



...IN THE WORLD, BUT NOT OF IT, FOR CHRIST!

BONAVENTURE AND HIS LESSONS ON ST. FRANCIS:

Chapter IV—The Progress of the Order under Francis' Guidance and the Confirmation of the Rule

2. Eventually, they arrived at the valley of Spoleto, still full of these good dispositions, and there they fell to debating whether they should live among the people or seek refuge in solitude. Francis, who was a true servant of Christ refused to trust in his own opinion or in the suggestions of his companions; instead, he sought to discover God's will by persevering prayer. Then, enlightened by a revelation from heaven, he realized that he was sent by God to win for Christ the souls which the Devil was trying to snatch away. And so he chose to live for the benefit of his fellow men, rather than for himself alone, after the example of Him who was so good as to die for all men.



any of the liturgical books, so that they could not chant the divine office. Christ's cross was their book and they studied it day and night, at the exhortation and after the example of their father who never stopped talking to them about the cross. When the friars asked him to teach them how to pray, he said, "When you pray, say the Our Father, and We adore you, O Christ, in all your churches in the whole world and we thank you, because by your holy cross you redeemed the world."

3. With his companions Francis now went to live in an abandoned hut near Assisi, where they lived from hand to mouth according to the rule of poverty, in toil and penury, drawing their strength rather from tears of compunction than from any bodily food. They spent the time praying continuously, devoting themselves especially to fervent mental prayer; they had not yet got

He also taught them to join with all creation and praise God in his creatures, while venerating priests with special reverence and holding fast to the true faith which is professed and taught by the Catholic Church. This they were to believe firmly and profess with all simplicity. The friars obeyed his teaching to perfection, and whenever they saw a church or crucifix, even from a distance, they knelt down humbly and prayed the way he had taught them.

Bonaventure—Major Life of St. Francis (1263)



VISITOR'S MESSAGE

Homily by Fr. Robert Altier...

Open Your Heart to the Child Who is Love

In the first reading this morning from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, we hear about how every cloak rolled in blood will be burned and every boot that tramped in battle is going to be destroyed, and that the pole of the taskmaster and the rod upon their shoulders is going to be broken and destroyed – all of

these things that usually come with battle, the war that has to go on to be able to free slaves, to be able to end things and bring about peace. As this all builds up, one would expect that we are going to hear about some kind of battle that is going to be happening. Instead, Isaiah suddenly turns it around and says, "Because a child is born for us, a son is given us; and on his shoulder



dominion rests." So it is not so much a matter of any kind of physical battle, but rather, it is a spiritual battle, and it is by faith in this little, tiny Baby who is born in Bethlehem that one is going to be able to destroy the one who has put his yoke and his chains about us, who has put the pole upon our shoulders, who has beaten us with his rod – and that is Satan himself. The one thing Satan cannot handle is humility. Satan lives and thrives on pride. And so God, in His humility, comes down to us in the form of a tiny, helpless baby. He comes to us just as one of us, totally dependent upon His mother, and yet with the joy that a baby brings. Anyone who would see Him and have faith would understand the freedom that comes only from Him.

In looking upon this little Baby in the manger, the shepherds were also able to discern something that did not seem to make any sense to them. The sign that was given to them was one that would be highly unusual: a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes. Swaddling clothes were the clothes of the dead, the strips of cloth that would be wrapped around the body of the dead the way that Lazarus, when he was in the tomb, was all wrapped up. And this is the way Our Lady clothed her Son. Now one could try to explain that away and say, "Considering it would have been cold, it probably was the most reasonable way to wrap up a child to make sure that he stayed warm." But when we look at it, we can understand it from a different perspective; that is, the very purpose of the birth of this Child was to die. He came into this world and is born for us so that He could die for us. And right from the very first moment of His appearance on earth, with the newness of life and the joy that a baby brings, there is at the same time this tinge of sorrow, there is this irony that is present right from the very beginning. There is new life and it points to death. Yet each one of us knows fully well that it is His death that brings about life.

