



...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

4. A woman in Viterbo whose time had come seemed to be at the point of death; she was in an agony of pain and suffered all the the distress of womankind. Her physical resources were gradually waning and nothing could be done for her. Then she appealed to St. Francis and was saved and gave birth in complete safety. Now that she had received the favor she desired, she forgot the kindness which had been shown her and neglected to attribute it to the honor of St. Francis. She even engaged in servile work on his feastday, but the moment she stretched out her right arm to work, it became rigid and withered. When she tried to bend it back with her other hand, that too suffered a similar fate and became withered. The fear of God seized her and she renewed her promises and recovered the use of her limbs which she had lost by her ingratitude and contempt. This happened through the intercession of the humble and merciful St. Francis to whom she once more entrusted herself.



5. A woman from Arezzo had been in labor for a week and her life was in danger. Her skin had turned black and they had all given up hope for her, but she made a votive offering to St. Francis and began to implore his help even as she lay dying. The moment she made the promise, she fell asleep and saw St. Francis speaking to her in a dream. He asked her if she recognized him and if she could say the "Hail, holy Queen" in honor of our Lady. She told him that she could recognize him and that she knew the prayer. "Then," said the saint, "start it, and before you are finished, you will give birth to your child safely." At these words the woman woke up and began to say fearfully, "Hail, holy Queen." When she said the words, "thine eyes of mercy" and mentioned the Fruit of our Lady's virginal womb, she was immediately delivered from her suffering and gave birth to a beautiful child. She gave thanks to the Queen of mercy who had been so good as to have pity on her, through the intercession of St. Francis.

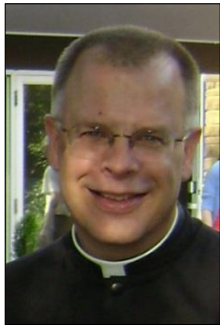
Chapter VII. The Blind Who Recovered Their Sight

1. In the friary at Naples there was a friar named Robert who had been blind for years; the flesh had grown over his eyes, so that he could not move his eyelids. A lot of strange friars were passing through there on their way to various parts of the world and St. Francis, the mirror of obedience, was anxious to encourage them on their journey by a miracle, and so he cured Robert in the following way. One night he was lying in bed, so sick that he was ready to die, and the prayers for the dying had already been recited. Then St. Francis appeared to him with three other friars who were noted for their

sanctity, St. Anthony, Brother Augustine, and Brother James of Assisi. They had followed him perfectly in their lifetime and now they were overjoyed to accompany him after his death. St. Francis took a knife and cut away the superfluous growth, giving Robert back his sight and rescuing him from the point of death. "Robert my son," he told him, "the favor I have done you is a sign for the friars who are going to distant lands. I will go before them and guide their steps. They should go joyfully and carry out the command given them with all eagerness."

Bonaventure—Major Life of St. Francis (1263)





VISITOR'S MESSAGE



Homily by Fr. Robert Altier

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, January 26, 2020

Readings: Is 8:23-9:3; 1 Cor 1:10-13, 17; Mt 4:12-23

In the first reading today Isaiah tells us that "God first degraded the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali" but then tells us everything is turned around for the people in these lands and that "the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light." St. Matthew, in the Gospel reading today, tells us this passage is fulfilled by our Lord leaving Nazareth and going to live in Capernaum, which is in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. St. John tells us that Jesus is the light and that the light came into the darkness and the darkness was not able to comprehend it.

The pattern we see in how God dealt with these two regions of Galilee provides insight into how He deals with His Saints. Before anyone can be raised up to great holiness, they have to be brought low. St. Augustine described this using the example of a container filled with vinegar that you want to fill with honey. First, the vinegar must be poured out of the container, but it cannot be replaced immediately by the honey because remnants of the vinegar remain in the container. For this reason, he says, the container must be scrubbed clean; only then can it be filled with honey.

