



...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 Chapter VI. Those Saved in Childbirth

1. There was a countess in Dalmatia who was a very good woman, besides being renowned for her noble birth; she had a great devotion to St. Francis and was always very kind to the friars. When her time came to give birth to a child, she was in agony and felt such pain that it seemed the birth of the child must be the death of the mother. There seemed to be no hope that the child could be born without her dying; her labor seemed destined to end in her death, not in the birth of her child. Then she remembered St. Francis and his power and glory; her faith was roused and her devotion enkindled. She turned to him as a source of efficacious help, a loyal friend, the comforter of the devout, and the refuge of the afflicted. "Holy St. Francis," she prayed, "I beg you with all my heart to have pity on me. I offer my vows to you mentally—I cannot put them in words." The saint lost no time in showing pity; the words were scarcely out of her mouth, when all her pain was at an end. Her labor was over and she gave birth to her child; her distress was relieved and she brought forth her child in complete safety. She did not forget the promises which she had made or go back on her resolution; she had a beautiful church built and gave it to the friars in honor of the saint, when it was finished.

2. A woman named Beatrice who lived near Rome had only a few days left before the expected birth of a child, but now the child had been dead four days. The poor woman was in agony and the pangs of death seemed to be upon her; the dead fetus was bringing its mother to the grave; without even seeing the light of day, it was bringing its mother into deadly peril. She had recourse to various doctors, but there was no human remedy for her. The

unhappy woman had inherited more than her share of the curse placed upon our first parents; she was to be the tomb of her own offspring and could look forward only to the grave for herself as well. Eventually she recommended herself to the Friars Minor through an intermediary and begged them for some relic of the saint. By Divine Providence, they happened to find a small piece of a cord which he had once worn and as soon as it was laid on her, the pain left her and the fetus which threatened her with death was delivered, so that she was restored to perfect health.



3. Juliana, the wife of a nobleman from Calvi dell'Umbria, spent years mourning for the death of her babies. She was constantly lamenting her misfortune; a short time after their birth, she had buried every child she bore with such difficulty. She was now four months with child and her past experience made her worry more about its death than its birth, but she prayed confidently to St. Francis asking that her unborn child would live. Then one night as she was asleep, a woman appeared to her in a dream, carrying a beautiful baby which she offered to her. Juliana was afraid to take it; she was sure she must soon lose it, but the woman insisted, "Take it and do not be afraid. St. Francis has had pity on your sorrow and it is he who is sending it to you. This baby will live and enjoy perfect health." At that Juliana woke up. The vision she had seen made her realize that she had the support of St. Francis and she was overjoyed. From then on she redoubled her prayers and promised a number of votive offerings for the life of her child. Eventually the time came for her child-bearing and she bore a son. He was a fine, strong, baby, as if he had received an increase of

vitality through the intercession of St. Francis, and he gave his parents cause to be more devoted than ever to Christ and his saint.

St. Francis worked a similar miracle in Tivoli. There

a woman had had a number of girls and was worn out longing for a boy, so she brought her prayers and votive offerings to St. Francis. Through his intercession, she conceived and gave birth to twin boys, although she had only asked for one.

Bonaventure—Major Life of St. Francis (1263)



VISITOR'S MESSAGE

Homily by Fr. Robert Altier Solemnity of the Epiphany, January 6, 2019

Readings: Is 60:1-6; Eph 3:2-3a, 5-8; Mt 2:1-12

In the first reading the Prophet Isaiah speaks about events that would take place in Jerusalem. Being written after the exile, the original context may have been

understood to mean that the people had learned their lesson during their time of exile and were serving the Lord so faithfully that not only would the Jews of the diaspora return to Jerusalem, but their fidelity would be a light that broke through the darkness of the Gentiles to bring them to the truth.

If only it would have worked that way! Unfortunately, we know that many of the Jews did not remain faithful to the Lord. Many gave lip service, but few they were who remained fervent in their love for God. For this reason the passage has to be understood differently. Another event would take place that would reveal the glory of Israel and attract the Gentiles to Jerusalem.

Today we celebrate that event: it is the star which signified the birth of the Messiah. We have all heard about the Magi, often known as wise men, and the journey they made. The Gospel today recounts the story of their arrival in Jerusalem and the reactions of Herod, the Chief Priests, and the people. None of these reactions was good. Herod wanted to kill the Child, the Chief Priests knew where the Messiah was to be born, but obviously did not believe, and the people were greatly troubled.