The Church, in the readings over the last few days, talks about how our salvation is near at hand and how in the Birth of Christ we are saved. Yet at the same time, we all know it is not in His Birth that we are saved, but rather it is in His Death and Resurrection that we are saved. But there would be no Passion, Death, or Resurrection without His Birth. And so the beginning of our salvation has come in that God is willing to take on our human nature and He is willing to be born in time. The One who is outside of time, the One who created time is born in time. The One who created the Blessed Virgin Mary became created within her. The One who is uncreated from all eternity took on a created nature and was born for us. The One who has no beginning suddenly has a beginning in time. The One who is immortality Himself came into this world with a mortal human nature so that He could die. It makes no sense if we just try to look at it

on the natural level. It is only with the eyes of faith that we can understand the mystery that is being unfolded before us this very day.

There is great cause for rejoicing as there is with the birth of any child: the miracle of a baby, the beauty of the absolute innocence of that little soul, the joy of the face that one beholds in a little child. Yet, with this Child, there is greater cause for rejoicing. Even though when a child is born family and friends rejoice with the parents, the child is born to those parents. This Child, however, is different. He was certainly given for His mother, but He was given for each one of us. Each one of us then shares in the joy that is Our Lady's. She alone, of course, had the privilege of being able to carry Him in her womb and to give birth to the Savior of the world, but each one of us, like Saint Joseph, is able to share in the joy. Saint Joseph, knowing that the Child was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, knew fully well that he was



brought into the mystery of the Incarnation but he himself was not part of it. So it is with each of us. We can look at the crèche and there we see Mary and Joseph: Mary, whose fiat nine months earlier has now borne fruit and given birth to God; and there is Saint Joseph, the just man, adoring the Child on behalf of each one of us.

Mary, His mother, extends Him with great joy to the poor, humble shepherds who came to worship Him – and she does the same thing for each one of us. We come before Him with the same kind of humility as the shepherds and it is important for us to recognize that it was to the shepherds that God first revealed this mystery. Shepherds, in the ancient world, were the lowest of the low; they were the unskilled laborers; they were the ones who were at the bottom of the pile in the societal pecking order. And yet in God's mercy, He sent His Son to be a shepherd, the Shepherd of our souls. He turns then to the lowly and to the humble, to the ones who would be the most apt to recognize the grandeur of the mystery that was taking place. They came at the message of an angel to be able to see this Baby who looked just like any other human baby, but they understood that this was the all-powerful God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, who has now become created in His mother.

And now the angel speaks to each one of us and calls each one of us to come and behold the glory of God that is shining on the face of a newborn Baby, to behold His glory, the glory of an only Son, and to be able to understand that in this Baby we have freedom for our souls. Indeed, the rod has been broken and the pole on their shoulder has been smashed if we are willing to accept Who this Child is and the very purpose of His birth. Saint Paul, in the second reading, tells us, "The grace of God has appeared to us." We look upon the face

of God in this little Child as we still await the coming in glory of our Savior in His second coming, but that does not in any way diminish the glory of the first coming. He is the grace of God, because grace is the life of God and in Him the fullness of grace resides. And so in this Child, every single grace that will be given to every human being throughout all of history is found. In this Child is contained all of the grace that will ever be given to the world. That is our salvation: the grace of God given in Jesus Christ, born in the most humble of circumstances, born for the purpose of dying, so that those who had chosen death would be able to have life.

It is this irony of the mystery of the Incarnation and the Birth of Our Lord that we need to meditate upon. As I have mentioned before on Christmas, God in His infinite wisdom not only gives to us these rather ironic sorts of twists that take place in this mystery, but in His infinite wisdom He also gives to us a way to be able to open our hearts. Even the most closed and hardened heart has to open in the presence of a baby. A baby is vulnerable and harmless. A baby is nothing but love. And it does not matter how hardened a sinner we might become, when we look upon a child our hearts melt and they open, suddenly we become transformed in the presence of an infant. We start making funny noises that we would never, ever make in any other circumstance, and everybody thinks it is pretty wonderful rather than thinking we are strange making strange noises. We act in ways that we would never act and nobody even thinks twice about it because it is a baby. God has come to us in an irresistible form, in the form of a newborn infant, and we cannot help but to humble ourselves before His humility. We cannot help but to open our hearts in the presence of His vulnerability. We cannot help but to prostrate ourselves before His divine condescension.

