



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

LIVES OF ST. FRANCIS, BY THOMAS OF CELANO

Chapter XXX

Of the manger Francis made on the day of the Lord's birth

Francis' highest intention, his chief desire, his uppermost purpose was to observe the holy Gospel in all things and through all things and, with perfect vigilance, with all zeal, with all the longing of his mind and all the fervor of his heart, "to follow the teaching and the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ." He would recall Christ's word through persistent meditation and bring to mind his deeds through the most penetrating consideration. The humility of the incarnation and the charity of the passion occupied his memory particularly, to the extent that he wanted to think of hardly anything else.

What he did on the birthday of our Lord Jesus Christ near the little town called Greccio in the third year before his glorious death should especially be noted and recalled with reverent memory. In that place there was a certain man by the name of John, of good reputation and an even better life, whom blessed Francis loved with a special love, for in the place where he lived he held a noble and honorable position in as much as he had trampled upon the nobility of his birth and pursued nobility of soul.

Blessed Francis sent for this man, as he often did, about fifteen days before the birth of the Lord, and he said to him: "If you want us to celebrate the present fast of our Lord at Greccio, go with haste and diligently prepare what I tell you. For I wish to do something that will recall to memory the little Child who was born in Bethlehem and set before our bodily eyes in some way the inconveniences of his infant needs, how he lay in a manger, how, with an ox and an ass standing by, he lay upon the hay where he had been placed. "When the good and faithful man heard these things, he ran with haste and prepared in that place all the things the saint had told him.

But the day of joy drew near, the time of great rejoicing came. The brothers were called from their various places. Men and women of that neighborhood prepared with glad hearts, according to their means, candles and torches to light up that night that has lighted up all the days and years with its gleaming star. At length the saint of God came, and finding all things prepared, he saw it and was glad.

The manger was prepared, the hay had been brought, the ox and ass were led in. There simplicity was honored, poverty was

exalted, humility was commended, and Greccio was made, as it were, a new Bethlehem. The night was lighted up like the day, and it delighted men and beasts. The people came and were filled with new joy over the new mystery. The woods rang with the voices of the crowd and the rocks made answer to their jubilation. The brothers sang, paying their debt of praise to the Lord, and the whole night resounded with their rejoicing. The saint of God stood before the manger, uttering sighs, overcome with love, and filled with a wonderful happiness. The solemnities of the Mass were celebrated over the manger and the priest experienced a new consolation.

The saint of God was clothed with the vestments of the deacon, for he was a deacon, and he sang the holy Gospel in a sonorous voice. And his voice was a strong voice, a sweet voice, a clear voice, a sonorous voice, inviting all to the highest rewards. Then he preached to the people standing about, and he spoke charming words concerning the nativity of the poor king and the little town of Bethlehem.



Frequently too, when he wished to call Christ Jesus, he would call him simply the Child of Bethlehem, aglow with overflowing love for him;

and speaking the word Bethlehem, his voice was more like the bleating of a sheep, His mouth was filled more with sweet affection than with words. Besides, when he spoke the name Child of Bethlehem or Jesus, his tongue licked his lips, as it were, relishing and savoring with pleased palate the sweetness of the word.

The gifts of the Almighty were multiplied there, and a wonderful vision was seen by a certain virtuous man. For he saw a little child lying in the manger lifeless, and he saw the holy man of God go up to it and rouse the child as from a deep sleep. This vision was not unfitting, for the Child Jesus had been forgotten in the hearts of many; but, by the working of his grace, he was brought to life again through his servant St. Francis and stamped upon their fervent memory. At length the solemn night celebration was brought to a close, and each one returned to his home with holy joy.

The hay that had been placed in the manger was kept, so that the Lord might save the beasts of burden and other animals

through it as he multiplied his holy mercy. And in truth it so happened that many animals throughout the surrounding region that had various illnesses were freed from their illnesses after eating of this hay. Indeed, even women laboring for a long time in a difficult birth, were delivered safely when some of this hay was placed upon them; and a large number of persons of both sexes of that place, suffering from various illnesses, obtained the health they sought.

