



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

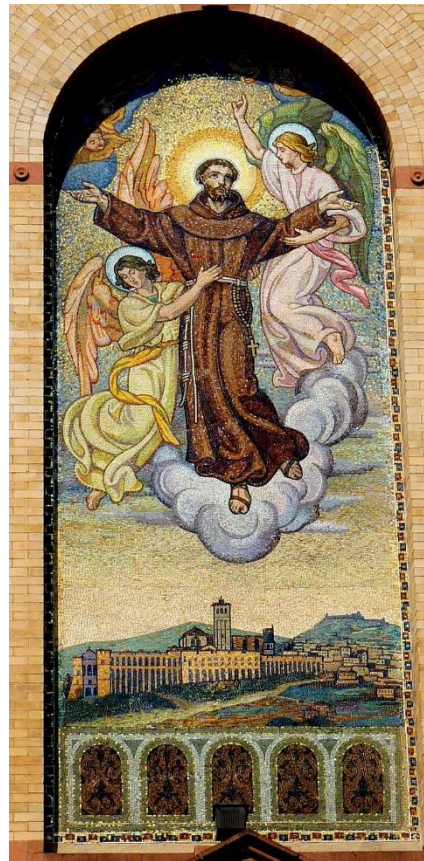
BONAVENTURE AND HIS LESSONS ON ST. FRANCIS:

Some of the miracles which took place after St. Francis' death

II. The Dead Who Were Raised to Life

4. The seven-year-old son of a notary in Rome wanted to follow his mother, as she was going to visit St. Mark's church, but she made him stay at home. So the child jumped from a window of the palace and suffered multiple injuries and was killed instantly. His mother had not gone very far and when she heard the noise, she suspected what had happened. She came running back and when she found her son had been taken from her in such tragic circumstances, she immediately turned upon herself and moved the whole neighborhood to sorrow with her screams. A friar called Raho, of the Order of Friars Minor, was on his way to the church to preach and he went up to the boy and asked his father confidently, "Do you believe that St. Francis can raise your child from the dead because of the love he had for Christ who gave back life to men by his crucifixion?" The child's father replied that he did believe and was prepared to profess it faithfully, adding that he would serve the saint for the rest of his life, if he were found worthy to receive such a favor from God through his intercession. Then the friar prostrated himself in prayer with his companion and called on the bystanders to join them. At that, the boy began to yawn. Then he opened his eyes and raised his arms and got up. He was able to walk immediately in full view of them all, so that he was restored at once to life and health by the saint's wonderful power.

5. In Capua a boy who was playing with a number of others on the bank of the Volturno accidentally fell into the water. The current dragged him under immediately and buried him beneath the sand at the bottom. The children who were playing with him began shouting and a crowd gathered round. Humbly and devoutly they invoked the intercession of St. Francis, that he might look with favor upon the faith of the child's parents who were devoted to him and save their son from death. Then a man who had been swimming some distance away heard the commotion and came up to the crowd and asked where the boy had disappeared. He called on the name of St. Francis and eventually found the spot where the mud had formed a sort of tomb around the boy's body. He pulled him out and took him from the water, but to his sorrow he saw that he was already dead. They could all see that he was dead, but they still kept crying and shouting, "St. Francis, give the child back to his father." Even a number of Jews who were there were moved with pity and repeated, "St. Francis, give the child back to his father." Without warning, the boy stood up, to their joy and amazement. He asked them to bring him to the church of St. Francis, so that he could thank him by whose power he knew he had been miraculously restored to life.



Bonaventure—Major Life of St. Francis (1263)





VISITOR'S MESSAGE

Homily by Fr. Robert Altier...

Christmas Day

Reading I (Isaiah 62:11-12) Reading II (Titus 3:4-7) Gospel (St. Luke 2:15-20)

Today we celebrate what on the natural level is always one of the most joyous events: the birth of a baby. There is always great joy

when a baby is born, but the baby who is born today brings even greater joy. As we heard in the first reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, the Lord proclaims to the ends of the earth that the Savior comes. And so it is not just a matter that a particular couple had a baby and their friends and family rejoice with them, but rather in this situation the whole world rejoices because today, as Saint Paul made clear in the second reading, the kindness and the generous love of God have appeared. Even prior to that, in the second chapter of his Letter to Titus, Saint Paul says that the grace of God has appeared offering salvation to all men.