This is the Messiah the people of Israel had been waiting for, but as God often does, He revealed the glorious coming of our Lord in ways the authorities did not expect. More than likely, neither Herod nor the Chief Priests had heard about the angel appearing to the shepherds. After all, the shepherds probably did not go to Jerusalem to inform the hierarchy of the apparition. Even if they did, the priests would likely have dismissed their report because they were uneducated, lowly people talking about their experience.

Even more shocking, however, is the news that pagans had come to worship the newborn King. To think that the High Priests would hear about the birth of the Messiah from pagans was unthinkable! It made no sense. Why would God reveal to Gentiles the most important thing to happen to the Jewish people since the Exodus? It is interesting that God revealed Himself to Moses at the time of the Exodus. Moses was Hebrew, but he was raised as an Egyptian. Why did God not reveal Himself to a practicing, God fearing Hebrew instead of one who did not know about the Lord?

Now God reveals Himself to pagans through the sighting of a star. Perhaps, like Moses, these men were not what they seemed to be. Why did these men care at all about a king being born in Israel? Palestine was certainly not the cultural or economic capitol of the world. I wonder if they would have gone to Egypt, Assyria, Rome, or Athens when a royal baby was born. I doubt it. But they came to Jerusalem. It makes one wonder if they were from Jewish families who did not return to Israel after the exile.

While it is true that the star appeared in the constellation associated with Israel, one wonders if the Magi had knowledge of the ancient prophecy by another pagan, Balaam, described in Numbers 24, about a star rising out of Jacob which is connected with a king and the Messiah. The effort they made to get to Jerusalem was extreme, but Matthew tells us they came to worship the Baby. It was not just about bringing gifts to a king, it was about giving worship to God.

Many Old Testament prophecies foretold that the Gentiles would be united with the Jews in worshiping God. This was understood to mean the Gentiles would become Jewish. No one, however, would have guessed this would be accomplished in the manner God chose. Even St. Paul tells us this was a mystery hidden from people in previous generations but now revealed to the Apostles and Prophets through the



Holy Spirit. Educated as a Pharisee, St. Paul never expected the Gentiles to be "coheirs, members of the same body, and co-partners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel."

Praise God that He works in ways we would never expect! In one way or another, and often in mysterious and unexpected ways, God manifests

Himself to each one of us. While our faith is not in extraordinary phenomena, God often uses the unexpected to get our attention. After worshiping the Child, the Magi returned to their country as changed men. God's Epiphany to us must change us so we will seek Him diligently and offer Him the treasures of our heart, worshiping Him as our King and Lord.

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ADMINISTRATOR'S MESSAGE... Holy Joy!

As we start the new year it is useful to consider how we might live our lives differently, hopefully better, for the Lord in the new year. Call that making resolutions, or whatever one thing we might

consider how to try to be better Franciscans. To be better Franciscans one simple thing we can do is to read a good biography on the life of St. Francis to glean some ideas on how we could live differently. For the most part our Rule is our best guide to this but in the history files on St. Francis are numerous recommendations he made to his Friars Minor on how they should live their lives better for Christ. St. Francis was constantly teaching his family. We can benefit from considering some of these things and today we will mention one subject in these historical stories about St. Francis that we can all benefit from considering. That is holy joy.

History has it that St. Francis asked Brother Leo to write about Holy Joy. He said "Brother Leo, God's Little Sheep, take your pen. I am going to dictate something to you." Brother Leo replied: "I am ready, father." St. Francis said: "You are going to write what perfect joy is." Brother Leo replied: "Gladly, father." St. Francis goes on in a most interesting and enlightening dictation.

"Well, then, supposing a messenger comes and tells us that all the doctors of Paris have entered the Order. Write this would not be holy joy. And supposing that the same messenger were to tell us that all the bishops, archbishops, and prelates of the whole world, and likewise the kings of France and England, have become Friars Minor, that would still be no reason for having perfect joy. And supposing that my friars had gone to the infidels and converted them to the last man... Even then, Brother Leo, this would still not be perfect joy. If the Friars Minor had the gift of miracles and could make cripples straight, give light to the blind and hearing to the deaf, speech

to the dumb, and life to men four days dead, if they were to speak all languages and know the secrets of men's consciences and of the future, and were to know by heart everything that has been written since the beginning of the world until now, and were to know the course of the stars, the location of buried treasure, the natures of birds, fishes, rocks, and all creatures, understand and write it on your paper, Brother Leo, that this would still not be perfect joy."

Brother Leo was shocked and asked: "Father, for the Love of God please tell me then just what is perfect joy?"