God, in His all-powerful and infinite knowledge, has presented Himself in a way that is completely vulnerable and helpless so that we will not be able to resist the gift which is given. Open your hearts to Jesus, allow Him to enter in. Salvation, grace, redemption – these are things we can talk about but we cannot see, but they are now seen in human form. Beyond this, Jesus did not merely give Himself to us as a little baby to look at, but He continues to give Himself to us in the Eucharist. It is the same Person who was born in Bethlehem; it is the same Person who died on Calvary; and He comes to us now in the Blessed Sacrament - Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, the fullness of His Person – to give Himself to each one of us. And He asks that we will have, as we come forward to receive Him, the same attitude and disposition as the shepherds, the same humility and openness of heart that we have in the presence of a little baby, that we would come to Him now and open our hearts to receive Him with the greatest of love, with the greatest of humility, with the greatest vulnerability, so that our hearts, hardened by sin, will melt in the presence of this Infant, that they will open in the presence of this tiny Child and allow Him to enter in and transform our hearts so that He –Who is God from all eternity but took on our human nature and was born in time—will now take us—who are human by nature and born in time—and transform us to share in His divine nature and enter into eternity. That is the gift He is offering: to break the bondage of sin and give us freedom for our souls, to take our arrogance and smash it and give us hearts that are humble, open, and free of sin. The grace of God has appeared, the salvation of our great Savior, and He has appeared in an irresistible form. Open your hearts to receive the Child that our Blessed Mother holds out to each one of us. Open your heart to receive the grace and the salvation of God given to us in Jesus Christ.

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



ADMINISTRATOR'S MESSAGE... **On Charity and Christmas**

All the followers of Jesus Christ know that this life is a test. In the visible absence of God will we prevail in believing in the invisible reality of God and act accordingly? Will we have and develop Faith in God? Having done that, will we use our free wills to pursue this unseen God by doing what we feel he asks of us, or not? Do we want to get to where God wants to take us, which is to heaven?

As Christmas comes again we consider anew that Jesus came as God's gift to us to make this message clear, and show us, and tell us, how to live if we want to get to heaven. Yet, He left it up to each of us to decide how we will live, as neither He, nor His Father, will tamper with

our free wills without our permission. That is why it is important that we surrender ourselves and our lives to God. So He can move our wills to know, love, and serve Him better and gain a happy eternity with Him forever.

St. Augustine wrote, among his many letters, of the visible and invisible, the physical and the spiritual, and the things we can or cannot do, here or hereafter. Among those things are a salutary number of writings on charity as the driving force in our spiritual growth. On charity he writes of what is ordinary, and extraordinary. His are enlightening and encouraging dialogues.

Acts of ordinary charity are those things that ordinary people do on a daily basis to assist, aide, or complement others in their family and outside their families. Among these things are the many routine things we do for others. We cook, and clean, and help others, including

especially our families and children, in various aspects of their lives. We smile at people, and encourage them, and help them get their lives in order, and accomplish the work of their lives. We live positively with others and promote peace for the love of God and of neighbor as the general way we live our lives, and for the love of God.

It is imperative that if people seek God, and His Kingdom, that they routinely live lives marked with ordinary charity. If we routinely practice ordinary charity with hearts that believe in and seek to serve God we are on our way to God. And we do well to keep in mind that many of the Saints have said that charity within and to our brothers and sisters in the Church is of the highest order.

Extraordinary charity, on the other hand, is consciously doing something exceptional that you don't have to do for the love and the good of another person or persons. It requires exceptional energy or dedication to accomplish and its primary objective is to more perfectly and completely fulfill the two great commandments, to

love God and neighbor. To follow the commands and example that Jesus gave us more perfectly, on an exceptional basis, in the way we live.