Now you ponder just those points: the grace of God and the kindness and the generous love of God have appeared. That is what we have in this little baby. Saint Paul says to the Philippians that Jesus is the image of the invisible God. So the miracle of what we celebrate today is God Who is born as a human baby. This is something which is completely beyond anything that our minds can even begin to grasp. This child on one level is just like any other baby who is born—tiny, innocent, vulnerable, dependent upon his mother, all of the things that we could say about a baby—and yet at the same time this child is unlike any other who has ever been born, not only because this child is God, but every single baby who is conceived is conceived only by the will of his parents; this child is conceived because He willed it. It is the parents who unite together to bring forth a child under normal circumstances. In this case, the child created His mother in order that He could be created in her. He is born because He chose to be born. Obviously, none of us can do such a thing because none of us existed before we began in our mother's womb. But when the human nature of Jesus Christ began to live within the womb of His mother, His divine nature had already existed from all eternity.

The fact that God would become one of us is the most astounding thing that we can even imagine. Yet we have to ask the question of why. Perhaps we can grasp the idea that God wanted to become man in order to save us from our sins, but even so, the question is: Why would He become a baby? God created Adam and Eve as adults; He could have just done the same Himself. But we know, as Saint Paul would tell the Galatians, that in the fullness of time God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law to deliver from the law those who were subjected to it. Well, Saint Paul then also tells us that the law brings death. So Jesus is born

subject to the law, to the law of death. It is the very reason why He chose to come into the world: to die.

But He came as a baby, I think, for a couple of reasons; number one, because a baby is about life. When you see a newborn baby, immediately the hope that humanity is going to continue is present in that child. Immediately, when you see a newborn baby, your heart is wide open with love and with joy. Our Lord comes into this world subject to death in order to teach us that He came for life, that He came to give us life and to give it to us abundantly. In fact, as Saint Paul told us in the second reading today, by the grace of God we have become heirs of eternal life. God chose to take on our temporal life so that we could have eternal life. He chose to be subject to death so that we could have life. He chose to become man so that we could become God.

If you ponder the idea that the one title Jesus gave Himself and called Himself over and over is simply "Son of Man," the question is why. Why would He call Himself the Son of Man? He is the Son of God from all eternity. Why draw attention to the fact that He is the Son of Man when by nature He is the Son of God? First of all, it is because we would have to have complete faith that He is God; but secondly, He calls attention to that which He was not and has now become. If that is the case, if He became the Son of Man it was so we could become the sons and daughters of God, and to draw attention to that which we were not. By nature we are human, but by God's grace we have become children of God.

Again, go back to that point which we heard already from Saint Paul's Letter to Titus: The grace of God has appeared. The grace of God is Jesus Christ. His grace is His very life. The grace of God has appeared; this is something that cannot happen by nature. How can your life appear someplace? It cannot. Your life is not visible. But the grace of God has appeared in the person of Jesus Christ, and it is by the grace of God that we become children of God and heirs of eternal life.

Now if you think about it again in this exchange, Scripture tells us with regard to the One Whom God calls His own Son, that He will make Him the heir and give Him as His inheritance all the nations. So Jesus, He Who created all of the nations, comes into this world and becomes one of us, and His inheritance has to do with this world—all of the people in this world. In exchange, what is our inheritance? It is God; it is heaven; it is eternal life. And so He Who was not of this world becomes of this world in order to inherit every soul who would inhabit this world, so that those who are of this world would be able to become other-worldly, so that our inheritance will be heaven and will

be God Himself.

He comes to us as a baby to show us life. He comes in a way that we can see and that we can understand the natural life in order to point beyond it, because the child upon whom we gaze in the manger, the child whose humanness we can see is God. If the grace of God has appeared, it is so that through the appearance of Jesus Christ in human form we would be able to look beyond to see the reality of what lies underneath. Only with the eyes of faith can we see that.

