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

8. One day St. Francis arrived at Imola where he went to the bishop and humbly asked him for permission to summon the people and preach to them. “It is enough, brother, that I should preach to my own flock,” the bishop replied abruptly. Francis bowed his head in genuine humility and took his leave. Less than an hour later, however, he returned once more. The bishop was annoyed and he asked him what he was looking for this time. Then Francis replied respectfully and without the slightest arrogance, “My lord, when a father throws his son out one door, he must come in by another.” The bishop was disarmed by his humility; he smiled and put his arm around him and said, “Henceforth you and all your friars have general permission to preach in my diocese. Holy humility deserves that.”

9. On another occasion, St. Francis arrived at Arezzo when the whole town was being torn with faction fights and threatened with destruction. There he was given hospitality in a village near the town and he could see the devils rejoicing over it and urging the people on to mutual slaughter. He was anxious to put the malicious powers of evil to flight and so he sent brother Silvester, who was a man of dove-like simplicity, telling him to approach the town like a herald. “Go up to the town gate,” he said, “and in the name of almighty God command the devils in virtue of obedience to go away immediately.” Silvester was a genuinely obedient man and he immediately did what he was told. He approached the town gate, singing a hymn of praise to God, and there he cried aloud, “In the name of almighty God and by the command of his servant Francis, away with you, all you devils!” There and then the down was restored to peace and the townspeople set about reforming the laws governing their mutual rights peacefully. Once the malignant and presumptuous influence of the demons which encompassed the town like a besieging army had been counteracted, it needed only the wisdom of a beggar, that is, Francis’ humility, to restore peace and save the day. By the heroic practice of humble obedience Francis had gained complete authority over the rebellious spirits, so that he could crush their frantic efforts and put an end to the violence they attempted.

VISITOR’S MESSAGE
Homily by Fr. Robert Altier...
True Prayer is Work, Not Consolation

Isaiah 29:17-24, Matthew 9:27-31

In the Gospel reading today, Our Lord tells the two blind men that He can heal them but they have to make this act of faith. Do you believe that I can do this? He asks them. But He asks them about this only after He makes them follow Him. Now this would seem to be a
particularly cruel kind of thing: These two men were blind, and Jesus required that they follow Him all the way until He entered into the house where He was staying, and then turned to them and said, *Do you believe that I can do this?* So these two men had to truly make an act of faith and they had to make quite an effort to be able to be healed.

We see in this that there is something of the way the Lord works with us. We like to think that God would just simply zap us and take care of everything and that would be it. We should all be taken care of in an instant. Whatever our problems are, God can just infuse the grace into us and that will take care of it all. He could; He can do whatever He wants. But, most of the time, He is going to make us work at it, not because we do not think that He could do it, but rather because God wants to see how much it means to us and what kind of effort we are willing to put forward.

If we look, for instance, at the prayer life, we could all sit back today and say, “Well, if God wanted to, He could just make me a mystic right now. He could just give me the grace and I’d be at the height of the spiritual life. Wouldn’t that be great?” He could do that, except that is not normally the way He works because if something like that happened what would probably occur is we would be so arrogant about what happened that it would actually be worse for us. So He requires that we have to work at it. Like the blind men, we follow blindly. We walk in the darkness and we try to keep on track as we seek the Lord, running into various things along the way and not exactly knowing where the door is that we are supposed to enter. We walk right into it sometimes, but nonetheless, as we grope our way through this, in time we will find exactly where we need to be. But He is going to make us work at it, and it is hard work.

People think that the prayer life should be easy, that it should be fun, that it should be all consolation. That is not what happens at all. Once in a very great while there is consolation. Once in a very great while one can sort of float away from prayer, saying, “That was wonderful.” But the saints tell us when that happens we really did not get much out of prayer. It is when things are difficult, when we have to be blind and grope around and try to follow the Lord when we cannot see very well – or at all, for that matter – that prayer is actually the best because then we are walking in the blindness of faith. The Lord will look at us and say, *Do you believe that I can do this?* and we will continually say, “Yes.” Not so much “yes” to the fact that He is suddenly going to take away our spiritual blindness and everything is going to be great and we are going to have all this insight; but rather “yes” to the fact that, if He chooses to do so, He can keep us walking along this path and He can make us holy. He can bring us to the heights of the spiritual life because it is not we ourselves who are able to do it.