Later, the place on which the manger had stood was made sacred by a temple of the Lord, and an altar was built in honor of the most blessed father Francis over the manger and a church

was built, so that where once the animals had eaten the hay, there in the future men would eat unto health of soul and body the flesh of the lamb without blemish and without spot, our Lord Jesus Christ, who in highest and ineffable love gave himself to us, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, God, eternally glorious, forever and ever. Amen. Alleluja, Alleluja.

Here ends the first book about the life and acts of Blessed FRANCIS."

Thomas of Celano, First Life



VISITOR'S MESSAGE

Homily by Fr. Robert Altier...

A shoot will sprout from the stump of Jesse...

Reading (Isaiah 11:1-10)
Gospel (St. Luke 10:21-24)

In the first reading today from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, we are told that a shoot will sprout from the stump of Jesse, telling us very clearly that what is going to happen is that the house of Jesse is going to be humbled. It is going to be destroyed, in essence, cut down, if you will. But what happens with an olive tree if you cut it down, it starts sending shoots up out of the stump that remains and the whole thing grows up all over again. And so what we are being told is that when the Messiah comes, the place that He is going to rise up from is going to be completely cut down. That is precisely what happened. The house of David was completely destroyed; it was the laughingstock at the time of Jesus. All of the promises that were made to David about a son being seated on his throne and all of these glorious things that God had promised appeared to be a complete farce because there had not been a king in Israel for quite some time at the time of the Lord, and the house of David really did not have a whole lot of authority or clout or anything glorious about it by the time that the Lord came. So again, we see how God fulfills everything that He promised. At the same time, as one would look at the house of David at that time, they would completely hold it in ridicule. They would not look up to it. They would not think anything of it. But those of simple faith, on the other hand, would be able to look at the promises God made to David and say, "Maybe I don't understand but I believe."

That is precisely what Our Lord is getting at in the Gospel today. He tells us that what had been hidden from the learned and the clever has been revealed to the childlike. Then He goes on to tell His apostles, "Blessed are your eyes because of what you see, and your ears because of what you hear. Many prophets and many kings desired to see what you see and to hear what you hear but did not hear them or see them." The same is true of us. Many have longed to see what we see and to hear what we hear, that is, we have the Lord, we have the Scriptures,

we have the Word of God, we have the teaching of the Church—we have everything.

We can also look at it from another perspective and the time in which we live to think about what the Fathers of the Church said: that the most blessed people of all time are going to be the ones who are alive when the Church is crucified. And I truly believe that is us. It is not going to be a fun time, but it is going to be a very blessed time: the grace that is going to be available to us and just the gift to be united with Our Lord in His passion and in His crucifixion. There is no price that can be put on such a gift and we need to be able to rejoice in it. All of the saints longed for that day and they did not see it. All of the saints longed to hear about the work that the Lord is doing but they did not hear it. But you do, because the Lord has chosen you for this time. For whatever reason, in His providence from all eternity, knowing the time and the place in which we live, He has chosen each one of us to be here and He is giving each one of us the grace to do the work that He has called us to do. He has given us the faith to be willing to say "yes" to whatever it is that He is going to ask of us.

So there is no reason to fear. There is no reason even to be concerned. All we need to do is pray and be faithful. That is all, because if we want to hear the voice of the Lord and if we want to see the work of the Lord the only way is in prayer. Otherwise, we are going to completely miss what it is that He is trying to do. It will be obvious to the whole world, but they are going to reject it. Only those of simple, childlike faith will be able to stand firm. And when the Church appears to be destroyed, that is when the new shoot is going to sprout and it will be glorious. What we have seen we will see again, just in a different form. But what a blessing for us that we have been called to live in a society that is completely filled with sin, that has completely rejected Christ. It would be much easier to be able to live our faith if we lived in a faith-filled society where everyone was Catholic and supported their faith. But it is not about having it easier; it is about the idea of being able to serve the Lord, not

because everybody else is doing it and we are getting caught in the current, but because it is what we truly believe and we have to make that choice when it is not being upheld by our society.

That is the gift God has given to each and every one of us, and we need to be so grateful for the opportunity to

live our faith in this time. Therefore, we also need to be very clear to make sure we are truly living the Faith and not trying to walk with one foot on both sides of the fence—it does not work very well—but to make the choice to serve Jesus Christ, to believe with childlike faith, and to be so blessed to see what we see and to hear what we hear from the voice of the Lord.