The other reason I think He came as a baby is to teach us what we are to be. Jesus tells us that we are to be as innocent as doves, and yet as clever as serpents. What is a baby? Innocent. Pure. Gentle. Vulnerable. Dependent. Trusting. The list could go on and on. And what does He want from us? To be exactly that: to have the innocence and the trust and the dependence upon God that a baby has upon his mother. That is what He wants from us. He took on our nature so that we could take on His. We could say in a way that He was transformed to become one of us so that we would be transformed to become Him. As Saint Paul points out in the second reading, it is through Baptism that we have become members of Christ and heirs to eternal life. He became one of us so that we literally could become a member of Himself, to be a member of Jesus Christ, to share His life, to share His nature.

And so today, as we celebrate the Nativity of Our Lord, we need to think very deeply about the joy that comes with the birth of a baby, and we need to think about the peace that is there. Mary, we are told, held all of these things in her heart; she pondered them. Just think what a mother does with a baby. She sets the baby on her lap and she just simply gazes at the child, looks deeply

into the eyes of the baby if the baby is awake; and even if the baby is asleep, the mother just stares as if to look beyond what is physical into the very depths of the being of that child. That is what Jesus asks of us today, to have the kind of joy and the kind of peace that is experienced by a mother in union with her child, the kind of innocence that is present, and to be able to look beyond what is seen into the very depths of this Child, Who looks beyond what is seen in us to the very depths of our being. And what is it that we do with a baby? We love the baby. How could you not love a baby?

That is all Jesus wants from us. He wants us to come near to Him. He wants us to let down our guard just like we do with a baby, and He wants us to love Him. But the difference with this child as opposed to any other baby is that under normal circumstances a baby cannot love in return—but this baby is Love itself. He loves us first so that we can love Him. That is what He is wanting. That is what He is waiting for. He shows Himself to us in a way that we can be vulnerable. That is what we do with babies because we know a baby is not going to hurt us. We know that a baby is not going to violate us, so we can let our guard down and we can make funny noises and funny faces and we can just be as innocent as can be in the presence of a baby. Do not put up any pretenses with Jesus. He looks beyond what you can see anyway, and He knows what is in your heart. Let the guard down. Come to Him in innocence, in gentleness, in trust, in dependence upon Him. Be filled with the joy and the peace of this child. Love Him, and allow yourself to be loved by Him. Then you too will be able to hold all of these things in your heart and ponder them, to ponder the great mystery of God made man, born for us as a human baby of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

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



ADMINISTRATOR'S MESSAGE... CHRISTMAS IS COMING!

Christmas is coming. Busy time of the year and special to us who worship Jesus as Lord and Savior. His birthday is a happy thing for us. Our Rule addresses it!

The world celebrates the busyness and profit of gift giving. The TV is full of commercials pushing the new toys and other things we can buy to enhance our life in the world, many of which we just do not need to live. We do well to avoid buying things just to have more things.

Our Rule covers Christmas too, but in a completely different way.



RULE: ARTICLE 9

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

We are in the Christmas fast now. This call is different even from what the Church teaches. Different in that St. Francis calls us to deny ourselves in preparation for the birth of Jesus. He makes Christmas a spiritual event. A call to live Scripture more fully, even in the time of giving. To "deny ourselves..." (Luke 9:23). One could easily ask why we should do that.

If we deny ourselves we pull back from the world. This

fast relates to food. Fasting from food may help us to fast from the rest of it all a bit better. To refrain from buying what we don't need or even showering others with things they do not need. The generosity of the season is a good thing though, but somehow, somewhere, people got to making Christmas a time of gift giving and that became the primary focus of Christmas. Somewhere in that Jesus gets lost most of the time and Santa Claus becomes primary. The challenge we have is to do the gift giving and keep the Lord ever present. Especially with our families and little ones. It is a tough challenge.

The world says eat, drink, and be merry, and be happy and all will be well. Get those new toys and possessions and enjoy life. The new toys are nice, and gifts that have meaning are nice. New tools, or appliances, to simplify our lives are useful and good. We can all use them. The question remains how do we give them and keep the focus on Christ's birthday? We need to be sure to do the things that keep Christ present in Christmas. He once said, to a saint I no longer remember, that man has destroyed all his holy days. On Christmas we have Santa Clause. On Easter the Easter bunny. Watch the commercials. Do you ever hear Christ being promoted? Not often. So, we need to promote him.

We do not need to tell people we are fasting. We do need to go to Church, and celebrate the Christmas season in adoration and praise to God, and it is good if others see it. We have many friends that will not even go to Church on Christmas! How many others are there? Many we believe. So, that is one basic way we acknowledge the birth of our Savior.