A very good example of someone who practiced extraordinary charity in our day would be Mother Theresa of Calcutta. She in our time is what St. Francis was in his time. As professed followers of St. Francis dedicated to living the life he gave us for the glory of God and good of our souls and the souls of others it is useful for us to reflect on our very special calling to live lives of extraordinary charity. That is what our Rule calls us to do.

As brothers and sisters of penance who we are before God is our primary and daily focus, and this in itself is wonderful and exceptional. Especially in this Christmas season, as we see anew the Child, let us ponder anew how we can live for Him more perfectly.

Have a holy and blessed Christmas!

Praised be Jesus forever!

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



NO GREATER LOVE by Paul Beery BSP

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, He gave them the right to become children of God. And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we

beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, has made Him known."

(John 1:1-14, 18)

"I am a lifelong Catholic, and I don't believe Jesus is the Messiah." This remarkable statement was made by an older woman at an interfaith conference held at a Catholic Church, showing she was in tune with a female Jewish Rabbi. A Catholic doesn't believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ? Lady, there's something wrong with your Catholic/Christian formation! She might begin by reading her bible, for we all have to answer the question Jesus asks: "Who do people say that I am?" John the Apostle had no doubt that Jesus was the Messiah. He was on the Mount of the Transfiguration, hearing God the Father say of Jesus: "This is My Beloved Son, listen to Him."

If Jesus is not the Messiah, then who is He? He is certainly not a prophet sent from God. Prophets don't lie. Jesus clearly stated that He was the Messiah, and Jewish authorities clearly understood who He was. At His trial He was asked: "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus answered, "**I AM**. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." The high priest tore his clothes and accused Him of blasphemy. He was right. Why would Jesus come to earth if He were not

the Messiah, our Savior?

It is offensive in the extreme to accuse faithful followers of Jesus of having been duped. I for one have not given my life to the Lord to uphold a lie. Jesus is either the Messiah or He is not. And if He is not, He has pulled off the greatest scam in history, and billions of people have been duped. I don't think so.

The divinity of Jesus Christ has to be the central core of our faith, without which nothing makes sense. And that is the real and dramatic meaning of the Incarnation, of Christmas, when the divine Son of God was born of a human mother through the intervention of the equally divine Holy Spirit. Those who have labored in the vineyard for many years may take all this for granted. We need to keep fresh in our mind the wonder of the greatest intervention in human history. That's why we honor St. Francis of Assisi for bringing the Incarnation from a far-off event to the present moment. Wikipedia explains it as follows:

"St. Francis of Assisi is credited with creating the



first nativity scene in 1223 (a "living" one) intending thereby to cultivate the worship of Christ, having been inspired by his recent visit to the Holy Land where he had been shown Jesus' traditional birthplace. The scene's popularity inspired communities throughout Christendom to stage similar pantomimes; eventually, the nativity scene became an archetype in Western culture, inspiring an infinite number of works of high and popular art. Distinctive nativity scenes and traditions have been created around the world and are displayed during the Christmas season in churches, homes, shopping malls, and other venues, and occasionally on public lands and in public buildings. The Vatican has displayed a scene in St. Peter's Square near its Christmas tree since 1982 and the Pope has for many years blessed the mangers of children assembled in St. Peter's Square for a special ceremony."

St. Bonaventure explains how Francis began the tradition of the first Nativity scene:

"It happened in the third year before his death, that in order to excite the inhabitants of Greccio to commemorate the nativity of the Infant Jesus with great devotion, Francis determined to keep it with all possible solemnity; and lest he should be accused of lightness or novelty, he asked and obtained the permission of the sovereign Pontiff. Then he prepared a manger, and brought hay, and an ox and an ass to the place appointed. The brethren were summoned, the people ran together, the forest resounded with their voices, and that venerable night was made glorious by many and brilliant lights and sonorous psalms of praise. The man of God [St. Francis] stood before the manger, full of devotion and piety, bathed in tears and radiant with joy; the Holy Gospel was chanted by Francis, the Levite of Christ. Then he preached to the people around the nativity of the poor King; and being unable to utter His name for the tenderness of His love, He called Him the Babe of Bethlehem. A certain valiant and veracious soldier, Master John of Greccio, who, for the love of Christ, had left the warfare of this world, and become a dear friend of this holy man, affirmed that he beheld an Infant marvelously beautiful, sleeping in the manger, Whom the blessed Father Francis embraced with both his arms, as if he would awaken Him from sleep."



