

"FOLLOW ME!"

Luke 9:23

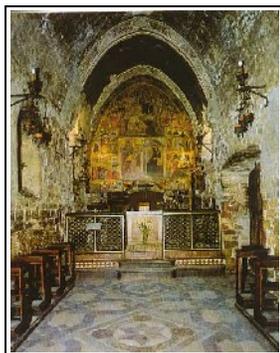


Monthly Newsletter of **The BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF PENANCE** of St. Francis

February 2011

BONAVENTURE AND HIS LESSONS ON ST. FRANCIS:

Chapter II—Francis gives himself completely to God and rebuilds three churches.



7. Now that he was firmly established in the lowliness of Christ, Francis remembered the command he had received from the cross to repair the church of San Damiano. He was a true son of obedience and he returned to Assisi in order to obey the divine command, at least by begging the necessary materials. For love of Christ, poor and crucified, he

overcame his embarrassment and begged from those who had known him as a wealthy young man, loading himself with stones, although he was weak and worn out with fasting. With God's help and his cooperation of the townspeople he eventually finished the work at San Damiano. Then, in order to avoid becoming lazy, he set about repairing another church dedicated to St. Peter, which was situated further away from the town. In his pure and unalloyed faith, Francis always had a great devotion to the Prince of the Apostles.

8. When he had finished there, he came to a place called the Portiuncula where there was an old church dedicated to the Virgin Mother of God, which was now abandoned with no one to look after it. Francis had great devotion of the Queen of the world and when he saw that the church was deserted he began to live there constantly in order to repair it. He heard that the angels often visited it, so that it used to be called St. Mary of the Angels, and he decided to stay there permanently out of reverence for the angels and love

for the Mother of Christ. He loved this spot more than any other in the world. It was here that he began his religious life in a very small way; it was here that he made such extraordinary progress, and it was here that he came to a happy end. When he was dying he commended this spot above all the others to the friars, because it was most dear to the Blessed Virgin.

Before entering the Order one of the friars had a vision about the Portiuncula. He saw a huge crowd of blind folk kneeling in a circle about the church and looking up to heaven. With tearful voices and outstretched hands they cried out to God, begging him to have pity on them and give them sight. Then a brilliant light descended from heaven and enveloped them all, giving them back their sight and the health they longed for.

This was the place where St. Francis founded the Order of Friars Minor by divine inspiration and it was Divine Providence which led him to repair three churches before he founded the Order and began to preach the Gospel. This meant that he progressed from material things to more spiritual achievements; from lesser to greater, in due order, and it gave a prophetic indication of what he would accomplish later. Like the three buildings he repaired, Christ's church was to be renewed in three different ways under Francis' guidance and according to his Rule and teaching, and the three-fold army of those who are to be saved was to win victory. (The three Orders he founded.) We can see that this prophecy has come true.

Bonaventure—Major Life of St. Francis (1263)



VISITOR'S MESSAGE

Homily by Fr. Robert Altier: Know your enemy...



In the first reading today from the Book of Genesis, we hear that the serpent was the most cunning or subtle of all the creatures God had created. What this means is that he is the most intelligent of all the creatures that God created. We must always keep in mind that when Satan fell, after being created

as the highest of all the angels, he did not lose any of his intelligence; he did not lose any of his ability or his power. People think that just because he fell he does not quite have the ability he used to have. When he fell, he no longer had grace, he no longer had access to God, his will became perverted and evil, but his intellect remained completely intact. What that means is there is no way that any of us by ourselves is ever going to outsmart the devil. It is a very important thing for us to keep in mind because sometimes, in our pride, we think that we are going to be able to outdo the devil, that we can be more cunning than he will be.