The reality of the matter is that even though we seem completely blind, God in His mercy is actually enlightening us all the way along. As we grope in the darkness of prayer, suddenly what we are going to find is that there is new insight into Our Lord, new insight into Scripture, new insight into the sacraments, new insight into people, all these various things, and we realize that our spiritual blindness is actually resulting in great clarity because God is healing us.

So if we ask that question of ourselves – “Do I really believe that He can do this?” – then we need to be willing to do exactly what these two blind men did in the Gospel reading. We need to be willing to follow Him in our blindness, not expecting that He is simply going to come to us and say, “Do you want Me to heal you?” Rather, He is going to require that we make the effort and follow Him, even though we are blind, because we know where He is; we can figure it out. We know the path. He is right there in the Blessed Sacrament, even though we cannot see Him. All we need to do is come to Him and open our hearts and fix them on Him, and He will heal us. But we have to be willing to make the effort, and we have to be willing to make the act of faith.

He is going to look at each and every one of us, today and every day, and He is going to ask that same question. He is going to require the same effort, and He is going to require of us the same act of faith. So today He looks at us and He speaks in our hearts and He asks us the simple question: *Do you believe that I can do this for you?* If we are going to answer “yes” then we know it requires faith and it requires effort – and it will be done according to our faith.

*This text was transcribed from the audio recording of a homily by Father Robert Altier with minimal editing.*
ADMINISTRATOR'S MESSAGE...
The Veil*

"On this mountain the Lord of hosts will provide for all peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines, juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines. "On this mountain he will destroy the veil that veils all peoples, the web that is woven over all nations; he will destroy death forever." [Isaiah 25:6-8]

Death be not proud! The Lord has overcome you, though you still nag us at every turn. How true it is. So long as we live this veil of death hangs over us and it dominates our thinking even if we love the Lord. We need to examine it long and mightily. We need to ponder its meaning in our lives and the lives of others.

A friend of ours, who was once an agnostic but who now believes, told us recently that he has reached the point he wants to die with his eyes open. He wants to see the Lord coming to him, and be ready to meet him when he dies so much so that he can see the Lord coming for him. What a change in this man from when he was agnostic. Now he has opened his heart to the reality of living forever with God because God has made himself very real to him by revealing himself to him in a special way in his life, at Eucharist no less.

Baldwin, bishop of Canterbury, said in a recent reading:

"Death is strong, for it can rob us of the gift of life. Death is strong, for it can strip us of this robe of flesh. Death is strong, for no man can withstand it, soothe its sting, calm its violence, and bring its victory to naught."

If that is all we had to ponder it would be enough to destroy life to us and those around us. The flavor of such negativism, because it is also reality, is enough to bring us down. So, we need to ponder it often remembering all that we have learned about our faith and the Lord’s message. He came to destroy death, and spoke of eternal life to a world that had not conceived of it. His message is what we need to hold in our hearts whenever death’s influence is strong.

Remembering that God is first and foremost love, Baldwin goes on to say:

"Love too is strong, for it can restore us to a better life. Love too is strong, for it can take death’s spoils away and give them back to us. The time will come when death is reviled and taunted: 'O death, where is your sting? O death, where is your victory?' Love is as strong as death because it is itself a kind of death: destroying the old life, rooting out vice, and laying aside dead works."

As we ponder the message of Christmas this year we need to put on love. To do our very best to see the importance of love in our hearts, lives, and families, and to lay aside all that is not of love. All that is not of God.

The Lord calls us to love. We need to reflect on his message when he said to his disciples, and we are his modern day disciples, "I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another." (John 13:34)

So, let us throw the veil of death aside, and focus on love. Focus on God, and the good we can do our neighbor. When we come to the New Year let us make resolutions to be more loving, and set aside the things of death, especially the sin in our lives. Our Rule will help us to do that in a mighty way, and the Gospel, which for us is our “first rule” will call us to be more perfectly servants of God, and to love others with a mighty love. Love conquers all.