"No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, has made Him known." Jesus not only came to earth as the Savior of a Fallen Race, but to tell us about God His Father. There is no way we would have known about the love relationship within the Blessed Trinity unless Jesus told us as part of the Good News, truly a **Divine Revelation**. We hear the words: "God is Love." What does it mean? Jesus not only explains it, but invites us into this divine love relationship. There is **no greater love** than to lay down one's life for one's friend. But it comes pretty darn close for a Divine Being to invite a mere human into a divine love relationship!

Donna and I recently read a rather short autobiography written by St. Gemma Galgani (died 1903), written under obedience to her confessor. She had a special relationship with Jesus, who appeared to her, and talked to her as Donna and I would talk to each other. To read some of the things Jesus said to Gemma was like overhearing a very private conversation that really only belonged to those two people. It was a

very intimate dialogue between two people who some would say were, "in love." I thought, WOW! That's such a personal issue I don't want to eavesdrop. But that was the language of love!

And that's what is available to us on our journey: to begin heaven on earth through a human/divine love relationship that is beyond description! It's the kind of relationship enjoyed by many Saints, and saints. There was an episode in the life of St. Francis, where a young boy recently received into the Order wanted to see what his holy father did when he got up at night and went off to pray. Sure enough, when he woke up in the middle of the night, Francis was gone. The boy set out to find him.

"And when he came to the place where St. Francis was praying, he stopped at a certain distance, for he began to hear a number of persons talking. Going nearer in order to see more clearly what they were saying, he perceived a marvelous light completely surrounding St. Francis. In that light he saw Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. John the Baptist, St. John the Evangelist, and a great throng of angels, who were talking with St. Francis. On seeing and hearing all this, the boy began to tremble, and he fainted and fell like a corpse onto the path that led back to the monastery."

"Later, when that very wonderful conversation was over and the mystery of that holy apparition was ended, St. Francis, while returning in the dark of night, stumbled on the boy lying on the path as though he were dead. He had compassion on the boy, and taking him up in his arms St. Francis carried him back to his bed, like

the good shepherd carrying his little lamb."⁴¹

Jesus is the Lamb of God, carrying us in His arms. He is the Messiah, born not only to save us from our sins, but to invite us to a divine love relationship that surpasses all human experience. Come Lord Jesus!

Paul Beery BSP - Morning Star Chapter - Minnesota

1 Little Flowers of St. Francis, #17



Awake! Awake! **A MEDITATION by Janet Klasson BSP**

From the Gospel reading on the Second Sunday of Advent

As it is written in the Prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'" (Mark 1:2-3)

Advent has always been a time of penance, although in recent decades, the secular celebration of "The Holiday Season" has largely taken over. "Preparing the way of the Lord" has been replaced with overindulgence and excessive revelry. Advent is buried under a mountain of tinsel and trappings. We who live "in the world but not of it, for Christ" struggle daily to reclaim the season for Christ. We fight the daily battle not just with the world and the devil, but our own lower nature. Temptations large and small are never far away.

But in the readings for Advent, the "voice of one crying in the wilderness" will not let us be lulled into sleep. "Awake! Awake! He is near. Prepare!" This Advent, there is a heightened sense of expectancy, a new urgency. It is as if, in the correction that must come to a world that has rejected Truth, the facade is about to crumble. Awake! Prepare!

There is much talk these days about such things as the housing "bubble", the debt "bubble", etc. But the truth is, a society that rejects God has itself all the substance and sustainability of a bubble. We have been living an illusion for quite some time and the bubble is about to burst. It must. The world that has rejected God has rejected the very force that sustains it and has lost its ability to love.