What we see in the Gospel reading is precisely the way that the Evil One works. He just simply lays temptations, but very subtle temptations. We see that there are three different types of temptations. There is the flesh, and so he says to Jesus, "If you are the Son of God, turn these stones into loaves of bread. Satisfy your hunger. Take care of yourself. Look out for Number One." What does our society tell us all the time? Just go to the grocery store and look at the breakfast cereals on both sides of the aisle, for 100 feet or more; [there are] lots of opportunity to satisfy the desires of the flesh. Not only that, just go to any place that sells electronics and what do we have but music (that is despicable by itself) glaring from every speaker in the place and at least 50 television sets with various things flashing in every direction—it is sense overload. But you have plenty of things to choose from; whatever your desires might be, they can be met. It is all about the self; it is all about the sensuality, looking out to make our own lives easier, more pleasant, and more convenient. It is all about pleasure in our society.

But it does not stop there because then the devil—when that one did not work—empties Jesus with pride. "Throw yourself off the parapet of the temple." [It was] the highest point of the temple, underneath which was a huge square where the people would gather. "Throw yourself off here in the midst of all of these people. The angels will catch you, and you will just float down very nicely to the ground. Everybody will see you and they will think that you are impressive." Isn't that the way the temptations are for us, too? It is all about making sure that we

have a title or position or showing off our things, making sure that we get one up on somebody else, bragging about ourselves or about our kids, making sure that the things we have look just a little better than someone else's. Even if not, at least in our own mind, it is one of the things that we regularly do: judging other people, making sure that we look just a little better in our own minds than somebody else, making sure that we justify ourselves so we can walk away smug and content. Pride is at the root of every single sin that we commit. But, once again, we see that it is pure selfishness. That is the synonym for pride: selfishness; it is all about "me". But then listen to what the Holy Father tells us: "We live in a 'me' generation." As Americans, more than anywhere in the world, we live in a "me" society: "It's all about me; it's what I want—me, me, me." That is all we hear about, and it is all that we are told to desire. What is it that you want? That is what the media tells us to go for.

But then there is one more if that does not work—and that is power. In our day, we hear over and over that knowledge is power. We have all kinds of means for power that we want to lord over other people. Rather than to be humble, rather than to serve others, rather than to pour our own selves out, we instead want others to be looking out for us. We want to be positioned high above all others, or at least above some, so that others will notice. We like to be able to have some sense of authority over others. Remember that authority is given for service. Power is about the self.

And so, Satan brings Jesus up onto the mountain and says, "Look at all the kingdoms of the world; all these will be yours." Maybe for you and me he does not quite do it that way, but it is in smaller ways. "Look at this; you could have power. This gossip will give you some knowledge and power over these other people in the office or in the neighborhood or in your family. If you have this knowledge, think how many people you can share it with!" He does not say, "Think how you will be able to destroy someone else's life and reputation by spreading this malicious gossip and rumor around," but he says, "The power that you have...you have knowledge!" That is what we like and that is what we go for. People get caught up into these radio talk shows and TV shows that are nothing but malicious gossip. They read these vile little newspapers that are nothing more than just spreading slander and gossip about other people. Then, what is worse, it does not stay there; we turn around and we spread it all over the place, as well.

The devil is very subtle. Again, just look at what he did with Adam and Eve. He begins with a lie, but a very subtle lie—it

is a question: "Did God really say that you cannot eat from any tree in the garden?" Then you see the response of Eve, and it is no different from any of us, her children. "No, God said that we cannot eat from the tree in the middle of the garden nor can we touch it lest we die." God did not say anything about touching it; God said, "You cannot eat it." But we like to embellish things a little bit. You see where the pride already is creeping in. And then the old devil says, "No, God lied to you. God knows that when you eat of that tree you will be like God." Now they were already made in the image and likeness of God, but when we see that there is a possibility for knowledge, that there is a means for being able to obtain something for the self, we like it. Eve saw that there was something good and pleasant so she ate it.