We can also acknowledge Him, and the reason for the season, in our meal prayers with our family, or even have a Christmas reading before we do gifts on Christmas day. In our family celebrations that is one tradition we have always had and it is very nice and adds meaning to the event. Read how Jesus was born in poverty and simplicity and born in a stable in abject poverty! The King of kings, and Lord of lords, in poverty! Wow! Read how the shepherds came to honor him, and the wise men who were really wise. Most of the world in the times of Christ did not celebrate his coming. He came, as God, in great humility. He remained obscure, even to those around him, and his whole life would follow that vein. He would not reveal Himself as God until His resurrection.

He cured the sick, the blind, the lame, the deaf, but the people even of his own time just did not get it! They called him a prophet, not God. Until He rose from the dead. And then what he taught everyone became a Gospel of life, and way to live. And he told us all, not just a few, to "Deny yourselves..." (Luke 9:23)

So, we do, and we should do it with fervor and do it with consideration of the great event coming. The birth of Jesus. A holy and glorious day for all of us, and a sure indication of what should be important in our lives. Jesus should be the focus of our Christmas celebrations.

So, let's consider how we do that. How do we make Jesus more central to Christmas? That is an abiding and wonderful challenge. May the Lord bless and lead us all!

And have a merry and holy Christmas!

Yours in Christ, now and always!

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



A Penitent in Medjugorje... by Janet Klasson, BSP

From the Gospel reading, Fourth Sunday of Advent

"In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me,

that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'" (Luke 1:39-45)

By their fruits...

While the Church has not yet officially ruled on the Medjugorje apparitions that have been allegedly taking place since 1981, it has recognized the fruits of increased faith, conversion, confession and vocations that flow from it. In February this year, Pope Francis sent Henryk Hoser, retired Archbishop of Warsaw-

Praga, as pastoral envoy to Medjugorje. Archbishop Hoser has told Poland's KAI Catholic news agency that "from a pastoral point of view, there is a very positive result. [...] My mission was not to make a judgement on Medjugorje, but to evaluate whether the pastoral ministry was proper and consistent with the doctrine and teaching of the Church, and effective and well-



organized. I concluded that this is the case.” He has also said that the biggest phenomenon in Medjugorje is confession. The commission established by Pope Benedict XVI to study the alleged apparitions of Mary at Medjugorje, reportedly voted overwhelmingly to recognize as supernatural the first seven appearances of Mary in 1981. As the alleged apparitions are ongoing, the Vatican cannot make a definitive ruling on them. With that in mind, I wish to share with you some of the blessings and fruits of my pilgrimage there this past fall. To avoid being cumbersome, I have not used the word “alleged” in the following article.

My Pilgrimage

In “the world”, penitents are a rare commodity. In Medjugorje, you can’t trip over a rock without falling on one. So, I felt right at home when I was recently a pilgrim there from October 29 to November 8. I had felt called to go there for over 30 years, ever since first hearing about it. *If Our Lady is coming all the way from heaven, I thought, the least I can do is meet her partway!* But life circumstances seemed never to allow it and I sometimes wondered if I would ever get there. The decades passed, and beyond all hopes and expectations, Our Lady continued to grace the world with her presence in that holy place. I continued to hope and pray that I might get there before the apparitions ceased altogether.

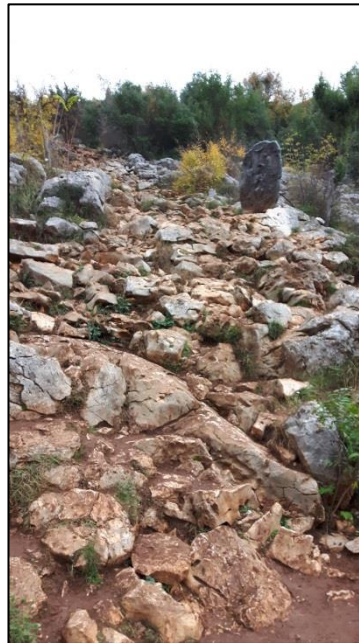
This year brought a deluge of changes for me. I tell people that God did not just turn a page, He closed a book. As you may recall my husband passed away in May and my father in August. Amid those changes I moved to a new city to be near family and to finally be a “close-by grandma”. In addition, there were other changes and challenges as well. After my husband passed, since I really needed to be near family, I rented a place in my new city before my existing house was sold. The housing market was very low, but in my heart I knew I had to go and that I had to trust. I told Our Lady that if my house sold I would try to go to Medjugorje in the fall. Our Lady works fast. The day the movers came to get my belongings was the day I got an offer on my house that led to a sale. The timing was undeniably Our Lady’s. Once that hurdle was passed, going to Medjugorje finally seemed within reach. Our Lady even arranged that a group was leaving from my new city on October 29. Praise God!