In the Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena, the Lord speaks to her about souls who have yet to be perfected in love:

"...in order to exercise them in virtue and to

detach them from their imperfection, I withdraw spiritual consolations from them and send them difficulties and afflictions. I act in this way in order to bring them to perfection, to teach them to know themselves, to realize that they are nothing and that of themselves they have no grace. Adversity should have the effect of making them seek refuge in Me, recognize Me as their benefactor, and become attached to Me by a true humility..."

Even souls who love the Lord and have progressed to a point in the spiritual life have need of this work of illumination. As we read in James 1: 2-3 "Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. And let perseverance be perfect, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

Our Advent penance is sign of contradiction in the secular build-up to Christmas. It points to the eternal reality that seems forgotten in the secular "Holiday Bubble". The hope that we point to in Advent is counter-cultural. It is hope rooted in the eternal, glorious, and true promises of Christ, not in the empty promises of the world, the flesh, and the devil. When so many do not seem to so much as desire peace, Christians anticipate the birth of the Prince of Peace. In a world that celebrates Christmas long before December 25, we wait with Mary in joyful hope through the last month of her pregnancy, a month heavy with promise. Our fasting during this season properly anticipates the

feast of Christmas.

Let us keep our eyes and hearts fixed on the

coming of the Infant King. May God grant us all a blessed Advent, leading to a holy Christmas filled with light, happiness, and peace.

From www.pelianito.stblogs.com

Luke 10:24 For I say to you, many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.

"My beloved, do not doubt that the times you live in are unique in human history, and not just unique, for each day is unique. But your day is heavy with significance, as a woman about to give birth. There is a time when the woman doubts the day will ever come, yet in the fullness of time, there is nothing that can stop the birth of her child. Keep this in mind lest the mundane activities you engage in lull you into the sleep of apathy. Remain awake. Trim your lamp wick. Be ready through frequent reception of the sacraments, for you do not know the hour or the day. But I tell you, the labor pains have started and more are to come before the Child of glory is born into the world and peace reigns in men's hearts. Pray, my child. This is not the time to stop!"

Jesus I trust in you. You alone are Lord. Keep us faithful and ready, so that all who are destined for glory may be saved. Jesus, for the sake of your sorrowful passion, call all souls to your Sacred Heart of mercy. Amen.

Janet Klasson BSP, Divine Mercy Chapter



FROM THE 'SPARROW'...The Praises of the Most High

The peace of Jesus.

The peace of Jesus to each of you. Always at this time of year I am reminded of St. Francis and his efforts to celebrate the Lord's birthday in his special way on the

mountain outside of that small Italian town. These thoughts lead me to consider the words of some of his prayers. {It's a sparrow thing!}

The Praises of the Most High

*You are holy, Lord, the only God,
And your deeds are wonderful.
You are strong. You are great.*

*You are the Most High, You are almighty.
You, Holy Father, are King of heaven and earth.
You are three in One.
Lord God, all good.*

*You are Good, all Good, supreme Good,
Lord God, living and true.
You are love. You are wisdom.
You are humility. You are endurance.
You are rest. You are peace.
You are joy and gladness.*

*You are justice and moderation.
You are all our riches, and You suffice for us.
You are beauty, You are gentleness.
You are our protector, our guardian and defender.
You are courage.
You are our haven and our hope,
our faith, our great consolation.
You are our eternal life, great and wonderful Lord.
God Almighty. Wonderful Savior.*

May this prayer of Francis touch you!

Bob Hall BSP. Little Flower Chapter





MEDITATION ON THE PASSION by Dawn Usak, BSP

Fourth Station: Jesus Meets His Mother

We adore you oh Christ and we praise you.

Because by Your Holy Cross, You have redeemed the world.

Oh my Jesus, the look of anguish in Your eyes is mixed with tenderness as You gaze upon Your Beloved Mother. How grief-stricken is she who first beheld you at Bethlehem and now sees you under the weight of the Cross. My soul cries out with love for the sake of Your Sorrowful Hearts.

Our Father..., Hail Mary..., Glory Be..., Amen.