But all you have to do is think about what we ourselves do. If we meet somebody who is innocent, someone who is very pure and naïve of the ways of sin, what do we do with them? We ridicule them; we make fun of them; we tempt them; we put things in front of their path; we shun them. These are the ones we should be holding up and saying, "Praise God that this person has been spared of all these horrible things that we ourselves have given into!" But instead, just like the devil, we start putting things in front of this person and we try to make the person self-conscious. We try to make sure that this person realizes that they are the one who is different from the rest of us: "Don't you like to be like everyone else? Wouldn't you want to be just like us?" And so the ridicule will get at their pride. The temptations get at the sensuality. Pretty soon, we do everything in our power, very subtly, to lead them into sin so they will be like us. That is the trick of Satan. It is not that you will be like God; that was a lie. "You will be like me"—that is what he was really saying. It is no different from the way we do things to innocent people. We despise their innocence, and so we want them to be like us. We are the ones who have given in to sin and we want to drag others down with us. What a tragic way of living!

But it does not need to be that way. Saint Paul makes very clear in the second reading that just as through one man sin comes into the world, so through one man righteousness comes into the world. And so, all of us, who are members of Jesus Christ, have the means to be able to reject sin, to reject Satan, to reject all of his lies - which, I remind you, is what we all vowed on the day of our Baptism. We have made a vow to Almighty God that that is what we were going to do: to reject Satan, all of his lies, all of his empty works. Everything about the vile creature we have vowed that we would reject. So, again, you see the subtlety of the devil when he gets us to do his work to try to drag others down, when he gets us to do his work on our own selves when we tear ourselves to pieces, telling ourselves how rotten, worthless, and horrible we are.

Therefore, we reject the gift of God because we do not believe that God could actually love us that much. Instead, we give ourselves over—very subtly but very completely, nonetheless—to the ways of evil.

We are members of Jesus Christ. We have been redeemed. We now live a redeemed humanity—redeemed manhood and redeemed womanhood. We do not need to live according to the ways of sin. Sin is certainly at work within our flesh, but in Christ we have overcome it. Our sins are forgiven in the confessional and we have the grace of God to be able to reject Satan. It is not us against the devil—we will lose; it is us *as members of Jesus Christ* against Satan—and we will win. We can trounce the head of Satan, we can crush him, and we can reject all of his temptations only in Jesus Christ. The devil is very subtle; he goes after all the weaknesses of the mind and body. And if we give into the pride and think that we are going to take on the devil, we are going to be crushed.

But we have the opportunity to eat of the fruit of the tree of life, the Holy Eucharist. The Cross is the tree of life and the Eucharist is its fruit. Each one of us has been given to eat of that Fruit. And with the power that comes from Christ, we can overcome Satan—but only if we are willing to humble ourselves and rely on the help of God. That is the key. With what we receive in the Eucharist, with the graces that we receive in prayer, we come to understand how Our Lord overcame Satan. If we are willing to unite ourselves with Him, we can overcome the devil. He has already united us to Him, now it is just a question of whether we are willing to reciprocate and do the same. Or are we going to arrogantly try to do things on our own, the American Way: "I did it my way, not His way"?

We are called to unite ourselves to Christ. We are called to lives of holiness. We are called to righteousness. We are called to reject the ways of sin that we have inherited from our first parents and from our own parents. We live in a world that is immersed in sin and selfishness and pride and power. We are called to live lives of humility, of self-denial, lives that are united in Christ, who was lowly and poor. Are we willing to do the same? Are we willing to unite ourselves with Christ and in Him to overcome sin, to overcome temptation, and indeed to overcome the tempter himself? We have the righteousness of Christ at work within us to be able to live as redeemed men and women. The choice is ours to live the way of Satan, the ways of the world, and the ways of the flesh—that all look very pleasant and tempting—or to live the way of Jesus Christ, united with Him and His Cross, but united with Him in His Resurrection and in the redemption of all of humanity, of our flesh, and of the world, to be able to reject everything that is not of God and to choose God, to choose the dignity that He has given to us, and to crush the head of Satan.

* This text was transcribed from the audio recording of a homily by Father Robert Altier with minimal editing.



