons, and they will have you led before kings and governors because of my name. It will lead to your giving testimony. Remember, you are not to prepare your defense beforehand, for I myself shall give you a wisdom in speaking that all your adversaries will be powerless to resist or refute. You will even be handed over by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends, and they will put some of you to death. You will be hated by all because of my name, but not a hair on your head will be destroyed. By your perseverance you will secure your lives." [Luke 21:9-19]

The Mass readings in November are somber in tone—dire even. The fact that the month preceding Advent offers Mass readings that are meant to shake us up, is an annual reminder that followers of Christ should guard against getting too comfortable; the Lord, through the Church, is warning us against complacency. We are not meant for this world and so the world will necessarily hate us. I heard a bishop say once that if you’re fitting in quite well with the world, you’re doing it wrong! Those of us striving to live “in the world, but not of it” would do well to check ourselves often. The pull of the world is subtle; before we know it we can be pulled under! We must remain vigilant!

However, if we only look at the warnings in the November readings we are missing something crucial. Read again the last half of the above Scripture passage. The Lord is promising to be with us in all our trials in a powerful way. He promises wisdom to confound our persecutors; he promises the greatest reward of all for what we suffer in his name—eternal life with him.

In all our trials, we are meant to trust in God. In fact without trials, we cannot learn how to trust in God. If our faith is never tested, how can it be strengthened? In a previous article I quoted St. Rose of Lima on the true purpose of suffering. Her message bears repeating:

"When I heard these words, a strong force came upon me and seemed to place me in the middle of a street, so that I might say in a loud voice to people of every age, sex and status: 'Hear, O people; hear, O nations. I am warning you about the commandment of Christ by using words that came from his own lips: We cannot obtain grace unless we suffer afflictions. We must heap trouble upon trouble to attain a deep participation in the divine nature, the glory of the sons of God and perfect happiness of soul.'"

It follows then that the Christian must practice trusting God in all circumstances. Most of us are not ready yet to go looking for afflictions; our perfection in holiness has not yet reached that degree. But we should be praying for that grace. Until it comes, however, we need to at least practice accepting all that comes as a personal gift from the holy hand of our loving Father. If we practice in small things, then when the larger trials come, trusting in God will come naturally. We will have built up our spiritual muscle.

In one of the other November Mass readings we read about the horrible tortures of the seven Maccabees brothers and their mother who suffered horribly rather than betray the laws of God. The Mass reading is shortened and some of the more disturbing details are left out. However, it is well worth reading the entire seventh chapter of 2 Maccabees, as we can learn from this courageous family what it means to trust in God especially in our trials. Reading between the lines, we can see that the faith these martyrs proclaimed in death was a fulfillment of the faith they lived each day of their lives.
The November readings have many layers, but one of the main themes is trust in God in all circumstances. In one of the other readings, St. Paul tells us: **But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one.** [2 Thessalonians 3:3] All these readings culminate in the Feast of Christ the King, the last Sunday of the liturgical year. Our focus is not meant to rest on the trials, but on the victory of Jesus Christ. Through our faith, this victory is ours as well and we have a right to claim it as children of God in Jesus. So no matter what trials come, the Christian must be joyful, faithful, charitable, and holy. Let us pray for the grace and strength we need, so that in time of trial we will not be put to shame. Jesus we trust in you.

From www.pelianito.stblogs.com

Psalm 111:10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practise it have a good understanding. His praise endures for ever.

“Beloved, you do not know what is about to befall the earth. Cling to nothing but me and my Mother. There is nothing that can harm you if you do this, if you cling to us with unwavering faith. It is true, you may be asked to suffer. The harm you will avoid is spiritual harm. Yet, whatever happens, know that I hold you in the palm of my hand. Whatever befalls you, know that all is within the sphere of Divine Providence. Trust in me always. These trials are sent to test your trust. For it is easy to trust in times of comfort and prosperity. Easy to trust—but in whom? In God or in your wealth? No, it is in the crucible of suffering that one’s faith is tested. How will you fare? Practise now by accepting all things as from my loving hand. Practise in small things so as to build spiritual muscle. Never grumble or complain, but pour yourself out in love and service. Begin with those closest to you. Accept their faults and failings as I accept yours. Be swift to forgive as I am. There is much to come. I have been telling you this for a long time. Do not be afraid, but let faith be your guidepost in all things. I am near.”