In this example, St. Augustine is talking about our souls. God wants to fill us with His grace and all the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but our souls are either filled with sin or the remnants of sin still cling to us. Therefore, we must be brought low so the pride can be poured out and any other sinful tendencies can be scoured. After this process, the soul can be filled with God's grace and the person will be truly holy.

When we consider the call of the Apostles presented in the Gospel reading, we recognize what a gift and privilege it was to be an Apostle of Jesus Christ. Of course, they could not have known the magnitude of this gift when they were first called, nor could they have imagined the cost it would require. Individually, they would all need to be purified. The depth and length of this purification would be different for each depending on the number and gravity of sins that needed to be purged, the level of holiness to which they were being called, and the number of people they would influence.

This would imply that the writers of the Gospels would have required more purification than some of the others because for nearly 2000 years people have been changed and instructed through their gift. St. John was called to the heights of sanctity, so his purification would have been long and intense. St. Peter would need profound purification to lead the Church and set her on the right course from the beginning.

The Scriptures do not shy away from revealing the Apostles' imperfections. In case we might think they were Saints when they were called, we need only to think about a few events recorded in Scripture. St. John, the Beloved Disciple and closest to Jesus, was probably the holiest of the Apostles. However, along with his brother, James, they were known by the Lord as *Boanerges*, the Sons of Thunder. St. Peter actually rebuked our Lord when Jesus said He would be crucified and denied Him three times. Not only did the whole lot of them argue about who was the greatest, they all abandoned our Lord in His suffering. St. Thomas also doubted the resurrection.

I mention these imperfections because we recognize that we are no different from the Apostles. God chose weak and broken people and, after crushing them in purification, raised them up to be great Saints. There is a reason why God allowed the people of Corinth to experience divisions among themselves over something so seemingly foolish as does one belong to Peter, Paul, Apollos, or Jesus? At least the first three are Apostles or disciples of the Lord. Look at our ridiculous divisions over things that are trivial. God allowed these divisions to teach Christians over the centuries because we are just like them. Maybe our issues are different, but the basic problem is the same: our darkness.

The Light has come into our darkness. The problems and divisions are due to our desire for the darkness rather than the Light. St. Paul prayed that we would be united in the same mind and purpose. The mind is about truth, and the purpose is about the will, so we are to be united in truth and in charity. In other words, we are to be united in Jesus Who is truth and Charity. Trust God in trials, focus on the Light, and let God make you a great Saint!

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ADMINISTRATOR'S MESSAGE... Excerpts



Recently we got a surprise letter from a newly professed member, Bill Crowe (posted below), who lives in Advance, Missouri. What he said in the letter was pretty special. The letter was a Christmas card

with a thank you note to us for helping him reach what he calls repeatedly 'his vocation' as a professed member of the BSP. That is his 'vocation'. To live the Rule of 1221. So, through this Rule he has dedicated his life to Christ. A beautiful message, and here is some of what he says.

'Bruce, I am in love with my vocation. It's the best thing in my life. I would not trade it for anything in the world. It gives me such peace, and it truly makes life worth living. Again, I can't thank you enough for helping me prepare for my vocation. It truly makes me very happy.' Signed, Bill.

This excerpt from his letter is a wonderful meditation for us all, and an encouragement. We do well to consider, joyfully, what Bill shares in this letter, and to consider in other regards the good excerpts from the rest of our lives. We live excerpts if we are living the Christian life. The excerpts come from many sources. Principle among them are the Gospels and other writings from the New Testament. And then there are the excerpts from the lives of those who taught us, and loved us, as we moved through life. That gave us a mission too. To create in our lives things that people will want to extract to improve their lives and hopefully in Christ.