ADMINISTRATOR'S MESSAGE...ON GOD'S WILL



God is the only real meaning and purpose in life. As children we were taught, at least those in Catholic grade schools that the purpose of life is to 'know, love, and serve God in this life and be happy with him in heaven That's it! Now, that said, you could write a 1000 books on how we do that. For each of us it is different.

In the book, *Heliotropium: Conformity of the Human Will to the Divine*¹ by Jeremias Drexelius, the opening chapter addresses the will of God in several ways. First, it says that God's will is involved in everything that happens to us. Everything that happens to us does so either at the command of God, or with His permission. So, the former is called the Ordaining Will of God, and the latter the Permitting Will of God. Nothing happens to anyone purely by chance. This is the fundamental way of seeking to know God's will, the book declares. True, wise, and holy is this, the book declares: "The Lord has done it all."

Within that framework God's Will is certainly what happens to us, and in us, naturally, and the message of the Gospel is God's Will for sure. The Gospel is the Word of God come alive, which is what Jesus is and always was and always will be. Jesus is God, and the Son of God and of man, and he is the Word of God made flesh. Naturally we get hungry, and we need to eat. Naturally we get tired and we need to sleep. Obviously these things are God's will for us. We do a lot of things that have nothing to do with nature though, and therefore nothing to do with God's Will except that we can choose them, for God created us all with a free will, and that complicates, and often obstructs, our response to His Will.

For instance, we might like to smoke. That is our will, not God's, because we choose to do it and can live without it. We might enjoy a drink of alcohol, in that same vein. We watch TV programs, and many are really quite pointless except to humor or entertain us. There are many things we do because we like them, not because they are God's will for us, but are rather the exercise of our own free wills. Some of these things are sinful, but we seek them anyway.

As penitents we can modify even the obvious things God gave us as a sacrifice in union with what Jesus suffered, as substantiated by St. Paul when he said: "**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.**" (Col1:24) Since we get hungry we must eat, in God's will. We can choose what to eat and how much to eat though. God allows us a variety of foods, some delicious and some not so delicious. We eat less food

and those not so delicious. We eat sweets, but not those we like. So also we can voluntarily fast from other things of our own free wills. By fasting we can fast, and add our sufferings voluntarily to those of Christ, and improve our prayer life because fasting and other acts of self denial and mortification, St. John of the Cross, St. Theresa of Avila, and St. Francis have all said, is essential to grow in mystical prayer.

The marital act is God's will too. It is completely natural, and without it there would be no human race. We cannot be "fertile, multiply" (Gen 1:22) without the union of man and woman, properly in the sacrament of marriage. Then comes the disorder in our passions so celebrated these days. We are told to value this union without marriage or children, or even to unite ourselves to those of the same sex, just for the fun of it, and if the woman gets pregnant, however she conceived, she can abort the fetus! Abortion is the great sin of this age and begs the wrath of God. Obviously if we give up the marital act we won't die, but it is a good example, especially in these days, of how the world, and the devil, calls us to sin, forgetting God's will.

Just as God never changes His love for us, we must do the same towards Him, and our neighbor. It is His Will. As Jesus said: "**You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.**" (Mt 22:37-39) **Then He also said: "I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another."** (Jn 13:34) So, this is true, and God's will for us.

We love God, and we love our neighbor, as God loves us. That doesn't make everything easy. God will send us all problems, crosses, challenges, and difficulties. Even difficult people to deal with! He does that precisely because He loves us, to test our love, and to purify us of our faults, weaknesses, sins, and failings. We need to blanket everything with prayer and faith to overcome these things peacefully.

In the movie "The Passion of the Christ", by Mel Gibson, which covered the world some years ago with a visible depiction of what Jesus suffered for us, shows in one scene Jesus being whipped to death. His mother is looking on and says "My Son, when and how will you get past this?" She knew what he could do for others. She knew He could take care of Himself if He wanted to because she knew He was the Son of God. Yet, she knew He was not releasing himself from the scourging and His coming death. She held to her faith, but her mother's heart was pierced with a sword, as Simeon had foretold. In the resurrection her joy was restored and complete.