O my Jesus, help me to trust in you in all the circumstances of my life. In childlike trust I cling to you and our Mother. Grant me the grace, O Lord, to triumph in trust always. Jesus I trust in you! Save souls!

Janet Klasson BSP, Divine Mercy Chapter, Canada

(The messages on the Pelianito Journal blog are the fruit of Janet’s lectio divina. She submits all messages to her spiritual director, a Catholic priest. You may read his remarks here: http://pelianito.stblogs.com/on-private-revelation/.)

FRANCIS OF ASSISI: FATHER IN FAITH

Committing Ourselves Anew to Live the Gospel and the Rule of 1221

By Christopher G. O’Donnell, BSP

(Written to commemorate the Transitus of holy father Francis.)

October 3rd and October 4th make up for us a united celebration of the life and glory of our blessed founder and saint, Francis of Assisi, our Seraphic Father. I offer this reflection on him and on our own journey of faith as Catholic laity who live out the Gospel in accordance with the Third Order Rule of 1221 and the Franciscan charism.

To be Franciscan, for me, is to “go out into the deep” (= duc in altum) [Lk. 5:4], to enter into the life of the world, in its darkness and bring to it the light of Christ through joyful love, sincere respect for the dignity of creation—especially human beings—devoted service, and a pardon that brings peace to all. We are to be the ‘Church on the borders,’ to enter in where others do not go, to descend downward to those who most need us, there at the bottom, and raise them up on high. It is only there, in the midst of real life, that we will encounter Christ face-to-face, just as he himself told us: “Amen, amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” [Mt. 25:40b].

And so, on this extended celebration of this most incredible person, made like our Lord himself, even down to the stigmata he bore, because of his great humility, desire, and love, I feel a personal need to reaffirm for myself the profession I made just a little over a year ago. That is, I promise to live out the Gospel every day according to the manner of the Rule
of 1221 and the example of Saint Francis himself. I remind myself what the cord I wear under my clothing means—to always do penance so as to be more open to the love that God desires to fill me with. I recall that the TAU, which I have been found worthy to bear upon my breast openly, is a symbol of “those who moan and groan over all the abominations that are practiced” [Ez. 9:4b] and desire, instead, to love God. I remind myself why the sandals that I wear nearly always are not some fashion statement but a means of living a simple life. I promise to live out the chastity of matrimony, the life of evangelical simplicity, and an attitude of obedience as a sign of my loyalty to the Kingdom of God.

At the same time, however, I am challenged by the figure of Francis to whom I look for inspiration and understanding. He is so joyful and yet he constantly weeps bitter tears over sins and disharmony! He is so humble, yet his words strike one like rock hurled at their mind and heart! He is so gentle, and yet he demands so much of those who follow him! Am I really living the life that he has led me to? Is my piety real or just show? Do I truly seek to love the poor and marginalized or am I too caught up in my own interests to give them more than a passing nod? They are troubling questions and yet they must be asked. The Christian life is of growing in love and the demands of love can never be satisfied and this means that I will always have more to do, more to give, more to pardon, more to serve, more to love.

My prayer to our Seraphic Father on this his day of ‘passing over’—transitioning (= Transitus)—from the life of the flesh and death to the life of the spirit and life, is that he will pray to God to give me a heart like his. One that seeks Jesus among the disenfranchised. One that smiles at everyone, is respectful, courteous, and generous to all. A heart that exalts in my God and weeps tears of both joy and sorrow. Increase my faith! Let the fire of Your love, fiery and sweet as honey, burn in me as an unquenchable desire that leads me to true simplicity, the deepest obedience, joyful humility, and love of neighbor.

So blessings to you all on this our founder’s birthday into eternal life. May the God of peace grant each and every one of you joy, contentment, peace, and all good. Praise the Lord for His goodness!