St. Francis continued: "I'll tell you. Supposing that in the winter, coming back from Perugia, I arrive in pitch darkness at the Portiuncula (their home). Icicles are clinging to my habit and making my legs bleed. Covered with mud and snow, starving and freezing, I shout and knock for a long time. 'Who is there?' says the porter when he finally decides to come to the door. 'It is I, Brother Francis.' But he doesn't recognize my voice. 'Off with you prankster!' he replies. 'This is not time for jokes!' I insist, but he won't listen. 'Will you be off, you rascal? There are enough of us without you. And there is no use in you coming here. Smart men like us don't need idiots like you around. Go try your luck at the Crosiers' hospice!'

"Once more, I beg him not to leave me outside on a night like that, and implore him to open up. He opens up, all right. 'Just you wait, impudent cur! I'll teach you some manners!' And grabbing a knobby club he jumps on me, seizes me by the hood, and drags me through the snow, beating me and wounding me with all the knobs in his cudgel... Well, Leo, if I am able to bear all this for love of God, not only with patience but with happiness, convinced that I deserve no other treatment, know, remember and write down on your paper, God's little sheep, that at last I have found perfect joy."



This beautiful story is replete with the spirit of St. Francis. Since we are Franciscans we need to meditate on what it means for us, as lay people. We are not Friars Minor. We are Franciscans Minor! The least in the Orders of St. Francis but Franciscans nonetheless. In that alone there is holy joy!

In our lives we all want to find joy, and as Franciscans we need to remember this story about holy joy. What is it for us? We would maintain that it is all of those things that happen to us that we do

not want to have happen, for starters. Think about that. Bad weather, illness, complaining family and friends. Fasting and abstaining, and distractions in prayer. Difficult people and difficult jobs. The list goes on and on. We can offer all of these things to God as a prayer. In this way we become living prayers. How wonderful.

So, let's accept holy joy at face value, and offer it happily to God, with a smile.

Happy New Year to all!

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



Martyrdom of Solitude

by Janet Klasson, BSP

From the Gospel Reading on the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God

Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. (Luke 2:19)

I was praying a rosary recently using a published meditation guide. In the Fourth Glorious Mystery, one meditation leaped out at me, even though I had read it many times before. The meditation gave thanks to God for all the graces Our Blessed Mother won for the Church during the inexpressible "martyrdom of solitude" that she suffered after Jesus' ascension. As I pondered Our Lady's "martyrdom of solitude", I felt it take on a greater meaning for the Church today, as well as a distinct calling to the faithful in these turbulent days.

Some experiences I have had recently have underscored how we, especially as penitents, are being called to enter into Mary's martyrdom of solitude, a solitude where the presence of Jesus in the world is not only not felt, but rarely sought. I know you feel it too. It pierces.

On Christmas Eve I arrived early for the latest Mass, thinking there would be carols or the rosary before Mass. There wasn't. With four Masses that night and two the next day, with only one priest and a small liturgical team in the parish, I can't say I was surprised. There were only a few people in the church, so I thought I would sit near the front and at least meditate on the rosary before Mass on this Holy Night.

In the front pew just across the aisle, sat a family with adult children. I was alarmed and seriously distracted when a couple of the young women started taking selfies of themselves, chatting in normal tones about all manner of things. I had seen people chat before Mass before, but this I found quite disturbing. I moved to the other side of the

church in front of the nativity scene and offered reparation.

I was into the second decade when another large, extended family moved in a few rows behind me. I could smell the alcohol on their breath, as they chatted and laughed even louder than the first group. I started to pray my rosary out loud. While I don't think anyone in these two groups could hear me, I'm hoping the Holy Family was in some way consoled. Lord have mercy!

A couple of days later in a group gathering someone made a joke about priests abusing altar boys. I felt as if I was the only one who didn't find it funny. Don't get me wrong. Anyone who is guilty of abusing children should be found and penalized. I just don't think there's anything funny about it. I was pierced by how it hurt Jesus to have his Bride so tarnished, not to mention the damage done to his innocent children. I was so shocked I couldn't even speak. I could only pray.

Upon reflection it occurred to me that all faithful Catholics today carry in their own spirits these modern-day piercings of Christ. We are being called to enter into Mary's martyrdom of solitude, and it is bound to become worse before her Immaculate Heart triumphs and makes everything better. Fiat!

On top of these piercings, I feel comforts being removed. It seems we are being stripped of all that is not Christ.

But let us not become discouraged. As penitents, we know how to offer up our piercings, and strippings only serve to separate us from our attachments, until we cling only to Him. Our Mama shows us that



in every circumstance, even in the piercing of our hearts, we are called to give praise to God, keep our eyes on Christ, and proclaim our never-ending Fiat!