So, for us, we need to move in peace in the Will of God, as portrayed for us in the Gospel and in the wonderful natural gifts God has given us used carefully, prayerfully, and respectfully. As penitents we refrain from enjoying all we can

1 <http://www.heliotropium.net/>

to offer sacrifices to Christ crucified consistent with our calling to be his disciples. In the Gospel he says to us all: **"If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."** (Lk 9:23) This is God's will for us and this one Scripture was one of three that St. Francis picked to form his three Orders. The Rule of the BSP is the First Rule of the Third Order of St. Francis.

We need to hold to our faith and exercise our free wills for God's glory, following the Gospel, and for us, the wonderful

example of St. Francis, who perfectly followed Our Lord in his life. When we experience problems, or difficulties, living as we hope to for the Lord, we can call on the Lord and say: "When Lord will you get us past this? Please Lord get us past this." Our Lord can do anything and will for all who surrender to His Will.

May God bless us all, and lead us more deeply and perfectly into His Will.

Bruce and Shelley Fahey BSP Administrators - Morning Star Chapter - Minnesota



NO GREATER LOVE by Paul Beery BSP

"A new Commandment I give to you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples."

(Jn 13:34)



There are three heroines in my life who have brought this lesson home. Who of us does not want to give credit to those who have made them what they are? When a book is written, there are almost always notes of appreciation by the author to those who contributed to the finished product. If there is anything good in the finished product that each of us has become, it is due to the grace of God, and those who mediate that grace in our lives. Since I have written the equivalent of a book after years of writing this monthly article, it's appropriate to give credit to those who have helped me along the Way.

First of all, none of us would be on this earth without a mother who gave us birth. Like so many of her generation, my mother had difficulty in expressing her affection, but she more than made up for it by firmly grounding her children in the pursuit of virtue. It is not easy to persuade children to go against their self-centered natures to become other-oriented. Youngsters will rebel, claim to see nothing but a "dysfunctional" family, and find fault with parents and siblings. Hopefully maturity brings a better outlook. I know some people who spend their whole lives blaming their parents for some real or imagined problem that was the source of some trauma. Every one of us is the source of some trauma to others. That's life with Original Sin. Perhaps some blame could as easily be laid at our own feet. It is so easy to excuse ourselves of everything under the sun, while expecting perfection from others. Our loved ones deserve special consideration, special forgiveness.

By the grace of God I realized that my mother and dad did the best they could with what they had to work with, what they inherited from their parents and their environment. I see now how they went about striving for virtue when I didn't even

know what the word meant. I find myself following in their footsteps, doing some of the same things they did just because they did them first. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. The longer we live, the more we appreciate them.

I wrote once that my mother read books like "This Tremendous Lover," by Fr. Eugene Boylan. That explains about half of all one needs to know about her, or any person. My mother, whose name was May, encouraged her six children to succeed educationally, but even more in the school of the Lord's service. We learned to pray in the home, thanks to Fr. Patrick Payton: "The family that prays together, stays together." As a young child I recall attending his Family Rosary Crusade at the Capital in St. Paul, Minnesota during the Marian year of 1954. There were a quarter of a million people present—the age of faith. That was impressive! It's also when authorities still knew how to count.

May was very active in Church and community, and I'm sure that's where I inherited my activism for good and for God. Attending that rally was typical. Prayer and fidelity to Jesus was emphasized. I still remember her teaching me things like the morning offering, lessons on chastity, and an examination of conscience. But perhaps her best gift was an introduction to my second heroine, our Blessed Mother. The last to come along, I was privileged to have maximum exposure to "Our Tainted Nature's Solitary Boast" through, for example, the May Crowning, First Saturday devotions, and of course the Rosary.