SAINT CLARE: PRAY FOR US!
A Look at the Poor Lady’s Teaching on Franciscan Prayer
By Christopher G. O’Donnell, BSP

Prayer is foundational for the Christian life. As penitents the statutes we live by express the importance of prayer in our spiritual journey: “Prayer is the core of growth in a life with God. Penitents must be committed to a life of prayer as outlined in this Rule. More prayer than what is listed, including mental prayer, meditation, and contemplation, is encouraged” [BSP Statutes, art. 12a]. It can be difficult enough praying the canonical hours daily as many of us do and yet we are also greatly encouraged to move into deeper, more intimate forms of prayer. For help in this endeavor, let us turn to Saint Clare for direction in learning to pray better. In her Third Letter to Blessed Agnes of Prague, Saint Clare counsels the noblewoman turned penitent to rejoice in the Lord and gives her a specific instruction on doing so:

“Place your mind before the mirror of eternity! Place your soul in the brilliance of glory! Place your heart in the figure of the divine substance! And transform your whole being into the image of the Godhead itself through contemplation! So that you may feel what His friends feel as they taste the hidden sweetness which God Himself has reserved from the beginning for those who love Him.” 1LAgP, 12-14

Clare is a mystic, a true follower of the Poverello, who has a vibrant, energizing, and intimate love for God. More so than Saint Francis, however, at least in his own writings, Clare clearly sets forth a path to arrive at union with God. Already in her second letter to Agnes she had outlined a four-fold progression of the Franciscan life and charism:

“Gaze upon Him, consider Him, contemplate Him, as you desire to imitate Him.” 2LAgP20

Unlike the traditional four-fold pattern used by the Benedictines and most other religious orders of the time, which consisted of reading (= lectio), prayer (= oratio), meditation (= meditatio), and contemplation (= contemplatio), Clare puts a distinctively Franciscan ‘spin’ on it. Rather than reading a passage from Sacred Scripture in which to draw inspiration, she counsels a direct and piercing glance on the crucifix of Christ: “gaze upon Him.” This is to come face to face with the reality of the depths of God’s love for us manifested fully in the Crucified Lord. Perhaps she drew inspiration from Saint Francis’ personal experience of gazing upon the crucified Christ at San Damiano. Whatever the case Clare tells us to search into the depths of God Who comes to us in the fragility and weakness of our own humanity. To gaze (= intueri) upon Christ is to begin to live according to the “mind of Christ” [1 Cor. 2:16]: to feel what he felt, to understand why he suffered and draw the courage to enter into that same crucible of suffering to
experience the depths of God’s love for us.

We move from gazing on Christ to considering (= considerare) our own participation in the Paschal Mystery, that is, to see how we are called upon to embrace the Cross and to bring forth Jesus’ salvation for others through our sufferings in union with him: “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his Body, which is the Church” [Col. 1:24]. This suffering is a necessity of love, not some sadomasochistic means of ‘paying for our sins’ or other such nonsense. Instead, it is to draw closer to God by descending into the depths of his Passion and experiencing his passionate love. As Saint Francis prayed just prior to receiving the stigmata, “Lord, I want to love like you love, and I want to suffer the way you suffered.” Both these petitions are one and the same for if you truly love as God loves then you will suffer as Christ did! To meet God you must mount the Cross—this is the great paradox of our faith!

This consideration leads to what Clare calls ‘contemplation’ (= contemplari) which is dwelling in the mystery of Christ with us and to enter into a personal relationship with him. It is important to realize that, following the example of Francis himself, Clare does not mean (as it often does in the monastic tradition) to “when the mind is lifted up to God and held above itself” [cf. Guigo II, The Ladder of Monks, 68] but is understood as penetrating the ‘veil’ of the crucified Lord to discover him in everything. Elsewhere scribes Christ Crucified as a “mirror” (= speculum) of prayer is to transform us into ‘an imitatio’ (= imitatio). The gazing, considering, and contemplating of Christ Crucified must lead to becoming like him for we become like that which we love: “This is the way we may know that we are in union with him: whoever claims to abide in him ought to live just as he lived” [1 Jn. 5b-6]. Our love for him and surrender to him allows the Spirit to conform us to the Image of Christ—the goal of prayer is to transform us into ‘another Christ’ (= alter Christi). What a wonderful destiny! Saint Clare, pray for us!