(*Reprinted from December 2010)
Bruce and Shelley Fahey BSP Administrators
Morning Star Chapter, Minnesota
NO GREATER LOVE by Paul Beery, BSP

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; hence the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God." [Luke 1:35]

That’s quite a thought, that the Holy Spirit was the original “Immaculate Conception!” And so the name is merely transferred to Mary by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit. We know the importance of a person’s name from the Old Testament. Take for example that of John the Baptist. Zacharias’s tongue was loosed when to end a certain controversy he said: “His name is John.” Kolbe takes up again the theme of married love, and the importance of a name.

"If among human beings the wife takes the name of her husband because she belongs to him, is one with him, becomes equal to him, and is – with him – the source of new life, with how much greater reason should the name of the Holy Spirit, who is the divine Immaculate Conception, be used as the name of her in whom He lives as uncreated Love, the principle of life in the whole supernatural order of grace?"

How does this affect us? Kolbe takes from St. Thomas Aquinas the notion of “The Great Circle of Being,” as all of creation makes one large circular movement issuing forth from God and coming back to God. For some of us the return trip is long and arduous! Kolbe states:

"Everywhere in this world we notice action… departure and return; going away and coming back; separation and reunion. The separation always looks forward to union, which is creative. All this is simply an image of the Blessed Trinity in the activity of creatures."

Francis saw God in all of creation (cf. Canticle of Brother Sun), for all of creation has the same duty, and follows the same path whether by instinct or intelligence (mankind, presumably). Kolbe, his disciple, continues:

"God creates the universe; that is something like a separation. Creatures, by following the natural law implanted in them by God, reach their perfection, become like Him, and go back to Him. Intelligent creatures love Him in a conscious manner; through this love they unite themselves more and more closely with Him, and so find their way back to Him.”

"Find their way back to Him." And who is most perfectly suited to show us the Way? "I am the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done to me according to your will.” Kolbe concludes:
"Let us pray that we would understand more and more what the Immaculata said at the Annunciation. As God wills, so be it. In this thought, all happiness is contained, already here on earth, all destiny fulfilled..."

We return to the Letter to All the Faithful, where Francis has a few thoughts on following the will of God, for all the faithful!

"Jesus reposed his will in the will of his Father. The Father willed that his blessed and glorious Son, whom he gave to us and who was born for us, should through his own blood offer himself as a sacrificial victim on the altar of the cross.

"This was to be done not for Himself through whom all things were made, but for our sins. It was intended to leave us an example of how to follow in his footsteps. And he desires all of us to be saved through him, and to receive him with pure heart and chaste body.

"O how happy and blessed are those who love the Lord and do as the Lord himself said in the Gospel: "You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart and your whole soul; and your neighbor as yourself." Therefore, let us love God and adore him with pure heart and mind.

"This is his particular desire when he says: "True worshippers adore the Father in spirit and truth. For all who adore Him must do so in the spirit of truth." Let us also direct to him our praises and prayers saying: Our Father, who art in heaven, since we must always pray and never grow slack.

"Furthermore, let us produce worthy fruits of penance. Let us also love our neighbors as ourselves. Let us have charity and humility. Let us give alms because these cleanse our souls from the stains of sin.

"Men lose all the material things they leave behind them in this world, but they carry with them the reward of their charity and the alms they give. For these they will receive from the Lord the reward and recompense they deserve.

"We must not be wise and prudent according to the flesh. Rather we must be simple, humble and pure. We should never desire to be over others. Instead, we ought to be servants who are submissive to every human being for God's sake.

"The Spirit of the Lord will rest on all who live in this way and persevere in it to the end. He will permanently dwell in them. They will be the Father's children who do his work. They are the spouses, brothers and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Paul Beery BSP, Morning Star Chapter, Minnesota

St. Francis of Assisi: Salutation to the Blessed Virgin

Hail, holy Lady, most holy Queen, Mary, Mother of God, Ever Virgin; chosen from Heaven by the most Holy Father, whom He has consecrated with His most holy Beloved Son and the Holy Spirit, the Comforter; on you descended and in you still remains all the fullness of grace and every good. Hail thou His Palace!

Hail thou His Tabernacle!

Hail thou His Home!

Hail thou His Robe!

Hail thou His Handmaid!