Bishop Sheen said you could learn a lot about a man from his relationship with his mother. I believe that's true not only on the natural level, but the supernatural as well. Why wouldn't that be the case? Is the Holy Family without a Mother? How did Jesus treat His Mother? "The Passion of the Christ" revealed the close connection between them. Mary was there

for Jesus, and she is there for us.

“True Devotion to Mary,” by St. Louis de Montfort, opened my eyes to this fact. Mary intimately participated in the Incarnation by agreeing to be the Mother of God. As she physically brought Jesus into the world, she also brings Him spiritually into our hearts. She is our spiritual Mother, truly our Blessed Mother! Her many appearances around the world in recent centuries have proven that this spiritual motherhood is genuine and on-going. She infallibly brings us to Jesus: to Jesus through Mary. That’s not hard to understand. How many times have we gone to our mother for assistance? No one knows Jesus better than His Mother Mary, and there is no one in the Communion of Saints better able to intercede for us. What a great benefit to have a spiritual mother who will always be there for you.

Finally the third heroine is my beloved wife Donna. They say that only one in ten marriages are truly happy, blessed in the Lord. Thanks be to God, Donna and I have such a marriage, currently over 32 years in duration. Living in such a grace-filled marriage has enabled me to better understand Divine Love through the love of another person. “God is Love.” But how is God’s love manifested to me? One way is through the love of another person, especially one outside our own family, who doesn’t have a “duty” to love us. Donna showed forth God’s love in a special way I had not experienced before. Of course Jesus is the original Mediator between God and mankind, but it’s amazing how other Images of Jesus can bring the Divine to a human level that truly opens our hearts to both. All good things flow from the Love of God and our desire to fulfill His Will. What on earth is more important than that?

Donna and I have the same interests and the same fidelity to the Love – and the Will of God through the Gospel of Life. She has joined me in “True Devotion” to Mary. And she would be the first to say that she both understands and loves Jesus more through the influence of His Blessed Mother. It is said this is the easiest and most secure path to heaven. I believe it. Who but a mother would always do the best for her children, to make their path smooth and straight? That’s what mothers do, how God made them.

In turn, Donna has given me a glimpse into the plan of God I would never have had otherwise. “And He made them male and female...” (Gn 1:27) "It is not good for man to be alone." (Gn 2:18) It was not always good for me, and God gave me a perfect partner. She introduced me to the concept of covenant love in our marriage, which relates wonderfully well to God’s covenant love with His people. Add the complementary love

between spouses as a source of great inspiration, and our lives have been enriched immensely.

“All I ask is that you remember me as loving you.” Donna got a plaque with this inscription—for me—in case I ended up marrying someone else. One has to go back to the days of being “in love” to understand the significance of this gesture. I do not think there is a more exhilarating time in life. The emotions are in turmoil, and anything seems possible. But can those wild emotions be put to the test of conforming to God’s will? Donna was willing to give me up if that was what God wanted. I was in a similar position, but she put her decision into action by getting that plaque for me, just in case. It still sends chills down my spine just thinking about it. She would not go against her conscience, nor fail to put God first.

There is great peace in a relationship knowing such ground rules are in place. Neither one of us will take advantage of the other, for we are as servants. I have such admiration for her, and she has great devotion to me. It is said that a man needs to be respected by his spouse, a woman cherished. (See Ep 5:33) That is so easy to do with Donna, truly a child of the Madonna. I can see God’s Image and Likeness in her, and some of the qualities of Mary. Donna has an innocence and child-likeness that is so special to me that I can honestly say I have never so much as raised my voice in anger towards her. It is rather my duty, and my pleasure to love, protect and defend her with a passion that I feel Joseph must have felt for Mary.

Donna has persevered through many trials: overcoming dyslexia, the early death of her father, spending years in an orphanage while watching her four brothers die of muscular dystrophy. She is an inspiration to me as an overachiever in a world of slackers. Though God has not blessed us with our own children, we understand the interaction within the family as God created it, the basic unit of society, and can support others in their quest for the wonderful blessings of a happy marriage. And we can work to keep marriage sacred in the Lord against the unholy attacks against it.