One of the main Gospel excerpts we live is "Deny yourselves, take up your crosses, and follow me." There are a couple of others that are really central to us too. One is "Go, sell what you own, and give it to the poor." Another, "Take nothing for the journey." These were the three excerpts from the Gospel that St. Francis picked to convert his life to Christ when he and his followers were trying to decide how they should live. He found them in three random openings of the Gospel so obviously he was given the direction from the Lord. They are, therefore, three excerpts we should often ponder although they don't just pop into our lives so easily.

When the Pharisees asked our Lord why He and his followers did not fast Jesus said there was no need for them to fast while the groom was with them, that is he, himself. However, when the Groom was taken from them then they would fast. That is after his death. Our Rule is our fast, and our denial in living

it, in a real sense is our fast from life and the substance of our life. Living the mortifications of the Rule certainly, but even living the tenets of the Rule is a fast.

The Gospel, of course, comes from Christ. So it is the Lord who is telling us to deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow him. He did not say we would not have crosses. He merely said we needed to accept them, and take them up, and follow him. So all the miserable things that happen in our life, big or little, are our crosses. In a very real sense living our Rule is a cross. So we need to embrace the cross, bear it patiently, and with a smile. We also need to know and live the Gospel. No matter how many times you read it there is always something more there. A deeper pondering, or call, to live aspects of our lives, especially in our relationships with others, more perfectly.

As lay people we can sell some things and give it to the poor. Most of us cannot sell everything and give it to the poor as we would then become poor and we would never help the poor again. For that reason alone, many Saints and the Church says we need to be poor in spirit as lay people more than poor in means. Humble, gentle, and kind. Unassuming, and self-deprecating. We need to make less of ourselves and more of others. We need to live our Rule with enthusiasm, like Bill Crowe has, but invisibly. And we should do all of this with a certain excitement. For such it is to follow Christ who was very excited to do His Father's will even as he headed for sure death on the cross. He knew it and it did not slow him down a bit. We need to be like that and take nothing for the journey. Nothing that is that we don't need.

For St. Francis and the early friars this meant literally giving up all they owned and taking nothing for the journey. Many of them sold everything they owned before they came to follow St. Francis. St. Francis DID NOT ask that of the laity. The Rule specifies what he asked of the laity. So he had real respect for what it takes for a lay person to survive and thrive in our world and still follow Christ. We can interpret this today to mean we take nothing more for the journey than we need. Of course, we need a lot. We need food, shelter, clothing, transportation, and a certain amount of recreation. Even the religious in convents take recreation. Beyond that we don't need extra toys, beyond those of our recreation, or, God forbid, money. We cannot serve God and money, the Lord said. Why? Money is a magnet and the search for it will pull us deeper into the world and the world is not Godly. It is passing away. So enough money, that is

to get by, is enough money.

In fact, did you know that there are three ways you can manage money in the Church that are all good. One, you can give it all to the poor. Two, you can share it in common, as the first followers of Christ did, and we all do with our families. Or three, you can do with your money as is acceptable to your spiritual director, or the Church. Now the Church certainly supports us living our vocations, making even a good income, and taking care of our families and needs with our money, and, of course, providing

for the needs of the Church with a portion of our money.

So, let's move on in our lives in gratitude for those around us and our faith and our Church for these sources all pull us to be better people if we but keep in mind our mission. Our Rule promotes that mission and so our Rule is part of what we are. And we will provide numerous opportunities for others to draw excerpts from our life to foster and build their own.

May the Lord bless and lead us all.

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

Detachment...Posted by Janet Klasson

Bruce's article reminded me that I haven't posted this "excerpt" in a while. I have found it helpful in striving to live prudently as a lay person, "In the world, but not of it, for Christ". These excerpts are taken from Ralph Martin's book, "Fulfillment of All Desire", in the chapter titled, "Growing in Freedom":

"The goal of the process of detachment is not to stop loving the things and people of this world, but, quite to the contrary, to love them even more truly in God, under the reign of Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit."

John of the Cross: "We are not discussing the mere lack of things; this lack will not divest the soul if it craves for all these objects. We are dealing with the denudation of the soul's appetites and gratifications. This is what leaves it free and empty of all things, even though it possesses them."