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



ADMINISTRATOR'S MESSAGE... Peace

The Gospel of October 25, 2012, struck us. In it the Lord says: **"Do you think I have come to establish peace on the earth? I assure you, the contrary is true; I have come for division.**

From now on a household of five will be divided three against two and two against three; father will be split against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."¹ There are many lessons in this gospel reading for us all. Serious lessons, especially in this Christmas season.

For one thing we need to be Peacemakers, despite this warning, and that is what it is, a warning, from Our Lord. We are not living among Peacemakers. We need to become Peacemakers, for the Lord also says, in the Sermon on the Mount, **"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."**² And that is our primary concern, to be children of God, and therefore, to act like children of God. Yet the Lord's warning remains.

As we enter the Christmas season again it is an annual reminder to us too. That despite the fact we do not live in

1 Luke 12:49-53

2 Matthew 5:9

a peaceful, peace-loving, world, we need to seek peace and promote peace, and love peace, the Peace of Christ in us and for others. Jesus has been called the Prince of Peace, and with His birth He brought His Peace as His gift to us all with Him. He did not live in that peace Himself, but despite His warnings to us that He would not establish peace on the earth He did bring it for those who love Him and follow Him. Not for our world though. In our world, from now until the end of the world, peace will not be the ongoing situation, due to the sins of men.

So, as Christmas dawns on us let us renew our thoughts and desires for peace, for ourselves, certainly, and for those we can affect. If there is someone with whom we do not have peace we might want to take the opportunity to call them and just talk to them and try to reestablish the peace between us—in the Spirit of the season.

Our Rule calls us to peace, His Peace, because it calls us to be his true servants, and followers of the way of the Gospel, the Way that He gave us, to follow Him in living our Rule. This is the narrow way, and just as the way to heaven is narrow and difficult, so also is the way to peace. But, let's go after it.

Peace be with you all and your families in this wonderful Christmas season. Merry Christmas to you all!

And plan to enjoy the Octave, the eight days after Christmas, when there are no mortifications.

Rejoice in the Lord always! Again we say, rejoice!

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

*"For a child is born to us, a son is given us;
upon his shoulder dominion rests.
They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero,
Father-Forever, Prince of Peace."*

(Isaiah 9:5)



NO GREATER LOVE by Paul Beery BSP

“Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, authorities and powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done

everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the Gospel of Peace.” (Ephesians 6:10-17)

“I expect to die in bed. My successor will die in prison, and his successor will die a martyr in the public square. His successor will pick up the shards of a ruined society and slowly help rebuild civilization, as the Church has done so often in human history.” Cardinal George of Chicago, on what the complete secularization of society could bring. He said his statement is not necessarily prophetic, but I think it is, for America has come to the end of an era. The signs of the times are everywhere.

The last election was for me the final sign. I cannot express in words how deeply I remain in mourning for the fate of this nation and its people, for I believe that our decline as a “ruined society” - morally, spiritually and materially - is **irreversible**. Conclusive proof has been given that America is no longer a Christian nation, governed by Christian principles, or at the very least the Natural Law which has always been the foundation of Christendom. There are many contributing factors to this decline, among them the media, our educational system, and new immigrants - all promoting the glories of, salvation by, and dependence upon an ever more powerful federal government. But even worse is a loss of faith.

The Fall: One thinks of the Book of Judges, where the Israelites begged God through the Judges to give them a king to rule over them, **just like the pagan nations around them**. And He allowed it. One thinks of the trees begging the fig tree to rule over them, then the vines, and finally the thorn-bush, which it did to their destruction. Solomon lost his way and his wisdom by listening to his pagan wives. Today’s Catholics/Christians voted for a political party that has so corrupted morality and decency that even these professed followers of Jesus freely participate in sanctioning the death of the innocent in the womb—human sacrifice on the Altar of the Goddess Choice. **That’s paganism!** They voted to promote the glories of the greatest sexual perversion known to mankind and call it a preferential “alternative lifestyle,” one that now seeks to desecrate the Sacrament of Marriage in the name of “love.” **That’s paganism!** They voted to accept euthanasia, which will now be imposed upon the “useless” elderly and disabled after they are denied care in the brave new world of a Secular Socialist totalitarian State. **That’s paganism!** They voted to grant animals rights, while denying them to humans made in the Image and Likeness of God. **That’s**