We are united in living the Gospel in the spirit of St. Francis. We are prayer partners and life partners, walking hand in hand to the Promised Land. There is some concern as to who will be there first, and who will be left behind. Donna prays I will be the latter. That’s OK with me. I seek her happiness and find my own. I thank God for the blessings He has bestowed upon us in this life, and ask nothing more. For in no time at all, I will be united with her, with all three of my heroines for all eternity with the One who taught us to love one another.

Paul Beery BSP - Morning Star Chapter - Minnesota



A MEDITATION by Janet Klasson BSP

From the First Reading of the Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time:

"Thus says the Lord: Is this not the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?"

(Isaiah 58:6-7)



Lent is just around the corner and the church gives us this beautiful reading from Isaiah about the fasting that God desires. The passage does not negate the fasts we observe as part of our Rule, but it does warn us that without charity, our fasting cannot please God. The fact that

our Rule also requires that we give to the poor, testifies to the scriptural solidity of our Rule. Thanks be to God for the great gift he has given us through St. Francis.

I have recently begun to read a book called *Spirit of Penance: Path to God* by Dom Hubert Van Zeller. This is a book that cannot be rushed through. It is so full of solid teaching about penance that each paragraph must be digested on its own. I find it affirms me on the path of penance, but it also challenges me and expands my understanding of the way of life to which we have been called. I would like to share with you a few of the lights that I have found in my reading thus far.

Van Zeller explains that the way of penance is the way of total surrender to God. Someone who is surrendered to God in the way of penance does not make lists of what he will give to God, but "gives himself as completely as he can, and that is all there is to it. For him, the problem is not what to give next, or even how to give more, but simply how to go on in the disposition of letting God take. There is no more generous giving than this, no sharper penance."²

If we are called to live the Rule of 1221, it is God's doing, for no one can live this Rule unless God wills it. The more we surrender to our call, the more we surrender to God, and the more we surrender to God, the more grace we will receive to live our call. The above quote also gives dignity to the daily penances that fall outside the specifics of the Rule—a man who hands over his entire paycheck to support the family; a woman who is sleep-deprived for years as she raises her children; a single person looking after aging parents because the rest of her siblings are busy

with families of their own; an aged person who carries the cross of having to be looked after at the end of a productive life; a young person who has to babysit his siblings instead of going out with friends. The list is long. These are the penances that God chooses. It is not for us to wish them away or to refuse them, but to "take up our cross and follow him."

Penance is for everyone, a truth that has been forgotten by many in this age, to the detriment of society as a whole. How many today have heard the exhortation to "offer it up?" Too few, unfortunately. A society that loses its ability to pray and offer penance cannot survive long, for the spiritual sustains the physical. And prayer and penance work together to sustain the spiritual life, as is beautifully described in another passage of the book:

"Unless prayer informs penance, and penance expresses prayer, each is incomplete. Just as in the act of respiration, there is the dual process of inhalation and exhalation, so in the act of religion there is the dual activity of mystical receiving and ascetical giving. Neither inhalation nor exhalation is the whole of breathing or the whole of life; neither mysticism nor asceticism is the whole of religion or the whole of life. But in order to keep alive physically, you have to breathe in and out; in order to keep alive spiritually, you have to pray and do penance."³

The Rule is once again affirmed in this passage from the book. What a blessing to have a Rule that gives us what is necessary to stay alive spiritually—prayer and penance! We need not wonder why God has resurrected this Rule over 700 years after it was written. In the beginning it was written to inject life back into the Church; today it has the same mission and we are the new missionaries.

"Francis", our Lord said, "rebuild my Church which you see has fallen into ruins." Through prayer, penance, and almsgiving, let us go now and do the same.