There was one complication—due to some foot and hip problems, I could barely walk on level ground in the weeks leading up to the trip. I wondered how I going to make it through the airports, let alone climb Apparition Hill or Cross Mountain. I told my friends and family, *Our Lady has made the other arrangements so I’m going. If she wants me to climb Apparition Hill, she’s going to have to carry me! If not, my penance will be to stand at the bottom and pray while watching the others go up. Fiat!*

The day of the trip arrived and I set out in the wee

hours for the airport. To my surprise, I made it through all the airports without assistance, albeit with constant pain in my foot and hip. *Fiat!* After about 24 hours of travel time, our group of 19 Canadian pilgrims arrived at our “pansion” or inn in Medjugorje. My first hint that Our Lady was not going to go easy on me was that my room was on the third floor, 36 stairs up. *Fiat!* The innkeeper himself grabbed my bags and hauled them up effortlessly, then disappeared. The rooms were simple, comfortable but not luxurious, perfect for a pilgrim-penitent. Mine had a great view of the chickens and sheep in the yard below, and at night I could see the lighted cross on the top of Cross Mountain. Praise God!

Apparition Hill



Our first full day there, I was kind of hoping for a day of rest, but at breakfast our pilgrimage leaders informed us that since the weather was going to be favorable, we were going to climb Apparition Hill that afternoon. *Fiat!* Apparition Hill is, I learned, the “easier” of the two climbs, as Cross Mountain is three times higher. The able-bodied group members would hike to the hill, but those of us who needed to conserve our strength and pseudo-agility would take a cab to the base of the hill. We

would all meet and pray the joyful mysteries together on the way up at the stations provided, with reflections by Fr. Joseph Jacobson, who was our spiritual guide for the pilgrimage. Coming down would be at each our own speed, and hopefully in a controlled manner as the climb was very rocky.

I was shocked at the terrain when I first laid eyes on it! It was as if God had dumped from on high a huge load of boulders with just enough mud to hold them in place. Many of the rocks were sharp, and flat bits were scarce. The climb, I found, was a metaphor for the struggles of life—you can never plan past the next step, and if you think about how hard the journey is going to be, you will give up before you even begin. Sometimes, even what you thought was the right step turns out all wrong. Just. Keep. Going. After all, how did Christ make it up the hill to Calvary? One step at a time.

Our Lady chose to appear in this place, first of all because of the steadfast faith of the villagers, which had held firm through centuries of persecution. As for

the terrain, besides the penitential component, Our Lady has told the visionaries she wants pilgrims to see the stones as representing the stony hearts of those who need our prayers and sacrifices.

Our Lady has said that the veil between heaven and earth is very thin at Medjugorje and I believe it! With my physical limitations in mind, you will understand when I say that it was no small thing to find myself, an hour and a half after starting, at the goal of our climb, the statue of Mary which marks the spot where she first appeared to the visionaries in 1981. The Queen of Peace, rewarded my efforts with gifts of hope, comfort, and peace. I was overcome with emotion in that holy place, and still am when I think of it. Our Lady carried me up for sure! It was so humbling to be up there, and I am so grateful!

After that beautiful mountain-top experience I, of course, still had to get down, and the down is even harder than the up! My previously underused muscles were already protesting the uphill climb. Now, a further hour and half down? I picked up my trusty walking stick and started out. Our Lady had pity on me and sent two angels to help me. A couple of gentlemen from our pilgrim group walked with me to keep me safe, scouting the best path, and guiding each step, extending their hands when I needed it. Truly they were the embodiment of our guardian angels, who also are there as scouts, guides and a hand to hold, whether we feel it or not.