The evil one thinks he is winning. But the Church's martyrdom of solitude, her Fiat under the banner of Our Lady will prove to be an invincible weapon, just as it was in the early Church. Our Lady was an unsung hero in the early days of the Church. She relived the silence of Nazareth, bereft of the comfort of the physical presence of her Beloved Son. Her every act, perfectly conformed to the Divine Will, won graces and favors for the fledgling Church. Her holiness was the milk that fed it, just as her wisdom and knowledge guided the Apostles and disciples in

their first steps.

So let us continue to do whatever God asks of us, in silence and prayer, for as long as He requires it, embracing whatever comes as a cross-shaped gift from our Beloved. The Divine Will is indeed our joy and our hope, the tomb in which we await His glorious resurrection.

O holy Mother of God, Full of Grace, grant to us, your little children grace upon grace, that our martyrdom of solitude, linked to yours, will be an invincible weapon in your hand, leading to the glorious triumph of the Bride of Christ. St. Francis and St. Clare, all you holy angels and saints, pray for us. Amen. Fiat!

Janet Klasson BSP, Divine Mercy Chapter, Canada



FROM THE 'SPARROW' Feathers...

Peace Peace to all the little sparrows! Digging further through the "sparrow archives" I came upon the section of papers I used to call "Feathers..." which are actually collected works and articles by non-sparrows. Some of these have tremendous spiritual insights and they, on occasion, should be shared. So without further delay here is one that was submitted anonymously by a rather insightful writer. So enjoy!

"Once upon a time there was a rich King who had four wives. He loved the 4th wife the most and adorned her with rich robes and treated her to the finest of delicacies. He gave her nothing but the best.

He also loved the third wife very much and always showing her off to neighboring kingdoms. However, he feared that one day she would leave him for another.

He also loved his second wife. She was his confidant and was always kind, considerate, and patient with him. Whenever the king faced a problem, he could confide to her and she would help him get through the difficult times.

The king's first wife was a very loyal partner and made great contributions in maintaining his wealth and kingdom. However, he did not love the first wife. Although she loved him deeply, he hardly took notice of her.

One day the King fell ill and he knew his time was short. He thought of his luxurious life and wondered, "I now have four wives with me but when I die, I will be all alone."



Thus he asked the fourth wife, "I have loved you the most, endowed you with the finest clothing and showered great care over you. Now that I'm dying, will you follow me and keep me company?"

"No way!" replied the fourth wife and she walked away without another word. Her answer cut like a sharp knife right into his heart.

The sad King then asked the third wife, "I have loved you all of my life. Now that I'm dying will you follow me and keep me company?"

"No!" replied the third wife. Life is too good! When you die, I'm going to remarry!" His heart sank and turned cold.

He then asked the second wife, "I have always turned to you for help and you've always been there for me. When I die, will you follow me and keep me company?"

"I'm sorry, I can't help you out this time!" replied the second wife. "At the very most, I can only walk with you to your grave." Her answer struck him like a bolt of lightning, and the King was devastated.

Then a voice called out "I'll go with you. I'll follow you no matter where you go." The King looked up and there was his first wife. She was very skinny as she suffered from malnutrition and neglect. Greatly grieved the King said, "I should have taken much better care of you when I had the chance."

In truth, we all have four wives in our lives. Our

fourth wife is our body. No matter how much time and effort we lavish in making it look good, it will leave us when we die. Our third wife is our possessions, status and wealth. When we die, it will go to others. Our second wife is our family and friends. No matter how much they have been there for us, the furthest they can stay by us is up to the grave.

And our first wife is our Soul. Often neglected in pursuit of wealth, power, and pleasures of this world, our Soul is the only thing that will follow us wherever we go. Cultivate, strengthen and cherish it now, for it is the only part of us will follow us to the throne of God and continue with us through Eternity.

The above anonymous writer has zeroed in on an absolute truth that St. Francis also had a comprehension of and that was the ultimate truth that all sooner or later must face and that is death. St. Francis was so sure of this reality that he described it as "Sister Death." And he embraced it in 1226 in the presence of his followers. He was ready and had made his preparations through prayer as a penitent and by embracing the Sacraments. Should

we, as penitent sparrows, choose any other course than our dear Poverello has chosen? We wholeheartedly think not. Because we here represent also the Little Flower Chapter we also share in closing some thoughts and quotes of St. Therese involving Sister Death as well:

It says in the catechism that death is nothing but the separation of soul and body. Well, I have no fear of a separation that will unite me forever with the good God. No, it will not be death that will come for me. It will be the good God.

Death is a phantom, a horrible specter, as it is represented in pictures. After this exile there will be no more suffering, only heavenly peace. No more faith or hope, only peace and an ecstasy of love.