Hail thou His Mother! And hail all holy virtues which by the grace and inspiration of the Holy Spirit are poured into the hearts of the faithful, so that faithless no longer, they may be made faithful servants of God, through you.
Most people in the secular world—and many believers as well—are afraid of death. Certainly a good deal of money is spent in first world countries in an attempt to live longer and put off the inevitable. In the past, some people even experimented with cryogenics so that they could be frozen in the instant after (or even before) death and thawed out once a cure was discovered for whatever had killed them. There is always a buck to be made off people’s hopeless desire to avoid death.

I recently watched a series of short videos by Jeff Cavins on the Rabbi-Disciple Relationship*. In the last video of the series, Cavins quotes Archbishop Fulton Sheen as saying that the reason we’re so afraid of dying is that “we have not practiced for it.” It is not difficult to picture Archbishop Sheen saying that, with his characteristic twinkle. But what did he mean?

“Disciples of Christ die differently,” Cavins says. He goes on to explain that we practice for death by mortifying our flesh, by dying daily to self. This is worth pondering, because if we want to die differently we have to live differently.

Certainly the Rule of 1221 is one tried and true method of living differently in order to die differently. In living the rule, we practice dying daily. How awful that sounds to the untrained ear! The one who is afraid of death cannot fathom the beauty of dying daily. But there is no more beautiful way to live and to die.

St. Louis-Marie de Montfort confirms this in True Devotion to Mary:

“In order to rid ourselves of self, we must die to ourselves daily. This is to say, we must renounce the operation of the powers of our soul, and the senses of our body. We must see as if we saw not, understand as if we understood not and make use of all the things of this world as if we made no use of them at all....If we do not die to ourselves, and if the holiest devotions do not incline us to the necessary and useful death, we shall bring forth no fruit worth anything and our devotion will become useless. [True Devotion, No. 81, 82] These are challenging words. But by dying daily to self, we ensure a seamless transition into eternity. If we spend our earthly life with the attitude that our body is the servant of our soul, our whole “self” will be in a right and well-ordered relationship. If, on the other hand, we place the needs of the body above the needs of the soul, death will be painful and wrenching because the “self” will have died in a disordered way.

If we practicing for it, our death will not be a thing to be feared because in our daily dying to self, we have learned to live for Jesus. And if we live for Jesus, we will also die for him. If our life is all about him, it follows that our death will also be all about him.

Advent is a time to reflect on eternity. The readings are full of portents, warnings, and signs. They direct our focus away from the littleness of our lives to the grand symphony of Divine Providence. Penitents should embrace this season of preparation as Christ embraced the cross. It is a great gift to us and to the world, and allows us to assist Mary and Joseph in preparing a place for Jesus to come once again to earth. As we embrace our penitential mission, our hearts will be filled with wonder and expectation as we await with joyful hope the coming of our Savior in time, at the time of our death, and at the end of time.

May this blessed season of preparation lead us all to a holy observance of Christmas. May God bless you all.

(* http://thecatholicyearoffaith.com/category/rabbi-disciple-relationship)

From www.pelianito.stblogs.com

Joshua 9:14 Then the Israelite princes partook of their provisions, without seeking the advice of the LORD.

"My child, it is the time to watch and pray, to take to the Lord every decision, to hold every thought captive to Christ. Many lie in wait to trap the children of God. The deceiver has lured many with his seductions. But my faithful children must esteem nothing more than the will of God, not even their lives. For 'what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, but forfeit (eternal) life?' Those who remain faithful..."
to the end will win a prize of inestimable value. Esteem nothing in this world that does not lead to Christ. Make use of the world’s goods with prudence and charity, but in a spirit of holy detachment. Then the enemy will be less able to tempt you. Ask for grace upon grace and it will be given to you. My child I am with you. I am near.”

Jesus we trust in you. In the divine Will, we ask for grace upon grace—all we need to remain faithful to the end. Lord, let us not be put to shame, but may our every act give glory to your holy name. Amen.

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/.)

News about Bob Hall—the “Sparrow”

Dear brothers and sisters, God has answered our prayers, and we have had word from Bob Hall, the “Little Sparrow”. If you are new to the BSP, he is a professed brother who is in prison in NC, who used to write little inspired chirps for the BSP newsletter. We had heard he was seriously ill and then we heard nothing. Our failed attempts to get an update left us fearing the worst. Imagine our delight to have recently heard from him! He asks for continued prayers as his health is very poor. His penance at this time is very profound. In order that we might remember to pray for him—and for the edification of us all—we will re-run some of his past articles.