Despite their efforts, near the end, one of my feet got wedged in a rock with the other foot wedged behind it. I was going down! Because of my walking stick it was a slow fall sideways. I landed—where else—on a rock, next to a thorny bush, which also left its mark. Without my angels I would have had a very hard time getting out of that predicament. I must have landed on my real angel because aside from a 7-inch bruise on my thigh, and a small thorn prick, I suffered no real injuries. When I mentioned my bruise to one of the locals she said, "In Medjugorje, we call those 'kisses from heaven.'" Upon reflection I can see that Our Lady gave me a very small taste of Calvary—one fall and a small thorn. Yes, it was indeed a kiss from heaven! *Fiat!* Thank you Mama!

There is much to ponder in such a climb. I'm sure everyone comes back with their own message or messages. I felt Our Lady was telling me (and all of us) to persevere in our prayers and sacrifices. The evil one wants to discourage us, but our Mother wants us to know that our prayers and sacrifices are bearing abundant fruit. She is always with us as our Mother, strengthening all her dear children for the mission entrusted to us—which often feels like a gruelling climb we are not in shape for. With her at our side, we have nothing to fear. Then what is left for us but to say, *Fiat!* as we put one foot in front of the other until she calls us home.

Prayers and indulgences

I took many prayer requests with me, some for my intentions, and some for others. **All BSP members and their intentions were included in my list.** In addition to prayers for conversions, my list also included prayers for the repose of the souls of my husband and my dad. It was providential that we would be in Medjugorje for the Feasts of All Saints and All Souls and for the octave of indulgences the Church makes available for the souls in purgatory from November 1-8. With my family members in mind, I gave all my prayers to Mary to distribute in the best way possible. One of conditions for the indulgence is to visit a cemetery each day you wish to gain it. I was able for seven of those eight days to visit the cemetery near St. James Church, where Fr. Slavko is buried. He was the priest who, initially a skeptic, became a believer and supporter of the visionaries and the message of Medjugorje.

The "Five Stones"

There have been countless messages attributed to Our Lady of Medjugorje, who is known as Our Lady, Queen of Peace. She has given them what have come to be referred to as "five stones" in reference to the stones David used to slay Goliath: 1) Prayer with the heart; 2) Eucharist/Mass/Adoration; 3) Scripture reading; 4) Fasting; 5) Monthly confession (at least). I was amazed to see how the locals have embraced the messages, particularly fasting, which Our Lady has asked to be on Wednesdays and Fridays and that the best fast is on bread and water. The local bakery gives away free bread on those days, and the restaurants too. On the Saturday night we were there, Adoration was held from 9:00 pm to 10:00 pm. There were 5,000 people there from all over the world—just another Saturday night in Medjugorje!

One of the priests we had the privilege to hear was Fr. Leon Pereira, originally of Singapore, but now chaplain of the English-speaking pilgrims and priests. He is a gifted speaker and has a true calling to that place. He said that Our Lady once showed him how much she loves us and it is as if each person in the world is her only child. She has told the visionaries, "If you knew how much I love you, you'd cry for joy." Do yourself a favour and look him up on YouTube. He has a powerful message.

The fruit of hope

For my part, I found it to be a deeply moving experience to pray and worship with so many people from around the world, each one praying in their own language. Truly, the language of the Spirit was reversing the division of Babel. It was encouraging to see so many priests there, as well as young people, all living the Truths of the Church, all responding earnestly to Mary's call. It gave me great hope for the future of the Church. Adoration, we were told repeatedly, is the heart of

Medjugorje. Mary is there, pointing us to her Son as she always does.

In Medjugorje, I felt a foreshadowing of the Triumph of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. A true reflection of Advent, it is a time of grace heralding the day when Jesus will be born into the lowly manger of our hearts

in a new way. Then, the great longing of God's heart will be fulfilled at last and **we shall be his people and he shall be our God***. Maranatha!

(*To read a collection of bible verses that tell of God's persistent longing [click here.](#))

Janet Klasson BSP, Divine Mercy Chapter, Canada



FROM THE 'SPARROW' The Season and Francis of Assisi

Peace to the little sparrows during this Advent and Christmastime. Let us re-visit the times of St. Francis and some of his somber words in contrast to some of his joyful words. The two

kinds of sentiments seem to be in opposition to each other...yet in essence they are complimentary to one another.