paganism! Those are not God’s standards but man’s. They are not Christian principles, but come from the world, the flesh and the devil! Christian, where is your dignity? How can you re-define marriage without re-defining the word “love?” The lust industry has taken over the very meaning of the word “love” just as it has re-defined good and evil. Christian, are you so blind you cannot even see the difference between love and lust, between Christianity and paganism, between God’s love and a complete counterfeit version using the same four letters? Do not demean the word “love” like you have the word “gay.” Do not tell us that God has changed His mind about Sodom and Gomorrah. And do not tell us that faithful Christians are the intolerant bigots of society.

America was founded as a Christian nation by those fleeing from religious persecution. It has for the most part maintained that Christian identity and traditional moral values until the last half of the twentieth century, when a relentless battle for the soul of the nation took place. We must confront the obvious fact that the Tyranny of Relativism and a spirit alien to American (Christian) Exceptionalism now governs. I feel an acute sense of betrayal. And we need look no further than members of our own household. A majority of Catholics supports an Administration at war with the Catholic Church and Religious Freedom, energetically persecuting their fellow believers. How is that possible? **They have been secularized by the pagan culture in which we live.** Fifty plus years ago the culture bore some relation to our Christian faith. Today **the culture is at war with our faith.** What will come tomorrow if today’s Catholics are already secularized? Who will teach children right from wrong, good from evil, the love of God from an imposter, the **freedom** of the children of God from **slavery** through dependence on a secular, God-less State?

The last election has set us on a definitive course to exchange that freedom for security by the imposition of European Secular Socialist standards. A dependent class is allowing—indeed pleading for—the federal government to control every aspect of their lives. They have elected a king who will give them everything they want—even free contraception to enjoy their earthly Utopia—while all of us pay the price. What a deal! That will really promote Christian virtue and holiness!

It’s difficult for me to not use hyperbole in writing this

article. I am not aware of any similar situation in my entire life where I could say that I have some insight into the words of Jesus just before His Passion: "My soul is sorrowful even unto death." Mourning the death of a relative or dear friend bears no comparison to how I feel at the moment. I have always loved history, for the future can be predicted from the past. I mourn for more than the passing of a dear friend. I believe we have witnessed the death of a great experiment in human freedom and self-governance—at the very least the patient is mortally wounded. I'm sorry folks. I don't like post-Christian America. It stinks. We should be allowed a time of wailing and lamentation for something beautiful that has been lost. We have lost the culture war to maintain Western Christian Civilization, and all that is left is to try to stop the bleeding. Welcome to the "new normal." Welcome to life in the midst of a pagan culture at total war with our values.

The Remedy: In a recent talk Father Michael Keating proposed the proper response: join the **Resistance Movement** in Spiritual Warfare. Persecution of faithful Christians is nothing new in the world, and it has been far worse in other countries where countless millions have been martyred for their faith the past hundred years. It was nice being the exception to the rule, but persecution is the way of the world, and we in America are finally fully subject to the ways of the world. So I'll try to stop whining, and get up off the mat. Time to move on with the task of "re-building civilization" in the footsteps of our holy father Francis, called to do the same thing in his time. Political involvement only goes so far. Ultimately, our only real hope is in God. That's as it should be, the correct order in the universe. "Under God we shall do valiantly, for the help of man is worthless."³

The Prince of Peace has come to bring peace to those who live in peace with God, but war to those who are not at peace with God. That's the nature of God's "agape" or divine love. Those who learn to live in union with God begin heaven on earth, while those who are not at peace with God do the opposite—make war with Him and His plan for mankind. Constantly full of anger, frustration and rage, they seek constant change in hopes of finding some kind of inner peace, which can only come from the Prince of Peace. So we live in the midst of war as the Church and its faithful Christian members face continuous assault. We are called to stand firm and resist all such attacks, much like the Resistance Movement in World War II. Paul the Apostle tells us to put on the armor of God, and it is all defensive armor, that which is needed to resist and stand firm, and avoid a disgraceful retreat.