“Inasmuch as this vision is the splendor of eternal glory, the brilliance of eternal light, and the mirror without blemish, look upon that mirror each day, and continually study your face within it, so that you may adorn yourself within and without with beautiful robes and cover yourself with the flowers and garments of all the virtues. Indeed, blessed poverty, holy humility, and ineffable charity are reflected in that mirror, as, with the grace of God, you can contemplate them throughout the entire mirror.” 3LAgP 14-15a, 16-17a, 18

The “mirror” of the Crucified Lord implants in us the poverty, suffering, and humility that enable us to love as Christ loved and to enter into the depths of divine-human love which, though pierced by suffering, enables us to ascend into the heart of God the Father in a profound union.

Although union with God is sought, just as for the monastic tradition, but the goal of our life is actually participating in the life of Christ in a concrete way—that of ‘imitation’ (= imitatio). The gazing, considering, and contemplating of Christ Crucified must lead to becoming like him for we become like that which we love: “This is the way we may know that we are in union with him: whoever claims to abide in him ought to live just as he lived” [1 Jn. 5b-6]. Our love for him and surrender to him allows the Spirit to conform us to the Image of Christ—the goal of prayer is to transform us into ‘another Christ’ (= alter Christi). What a wonderful destiny! Saint Clare, pray for us!

Chris O’Donnell BSP, St. Anthony Chapter, Escondido CA

MORNING STAR: NEWS ON THE ASSOCIATION...

MEMBER WEBSITES

Brothers and Sisters of Penance of St. Francis facebook page by Lisa Drago, BSP
www.returning-catholics.blogspot.com Blog for Returning Catholics—and others too—by Jim Mearns, BSP

NEWS FROM THE ST. ANTHONY CHAPTER, ESCONDIDO CA

The professed of the St. Anthony chapter met last month and elected new officers. They include Rose Rypka to continue as Minister, Matt Heffernan as Vice Minister, Martha Elmer as Messenger, and Christopher O’Donnell as Treasurer. Please continue to pray for wisdom to guide this Chapter and for continued growth.

HANDBOOK OF THE ASSOCIATION...

The BSP Handbook, titled Stella Matutina: Handbook of The Brothers and Sisters of Penance of St. Francis is now available for order. We have used a print-on-demand service at Lulu.com to print the book. This means we do not have to keep a stockpile of books, but customers order directly from Lulu, which prints them as they are ordered and ships them directly to the customer. This simplifies the ordering process for the administrators. There is a link to the ordering page on our BSP homepage. You will need a credit card or a Paypal account to order. Cost is $10.00 plus shipping. Bruce and Paul also have copies available.
A.k.a. BSP, is a non-profit Private Association of the Faithful, which is dedicated to renewing the ancient way of penance as contained in the First Rule of the Third Order of St. Francis of 1221 for lay people in our modern world. We have the blessing of the Catholic Church to do this through several of its Archbishops, Bishops, and priests. If you are bound by another Rule of life in another profession of the way of St. Francis that does not permit you to enter other religious families you are nonetheless invited to add the elements of this beautiful way of life that Saint Francis of Assisi gave us to the lifestyle of your profession.

All members, and Franciscans, are welcome to submit articles for consideration for inclusion in this newsletter if they are directed towards the spiritual formation of members or are the outgrowth of the lifestyle of the Association. Just send them to the BSP at minnc@aol.com. Feel free to share this newsletter with your friends or neighbors. It is intended to be the primary monthly communication of the Association, and ongoing formation for all members and friends. And if you can find it in your heart and in your budget remember that donations to the BSP are used strictly to promote the lifestyle and are tax deductible.

We remain, always, sincerely yours in the love of Jesus Christ!

Bruce and Shelley Fahey BSP, Editors

Welcome to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance!

In the world, but not of it, for Christ!

Website: www bspenance org

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