Let us look into the depth of the Poverello's heart and soul:

"He [Francis] couldn't think of the exceeding dearth in which the poor Virgin found herself on the day [Christmas] without weeping. One time, while he was seated at dinner, a friar reminded him of the poverty of the Blessed Virgin and the indigence of Christ, her Son. Immediately, he rose up from the table, wet with tears, he ate the rest of his bread upon the bare ground. It was for this reason that he called poverty 'the royal virtue': because it shone with such splendor in the King and in the Queen."

—2 Celano 200

What a display of humility and what an insight into the Seraphic Father's mind! How focused he was in his "small and minor" self-description while lifting up Our Lord and Our Lady. It is these glimpses into his being that gives "lift" to our little sparrow wings. What a marvelous example he has left for us to follow! Is any wonder that once we have heard of his wholehearted commitment to the Lord and His Mother that we in turn should follow trustingly?

Turning now to St. Francis' joy which he found in Advent and Christmas we fall back to the reading before the above:

"Above all other solemnities, [Francis] habitually celebrated with ineffable care the Birth of the Child Jesus, and used to call the day which God, made little infant, had suckled from a human breast "the feast of feasts." [...] One day, the friars were arguing amongst themselves as to whether the

obligation to not eat meat remained, seeing as Christmas that year fell on a Friday. Francis responded to Friar Morico: 'You sin, my brother, in calling 'Friday' the day in which a Child is born unto us. I want that on a day such as this, even the walls eat meat, and if this is not possible, that they at least be smeared with it.'"

—Celano, 199

Now little sparrows you have to be smiling at Francis' display of devotion and he took it to such an earnest display in what he desired of the other friars. Isn't there a twinge of that same desire in all of us? Don't we feel that same impulse to throw caution to the wind in engage in such an impulsive unbridled zealous candor in our feelings for the Lord? Can we sparrows give to Lord our little hearts as did Francis and even to the point of being the Lord's fool of love? After all He gave completely of Himself to be the Fool of Love for us!

The key to the foregoing is Francis' love and deep humility. Perhaps we will understand even more closely by the following:

"In the search for truth and to possess it, no other way to be preferred to that of the Word of God made man [...]. First way: humility. Second way; humility. Third way: humility. If humility does not precede, does not accompany, and does not follow all good that we do, empty will our hands remain."

—St. Augustine (354-430) Epistle 118

As we see our Seraphic Father's zealous approach in his "humility" to the Birth of the Great King can we, as His little Brothers and Sisters of Penance, not match him in heart and spirit?

"Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel which, being interpreted, is God with us."

—Matthew 1:23 (cf. Isaiah 7:14)

Christmas reflection

Peace dear sparrows! Truly my feathers are a bit ruffled. Was reading an off-handedly written

fundamentalist bit of literature and came across the following:



"Travelling a few days in the start of this Christmas Season we saw this message on the electronic boards over the highway: 'Santa sees you, so be a nice driver.' A neighboring state had a similar line: 'Santa's watching. Don't speed.' What strange messages! Do state officials expect the public to heed them? Hardly!"

The writer of the above then launches off into a very hard argument of why there is no such thing as Santa or any concept in Christian history that would support such a claim. I take exception to such a statement and I present the following as a refutation:

Encyclopedia of Saints (printed by Our Sunday Visitor)

NICOLAS (d.c. 350) "An extremely popular saint, sometime listed as Nicholas of Myra, best known for being patron of children and most often called "Santa Claus. Nicholas was certainly an historical person, serving in the fourth century as bishop of Myra, in Lycia, Asia Minor, although he is best in legend. One of the most famous traditions concerning his saving three women from prostitution by throwing bags of gold through their windows each night. From this beginning legend stories about his charity circulated throughout the East. Churches sprang up in his honor, and his cult reached the Western Church in the eleventh century. Eventually Nicholas was identified with Father Christmas and Santa Claus."

Yes, dear sparrows, as Catholic Christians do believe there was a Santa Claus. Although we arrive at such a belief in a very sound understanding of who he was and the cult that grew through the legends about him. It is quite noteworthy to recognize first and foremost that Nicholas is a Saint in our Church and thereby we should reverence him in that capacity. Some of the qualities of his life were his love of children (St. Francis & St. Therese would approve of that!) and the kind and generous treatment he showed to the young women almost forced into prostitution. There were many other signs of the virtues he possessed which caused him to be recognized as a holy man.