That was the message I learned from Fr. Keating: we are not trying to fix the world! What did Jesus say? **The Kingdom of heaven is coming. Come Lord Jesus!** It is not here, it is not yet come. We cannot transform Paradise Lost by purely human effort, for the devil's playground will never be an earthly Utopia. That's not God's Plan. We are merely passing through a dangerous

place where we are put to the test—in need of the defensive armor of God—on our way to the ultimate goal of eternal life in heaven with God our Father. "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."

Fr. Keating named four virtues which are specifically designed for resistance fighters. "Manly Virtues," he called them, but they are suitable and necessary for all. **Courage** is especially needed to conquer fear. Be willing to give your life for the cause. Men need courage to throw themselves into battle. It begins by conquering small fears so as to overcome greater ones. In times of temptation, "only you and the Lord will know it, not others," the little triumphs of self-control over human weakness.

Endurance or perseverance is needed in Spiritual Warfare. Jesus said "You will be hated by all for My sake, but persevere to the end." A lesson in who the real "haters" in society are. We must endure things we do not like! While the world seeks to eliminate suffering, we seek by ascetical practices to endure, to not get too comfortable, to be habitually able to handle adversity. "Lord, you have given me this cross. Please give me the grace to stand firm and endure to the end, run the race to the finish line."

Magnanimity or Greatness of Soul is expected of a disciple of Christ. Avoid at all costs, are you ready for this—pusillanimity! Smallness of soul or mind. God calls us to greatness. "If you would be great, you must be the servant of all." We are made to live with God's Supernatural, Divine Life within us as Temples of the Holy Spirit, and commune with angels and saints from the time of Adam and Eve. Don't sell yourself so cheaply. Christian, recognize your calling before God, and renounce smallness of soul!

Finally Fr. Keating mentioned the necessity of the virtue of **Zeal**, a settled determination to act for good and for God. Stay focused on the true task: I will stay in this battle, this resistance movement until the Kingdom of heaven comes—just like Jesus, who "set His face like flint" in His determination to redeem us sinners by going to His Passion and death for our salvation. How are we taken out of the fight? By dis-courage-ment, the main tool of the Evil One, the enemy of mankind. He will do anything to get us to stop fighting, to rob us of hope. Once we realize we live in a pagan society with the devil in charge, it is less likely believers will absorb pagan values and call them Christian, as is happening now. These virtues will give us the courage to be part of the faithful remnant, willing to lay down our lives for Jesus.

"In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the Evil One. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."

3 Psalm 60:14





Weariness to joy... A MEDITATION by Janet Klasson BSP

From the First Reading, Second Sunday of Advent

“Take off the garment of your sorrow and affliction, O Jerusalem, and put on forever the beauty of the glory from God.” (Baruch 5:1)

These days there seems to be a superabundance of sorrow and affliction. Conflict seems never to be far away. Weariness pervades. Psalm 13 says it all:

*“How long, LORD? Will you utterly forget me?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I carry sorrow in my soul,
grief in my heart day after day?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?”⁴*

How long indeed! Yet the readings of Advent encourage us to look beyond our misery, to “take off the garment of (our) sorrow and affliction”, and to anticipate the hope of the Incarnation. Easier said than done most days.

A wonderful model of one who shed the garment of sorrow and affliction was St. Paul Le-Bao-Tinh whose martyrdom the Church celebrates on November 24. The Office of Readings gives us a beautiful testimony of the hope to which we are called in all circumstances:

“I, Paul, in chains for the name of Christ, wish to relate to you the trials besetting me daily, in order that you may be inflamed with love for God and join with me in his praises. The prison here is a true image of everlasting hell: to cruel tortures of every kind—shackles, iron chains, manacles—are added hatred, vengeance, calumnies, obscene speech, quarrels, evil acts, swearing, curses, as well as anguish and grief. But the God who once freed the three children from the fiery furnace is with me always; he has delivered me from these tribulations and made them sweet, for his mercy is for ever.