² Van Zeller, Dom Hubert. *Spirit of Penance, Path to God*, p. 10.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 13-14.

"Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: In my fury I will let loose storm winds; because of my anger there shall be a flooding rain, and hailstones shall fall with destructive wrath."

(Ez 13:13)

"My child, there is much reparation to be made for the great sins of this age. That is why I have called so many to a life of penance. Without my servants, the world would have already been destroyed. Then do not begrudge anything you are asked to forgo for the sake of souls. There is nothing too small to be used if it is offered in love. Child, give me all you can. The need is great."

Lord Jesus I am so weak. Without your grace I will not accomplish what you desire. Full of Grace, pray for me and for all sinners. Amen.

Author: Janet Klasson



FROM THE 'SPARROW'

Peace, my little friends! Jesus told us that Satan is the father of lies and that **the whole world is under his influence** (I add emphasis to that last statement!). Therefore, it should come as no surprise that there is a fundamental deception that underlies the world system. It was also like this in the time of St. Francis of Assisi and he recognized it as such and turned his life (with the help of grace) in a 180 degree turn that set him on a course completely away from the social norms of his times.

St. Francis, like most Franciscans and true Christians, recognized that the world constantly promises something that it cannot deliver—satisfaction. The illusion is that whatever we pursue—positions, possessions, or experiences—will somehow bring us inner peace. Yet it never happens. A more-desired object is always just over the next hill, and after climbing it, there suddenly appears one more obstacle to achieving our goal. Even if one is able to get hold of it, the result is still unfulfilling. It is not possible for the human soul to be satisfied with "things."

This, however, I have come to realize as a Franciscan and a follower of the Lord, is not, in itself, a bad thing, but rather part of the design of God!! In Romans 8, we are told that the creation itself was subjected to futility so that freedom for which every created being longs could only be found in the Creator. God uses this to bring people to Himself and also to keep His children on the straight path. So if God

uses a negative to get a positive that is not a bad thing...that's a good thing...haven't you heard that God can write straight with crooked lines...all that kind of thing is easy for Him because HE IS GOD!!!

Now, the journey (and the dream, if you will) can only be enjoyed when our eyes and hearts are NOT focused on the journey itself, but on Him whose kingdom and manifest presence should be the goal of all we do. This is what St. Francis did and how he lived and what attracts us to what he has left behind for us to follow. So let the journey and the dream begin in your lives this year...you will not regret it...it will be the most blessed thing you ever did.

Lord, today I will no longer allow the things of this world to blind me to their temporal nature and false promise.

I will see beyond them to the place of contentment in You Lord.

Your finished work, in Your Passion and Death of the Cross, has delivered me out of the darkness of the world and brought me into the Kingdom of Your Light.

All of the Brothers and Sisters of Penance of St. Francis give You thanks and praise for this deliverance through Your love and compassion for us and all men.

Bob Hall BSP - Morning Star Chapter - North Carolina



Then he said to all, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. (Lk 9:23)

"Since whatever is done in world happens through the Permission or Command of God, it is our duty to receive everything as from the Hand of God, so conforming our will to His most holy Will, through all things, and in all things, as to ascribe nothing to accident, chance, or fortune. These are but monstrous conceptions of the ancients, are not for an instant to be endured among Christians. And it is not only to fortune or chance that nothing is to be ascribed, but neither to the negligence of persevering care of man, as prime causes. Vain and idle are such complaints as, "This or that happened to me because this or that man hated me, or managed my affairs badly, or did my business carelessly. Things would certainly have turned out differently if he had only been well disposed towards and had entered into the business with all his heart, and had not spared his pains." This kind of philosophy is vain and foolish. But true, wise, and holy is this, "The Lord has done it all." For, as I have already said, good and evil things are from God."

Heliotropium: Conformity of the Human Will to the Divine by Jeremias Drexelius, Book I, Chapter 1

The **BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF PENANCE OF ST. FRANCIS**

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*

Welcome to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance!

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



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