This love of his was displayed so that other believers could see it and be edified by it. It is no small thing that after his death that parents held him up to their children as a good and holy Saint that loved them. Goodness and blessings seemed to come about through his intercession...they still do for those who believe in God's blessings coming to us through him and all other Saints at this blessed time of the Church's year.

Yes, Santa is watching...so are all the other Saints...but best of all the watchers of your life is the Lord God Himself. So make Him happy and be safe and sound in His love.

"For while all things were in quiet silence, and the night was in the midst of her course, the almighty word leapt down from heaven, from thy royal throne."

—Wisdom 18:14-15

pax et bonum, Bro. Sparrow

Bob Hall BSP, Little Flower Chapter, N. Carolina



Chittle? What's That?

I only recently heard of "Chittle" and what it means, so I thought as Penitents, we might all take advantage of knowing about Chittle and what it means to our Penitential way of life.

"Chittle" means the leftovers or crumbs, so in terms of fasting, we know what eating leftovers would be. However, if we go to a restaurant, visiting, or anywhere really, when we are deciding what to eat, instead of choosing the more desired favourite item, choose the lesser one. One can also use stairs instead of an

elevator for example. There are several ways to "Chittle."

"Chittle is denying ourselves of the comfort, luxury, or favorites we are so tempted to enjoy. Penitents doing "Chittle" are offering these small daily denials for the salvation of souls, reparation of our Church and world and many more needs that we may or may not be aware of.

Perhaps we can begin to "Chittle" during this Advent season and make it part of our Penitential way of life.

Submitted by: Penitent

A READING FOR PENITENTS

LUKE 12:22-46, LUKE 13:1-5

Now that we are in Advent, we are all striving to adhere more faithfully to our fasting, penance and prayer, keeping in mind our Holy Father St. Francis.

While we are preparing for our baby Jesus to come, the readings in Luke stress a warning of a later coming,

where we must always day by day be ready, waiting and watching, while continuing to maintain our fasting, penance and prayer. This is our commitment to our vocation as Brothers and Sisters of Penance.

The reading is very clear that we will not know the day or the hour, so it is important to keep our lanterns lit and be always vigilant. This is what will bring blessings to the humble obedient servant according to Jesus.

In Verse 27, we read how much more important the beauty and splendor of the lily flower is to God, than Solomon clothed in all his robes of glory. Another thing for us to consider as Penitents following St. Francis, is that nature is not to be forgotten or minimized because in the eyes of God, He cares for nature and the beautiful lilies. They do not spin, and yet grow and die.

As we read on in Chapter 13:1-5, Jesus is teaching the importance of Penance. It will not be the many sacrifices we may think, that increase our graces or

provide an easy road to Heaven, but instead the Penance we offer. We, as Penitents have a special calling and mission during these times we live in, for reparation but also in following the teachings of our Lord Jesus! If this is what He asks of us, this is what we must do.

St. Francis was a wonderful example of holiness in obedience to the Word of God and living it out. We may never become another St. Francis, however we too, are called to live out our vocation as best we can. Like St. Francis, we can never go wrong living the scriptures.

Blessings and Peace during this holy and penitential season of Advent and Christmas to all our Penitents!

Submitted by: Penitent

From the Desert Fathers

Someone asked Abba Anthony, "What must I do in order to please God?"

The old man replied, "Pay attention to what I tell you:

Whoever you may be, always have God before your eyes;

whatever you do, do it according to the testimony of Holy Scriptures;

in whatever place you live, do not easily leave it.

Keep these three precepts and you will be saved."



Submitted by: Penitent

MORNING STAR: NEWS ON THE ASSOCIATION...

STAY CONNECTED...PLEASE!

If you wish to connect with your Brothers and Sisters in the BSP, please remember that the **BSP Forums** at <http://bspenance.org/forum/>. Hope to see you there!



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. 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.



*O come,
Let us adore Him,
Christ, the Lord.*

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, Administrators
minncc03@gmail.com ~ www.bspenance.org



Welcome to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance!

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



The BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF
PENANCE



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