“In the midst of these torments, which usually terrify others, I am, by the grace of God, full of joy and gladness, because I am not alone—Christ is with me.

“Our Master bears the whole weight of the cross, leaving me only the tiniest, last bit. He is not a mere onlooker in my struggle, but a contestant and the victor and champion in the whole battle.

4 Psalm 13:2-3

Therefore upon his head is placed the crown of victory, and his members also share in his glory.”

St. Paul Le-Bao-Tinh most assuredly “put on forever the beauty of the glory of God.” And he did not achieve this only in death, but lived in the glory of God even in the most deplorable of circumstances. There is much we can learn from him. It is highly unlikely that this was the first time this holy martyr practiced this virtue. Not unlike us, he likely had countless opportunities to let the glory of God shine through the ordinary circumstances of daily life. No doubt he had built up spiritual muscle by rising above daily afflictions and sorrows, small and large, praising and thanking God in all circumstances.

We too should be working those spiritual muscles. This Scripture verse from Baruch is not directed to the saintly few, but to all the ordinary souls who are journeying towards holiness, as we all should be. Like all exercise a regular routine is necessary to strengthen us for what lies ahead. It may not be martyrdom; it may be illness or some other misfortune. Praising God in all circumstances is a powerful spiritual weapon that gets far too little air time.

I have recently signed up for a weekly email called “Faith in Action”, an e-newsletter specifically designed for the Year of Faith. A beautiful real-life example of this spiritual principle was described in the reflection of November 27, titled “Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled”, a short, but powerful reflection about a man who lives this principle in his every moment. I would invite you to read it [here](#). I also recommend that you sign up for their weekly email, which is always edifying.

Advent marks the beginning of the liturgical year. What better time to make a spiritual resolution to *put on forever the beauty of the glory of God*. Then we can sing with the psalmist:

*“I trust in your faithfulness.
Grant my heart joy in your help,
That I may sing of the LORD,
‘How good our God has been to me!’”⁵*

5 Psalm 13:6

From www.pelianito.stblogs.com

James 1:2-4 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.

“My beloved children, practice now to be joyful in all things. If you cannot be joyful today, what will happen when your faith is tested? Children I do not ask you to enjoy suffering, but to transcend it by living in the joy of heaven,

even while on earth. Let the joy of the Lord be your strength (cf. Neh. 8:10). This is no platitude, but a guarantee, a promise, a sure help in time of trial. Say, 'Lord, I give you my sufferings; I ask for your joy.' I tell you, my children, you will be strengthened. Persevere, my children, and be at peace. Shalom."

Sweet Jesus, beloved, give us your joy at all times. Help us to transcend our suffering and to live in the joy of heaven at all times. Jesus we trust in you. Amen.

Janet Klasson BSP, Divine Mercy Chapter, Canada



FROM THE 'SPARROW' Sparrow and the Dove...

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



THE PERFECT JOY OF SAINT FRANCIS

Reflecting on What it Means to be a Lover of Jesus Christ

One of the most difficult stories regarding Francis is his lesson to Brother Leo on spiritual joy. It occurs in the eighth chapter of *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis*

and the Seraphic Father explains what does not constitute perfect joy:

- Perfect joy does not consist in “the Friars Minor in every country giving a great example of holiness and integrity and good edification.”
- Perfect joy does not consist in “a Friar Minor giving sight to the blind, healing the paralyzed, driving out devils, giving hearing back to the deaf, making the lame walk, and restoring speech to the dumb, and what is still more, bringing back to life a man who has been dead four days.”
- Perfect joy does not consist in “a Friar Minor knowing all languages and all sciences and Scripture, if he also knows how to prophesy and to reveal not only the future but also the secrets of the consciences and minds of others.”
- Perfect joy does not consist in “speaking with the voice of an angel, and knowing the courses of the stars and the powers of herbs, and knowing all about the treasures in the earth, and if he knows the qualities of birds and fishes, animals, humans, roots, trees, rocks, and waters.”
- Perfect joy does not consist in that “a Friar Minor could preach so well that he should convert all the infidels to the faith of Christ.”