Ah, how happy I should be at the moment of death if I had but one soul to offer to Jesus. There would be one less soul in hell, one more soul to bless the good God for all eternity.

—St. Therese, the Little Flower

Forgiven...



Peace to all the little sparrows! Seven years ago, when in the process of writing on the e-mail to you all a Sparrow dispatch, unfortunately this sparrow was struck down in mid-flight with a stroke that caused permanent paralysis and diminished ability of clear spiritual and physical thought. (Oh me!) The stroke then left some most recent endeavors in a bit of a

cloud in the memory. All of a sudden in the last few days the mind cleared on some of those things that had been done or undertaken during that pre-stroke period. One thing of noteworthy mention was the introduction of a prayer card named "Forgiven."

"Forgiven" is based on the painting "Forgiven" by Thomas Blackshear II. If you are NOT familiar with "Forgiven" you may view it on Google at Thomas Blackshear II and you will find it a most striking and moving rendition of a sinner caught up from behind in the arms of Jesus as the sinner seems to be falling to the ground in despondency of sin holding a mallet and nail in each of his hands. The picture caused me such introspection and soul-searching that I wrote the following meditation pre-stroke and have just re-discovered it in the "sparrow archives."

FORGIVEN: A MEDITATION ON A MALLET AND A NAIL

Lord Jesus, I recall Your Gospel words to "come and see", that were given to Your first disciples. I've listened time and time again to Your Mother's words, in her many holy aspirations, wherein she has admonished and encouraged us to turn from sin and seek Your pardon and mercy. Yet how often have the thought of these invitations as applying to the "other sinners" of the world and not so much to me. It's been easier, in the fast-paced and sinful world to keep the call of ongoing conversion on the list of the things to get around to.

Desperately, as with man in the portrait being held in Forgiven, I too hang onto the mallet and nail that have crucified You but at the same time deepen my own emptiness. They are symbols of my many attachments, indifference, individualism, and materialistic view of life. I'm very comfortable with them. On the other hand, Lord, I find the conversion You offer to be very scary. It demands a change of heart and that will hurt. It requires a turning from myself to You and that is not easy with the world with its many allurements seemingly blocking my path. Above all, conversion demands my "letting go." So, I'm perplexed in my thinking and the

movements of my heart as I hold tight to the mallet and the nail.

However, in special moments, Lord, when I look at myself honestly, at times I weep for what my life has become. But maybe these tears are the beginning of my true change of heart. I've often meditated on Your call to discipleship. I've often heard Your words spoken by Your Mother in her visits to us. But somehow I still prefer to retain the mallet and the nail.

Yet, Lord, I truly believe that throughout my life You have been supporting me. At times I have felt Your strong arms lifting me up in times of trial, urging me to look at myself more honestly. You seem to be hoping that I will finally understand that I am not so much hurting You as hurting myself. And I see that You lovingly refuse to let me go!

As I now gaze upon this image of Forgiven, Lord, I see Your strong, pierced hands. I guess it's time to surrender myself to Your love. Help me let go of my pride and allow Your transforming love and forgiveness to change me into a better likeness of You. Looking down at me, You whisper, urging me to let go of the mallet and the nail. Instead You offer me the pincers of reconciliation and new life. You tell

me to take them in my hands and accept the new life You offer me and that is the freedom of becoming truly one of the children of God.

Lord, finally I am beginning to understand that Your greatest desire and Our Lady's prayer is for me to be reconciled with You and those also that you have given me to love...including myself. You are my Savior and Reconciler, my greatest Treasure, my best Friend. Help me always to be forgetful of the mallet and nail and only to the peace that shall be mine when I rest in You.

All sparrows can learn a lesson from "Forgiven" as each of us has at one time or another lost our way if only for a moment. It is such a grace-filled blessing to know that should any of us be falling from many or few faults that the Good Shepherd stands always behind us more than willing and capable to lift us up and out of our troubles and trials if we but call on His Name. There is no other singular fact as important to us sparrows than this!

True, I am not always faithful, but I do not become discouraged. I place myself in the arms of the Lord and He Teaches me to "draw profit from everything, good or bad, that He finds in me."

Pax et bonum, Brother Sparrow
Bob Hall BSP, Little Flower Chapter, N. Carolina

(Note: The bird image above was drawn by one of Bob Hall's friends and fellow converts to the Lord. Used with permission.)

MORNING STAR: NEWS ON THE ASSOCIATION...



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.

*"So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation:
everything old has passed away;
see, everything has become new!"*

-2 Corinthians 5:17-

Blessed New Year to you and yours!

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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