(Stations of the Cross. Painted by Sister Mary Leo Hargarten, SSND (1900-1959). Born in Milwaukee, Sr. Mary Leo studied art in Munich, Germany (1930-1934) and later headed the art department at Mount Mary College in Wisconsin. Suffering poor health, witnessing her mother's chronic illness and saddened by the premature deaths of siblings, Sister found her comfort in the Passion of Jesus. This set of Stations, painted in 1953, was first erected in the old St. Francis Hospital in Shakopee, Minn. When the Sisters of St. Francis made major modifications to the Chapel they gave the set to Fr. Robert Bayer, who mounted them at the Franciscan Retreat Centre, Prior Lake MN.)



MORNING STAR: NEWS ON THE ASSOCIATION...

PRAYERS FOR ANNA FERONI

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, Anna Feroni is a sister in the BSP who is seriously ill. She is the original webmaster and has been a dear friend to Bruce and Shelley and many in the Association for a number of years. Please keep her in your prayers.

In 2004, Anna submitted the following article for the December newsletter. Please remember her in prayer as you read it. May Jesus, Mary, Joseph and dear Fr. Francis be with you dear sister.



Create in me an open heart, O God... by Anna Ferroni

Back in 1982, my spiritual director told me something that I will never forget. He said, "Anna, you have a closed heart." That sentence stunned me and urged me to ask back, "What prevents my surrender to God? Where is my resistance? What is the invitation that God is giving me now?"

My spiritual director then said, "It is not easy to open our hearts when we are angry, afraid, hurting, but when we do, healing and peace can enter into and proceed from us." "How do hearts become open?" I asked again. My spiritual director answered: "The Spirit of God does it. We are so often blind to our own dark motives, and these motives blind us and hold us in our selfishness. But we MUST get beyond ourselves to surrender to God.

In a comprehensive sense, the opening of the heart is the purpose of spirituality, of both our collective and individual practices. The Christian life is about the opening of the self to the Spirit of God by spending time in prayer and mortification. Prayer and mortification are those practices through which we become open to and nourished by the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being. God is the Mystery where we live and move and have our being. To know God, we have to love Him here below. Love gives a living knowledge. Loving and knowing come together.

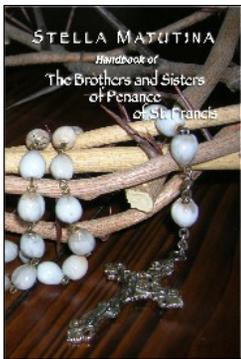
With the intellect, we look at God outwardly. It is through grace that we penetrate His inner life. Grace is participation

in the life of God; a real sharing in His life. You will get His grace through prayer and mortification, and His grace will open your heart. Then you will be transformed into a living flame. Contemplation will transform you. Contemplation is real contact with God, which perceives something of His mystery and obscurity. Contemplation is a certain, though obscure, knowledge of God."

I am sharing this with you because I believe it is still true for me, and because I think, it may be interesting for everyone to reflect about what opens and closes our hearts on a daily basis. I am aware that some days my heart is more open than other days. Even in the course of a single day, there are moments when my heart is more open or more closed. Sometimes it is closed because of bad health, tiredness, worry, or busyness. I know that my heart is closed whenever I feel grumpy or self-occupied, when the world looks ordinary, or when the voice of criticism is strong in my head, whether directed at myself or others. I even look kind of ugly, when my heart is closed.

When our hearts are closed, we live within a shell. The shell needs to be broken open if the life within it is to enter into fullness. What we need is the "hatching of the heart." And if the heart is not hatched, we die. This hatching of the heart, i.e. the opening of the self to God, is the goal of the individual dimension of the Christian life. As my spiritual director said, it happens through prayer and mortification. We don't have to seek Love and Knowledge elsewhere. We just need to seek it within ourselves.

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 (\$3.99 for a single book).

Bruce and Paul also have copies available.

May the Rule of 1221 lead many souls on the path to holiness.

Bruce and Shelley Fahey, Administrators



"Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear. The angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: 'Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.'

(Luke 1:8-14)

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!

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

**The BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF
PENANCE**



of St. Francis

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