A RE-TWEET FROM THE ‘SPARROW’

Perched on the roof of the Inn, as sparrows are wont to do, and as the winter evening was drawing close to nightfall, I beheld an unusual sight coming down the road to Bethlehem. It was two travelers. No travelers were not unusual for many had been arriving because of a census here in Israel. What was unusual was above these pilgrims, and apparently just out of their sight-line, there was beautiful white dove that was flying in a slow but prescribed circle...almost as if it was watching over and protecting them. This struck my sparrow mind as odd and a bit bewildering. For the task of protection would be better suited to the larger birds of prey such as the mighty eagle or the war-like hawk. How could the small and gentle dove be of any protection?

As they came into the town square the man was leading sister donkey who had on her back a young woman who obviously was about to give birth to a baby. Having stopped in front of the Inn the man was told there was no rooms available neither there or anywhere else in Bethlehem. As the man turned to give this distressful news to the expectant mother the dove circling flew low and through the square and then back up to takes its place in the circling orbit above them. None but sister donkey and myself saw its flight through the square. Immediately Abigail, who worked at the Inn, came right up to the couple and told them to go to the stable which was not far away and to take shelter there and that she would be along to help them as soon as possible.

As they made their way to the stable I flew along to see what would become of them and their story which was taking such a strange direction. There was something very attractive about them and which drew me to them but what it was I could not discern.

As our little group arrived at the stable I took up my perch near the door from whence I could see in the stable. Inside there was brother ox, sister cow, brother goat, sister sheep and who were now joined by sister donkey. Above the stable soared the dove in that persistent slow circle.

The man made a bed of straw for his wife. He came close by her side as she lay upon the straw as her time seemed to be drawing rapidly near. Suddenly the Dove flew down and perched at the entrance. All of us brother and sister animals turned to look at the Dove...then we heard the cry of the baby. When we turned to look back they were wrapping the newborn in white cloth and smiling with love at each other as they beheld the Child. With that the Dove flew back up in the night sky and started to fly in an ever increasingly larger
circle. After some time the Dove nearly flew out of sight and when it returned back it was followed by some local shepherds who came to the door of the stable. These shepherds told an amazing story of how an angel had appeared and told them of the signs of this baby's birth for which they were to go and look for. They said the angel referred to the Child as the Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. With that statement the Dove dipped low over the stable and great peace fell upon humans and animals alike as the Dove took up its station and continued its deliberate circle of protective love through this night of all nights.

But Wait! My dear little sparrow friends of today. Though two-thousand years from that night of nights...don't we too possess this Dove, this Spirit of God, and we too become white with freedom from sin by this Child? In our littleness and through this Spirit don't we receive wellness, joy, peace and love as we touch the Almighty and the God-Man in the Eucharist?

May the Dove of Christmas always be found circling in protective love above each of you!

Bob Hall BSP, Little Flower Chapter, N. Carolina

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

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.

“Iesus Christus, Deus homo: Jesus Christ, God-man. This is one of "the mighty works of God," which we should reflect upon and thank him for. He has come to bring "peace on earth to men of good Will," to all men who want to unite their wills to the holy will of God — not just the rich, not just the poor, but everyone: all the brethren. We are all brothers in Jesus, children of God, brothers of Christ. His Mother is our mother.

“You must look at the Child in the manger. He is our Love. Look at him, realizing that the whole thing is a mystery. We need to accept this mystery on faith and use our faith to explore it very deeply. To do this, we must have the humble attitude of a Christian soul. Let us not try to reduce the greatness of God to our own poor ideas and human explanations. Let us try to understand that this mystery, for all its darkness, is a light to guide men's lives.

—Saint Josemaria Escriva
Christ Is Passing By, 13
Glory to God in the Highest and on earth peace to people of good will.

He is here and coming!
We are filled with joy!

Wishing a blessed Christmas to one and all.
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 minncc@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*

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**Welcome to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance!**

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

[Website: www.bspenance.org](http://www.bspenance.org)