After hearing all these things, an exasperated Brother Leo finally asks, “I beg you in God’s name to tell me where perfect joy is.” Saint Francis’ answer may shock us to our very core:

“When we come to Saint Mary of the Angels, soaked by the rain and frozen by the cold, all soiled with mud and suffering from hunger, and we ring at the gate of the Place and the brother porter comes and says angrily: ‘Who are you?’ And we say: ‘We are two of your brothers.’ And he contradicts us, saying: ‘You are not telling the truth. Rather you are two rascals who go around deceiving people and stealing what they give to the poor. Go away!’ And he does not open for us, but makes us stand outside in the snow and rain, cold and hungry, until night falls—then if we endure all those insults and cruel rebuffs

patiently, without being troubled and without complaining, and if we reflect humbly and charitably that the porter really knows us and that God makes him speak against us, oh, Brother Leo, write that perfect joy is there!”

He goes on to teach that if they attempt to enter and “the porter comes out in anger, and drives us away with curses and hard blows...and if we bear it patiently and take the insults with joy and love in our hearts, oh, Brother Leo, write that this is perfect joy!” Finally, Francis adds that “if later, suffering intensely from hunger and the painful cold” and the porter comes out “with a knotty club, and grasping us by the cowl throws us onto the ground, rolling us in the mud and snow, and beats us with that club so much that he covers our bodies with wounds—if we endure all those evils and insults and blows with joy and patience, reflecting that we must accept and bear the sufferings of the Blessed Christ patiently for love of Him, oh, Brother Leo, write: that is perfect joy!”

What in the world does Francis mean? The story is the point of our Seraphic Father’s own life, the secret by which he lived, and the lifestyle that he wished to pass on to we brothers and sisters, his spiritual children. The final teaching brings home the point a little more clearly:

“And now hear the conclusion, Brother Leo. Above all the graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit which Christ gives to His friends is that of conquering oneself and willingly enduring sufferings, insults, humiliations, and hardships for the love of Christ. For we cannot glory in all those other marvelous gifts of God, as they are not ours but God’s, as the Apostle says: ‘What have you that you have not received?’ But we can glory in the Cross of tribulations and afflictions, because that is ours, and so the Apostle says: ‘I will not glory save in the Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ!’”

Looking at this difficult teaching and example of Saint Francis, we can now reflect upon our call to live as penitents, the Brothers and Sisters of Penance:

1. How do you view suffering?
2. Why is suffering a greater glory than the various spiritual gifts and good works?
3. What role does suffering play in your spiritual life?
4. *In what ways can you utterly conform yourself to Christ, like Francis did?*

Christopher G. O’Donnell, BSP, St. Anthony of Padua Chapter, Escondido, California



MORNING STAR: NEWS ON THE ASSOCIATION...

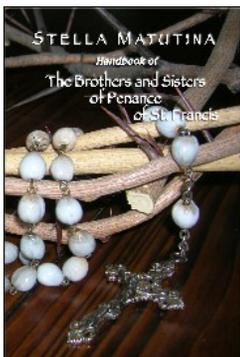
ESCONDIDO CHAPTER NAMED FOR ST. ANTHONY OF PADUA

Matthew Heffernan, BSP, of Escondido writes: "The Escondido Chapter voted on its name and we have chosen St. Anthony of Padua as our Patron! He really came through for a couple of us and after sharing recent intercessions that were answered in response to his prayers, his name was included." St. Anthony of Padua, pray for us!

HOW TO DONATE TO THE BSP...

From time to time we get a question on how to donate to the BSP. Statute Article 15 says in part: "Since the penitent is to financially support their home chapter of the Brothers and Sisters of Penance of St. Francis and the work of this Association, a portion of one's tithe may go to this cause." Should you wish to make a donation to the Association, you have a few choices. You may mail a check or money order to Bruce Fahey at the following address: **65774 County Road 31, Northome, Minnesota 56661**. Or if you like you may submit using Paypal by sending a money transfer to Shelley Fahey at jasp102577@aol.com. The Paypal option works well for those outside of the USA. Donations to The Brothers and Sisters of Penance of St. Francis are exempt from tax in the USA.

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.

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

Bruce and Shelley Fahey, Administrators



*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 2:14-15)

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)



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of St. Francis

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