Bernard of Clairvaux: "They do possess earthly things, but with the spirit of men who possess nothing...The miser hungers like a beggar for earthly possessions, the man of faith has a lordly independence of them. The first is a beggar no matter what he owns, the latter by his very independence is a true owner."

Francis de Sales: "So also you can possess riches without being poisoned by them if you merely keep them in your home and purse and not in your heart. To be rich in effect and poor in affection is a great happiness for a Christian. By this means he has the advantages of riches for this world and the merit of poverty for the world to come....I willingly grant that you may take care to increase your wealth and resources, provided this is done not only justly but properly and charitably."

"Part of the vocation of those who have money is using it well under the guidance of the holy spirit....This must mean regularly giving part of our wealth away for the service of the Lord and the relief of the poor, and by personally serving them."

"The 'contentment' that the Scriptures talk about is dependent not on how much or how little money we have but on knowing who is caring for us - God himself!"



The Inner Thoughts of Many by Janet Klasson, BSP

From the Gospel Reading on the Feast of the Presentation

Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed...' (Luke 2:34-35)

I had different idea for a newsletter article this month, but when I heard the above verse from the Gospel reading at Mass on the feast day of the Presentation of Our Lord, it pierced me. There is so much in it that speaks to our time, especially the last phrase.

First of all, it seems that the more society rejects

God, the more "free" people feel to give voice to things that in the past might have remained unspoken. The "inside voice" has become the "outside voice". Everyone is talking at once, and almost no one is prepared to be swayed from their position. Amidst the noise and chaos is a spiritual dynamic: the inner thoughts of many are being



revealed.

In the past only God had access to our inner thoughts. Now we are all being exposed to the cacophony. We are getting a taste of what God has had to endure since the fall, but amplified in our day, and there is almost no escape. Oh, the wisdom of silent contemplation! The mind of man is a bucking wild horse broken free of its last harness. Look out!

The second reason this phrase pierced me is that I have recently read a book titled, *"The Warning: Testimonies and Prophecies of the Illumination of Conscience"* by Christine Watkins*. For those of you who have never heard of the prophesied "warning" or "illumination of conscience" I offer you a simple explanation (there are many more detailed ones on the internet). The prophecy, explicated by numerous well-known saints and mystics including St. Faustina, tells of an coming manifestation of God's mercy in which we will see ourselves as he sees us, in the light of Truth, but also in the light of his unimaginable love for poor sinners. It has been called "a judgment in miniature". It will be a great shaking for humanity, a time that will remove all doubt about the existence of our perfectly merciful and perfectly just God, a time of decision for every living human soul. "Are you with me or against me?"

The foreword of the book was written by Bishop Gavin Ashenden (Chaplain to the Queen of England from 2008 to 2017). He begins by saying, "Every so often a book falls into one's hands that is particularly powerful in unveiling the mystery and power of God's purpose for his Church today, and this is one such." The book contains, not just prophecies, but real-life testimonies of people who have already experienced an illumination, a sneak-preview of what is purportedly to come.

Intrigued, I bought the e-book, not realizing that one of the people whose testimony is included is, in fact, a friend of mine. I knew her at the time she experienced the illumination several years ago. Her experience left her so shaken it was a full week before she could speak to me about it. The experience was extremely painful—to see how her sins had hurt Our Lord. It left her with a profound sense of gratitude and love of our merciful God, along with a burning desire never to hurt him again, which has not waned to this day.

Reading these stories helps us to realize that even our little sins hurt God. St. Faustina herself had an illumination of conscience, and described it in this way:

"Suddenly I saw the complete condition of my soul as God sees it. I could clearly see all that is displeasing to God. I did not know that even the

smallest transgressions will have to be accounted for. What a moment! Who can describe it? To stand before the Thrice-Holy-God!" — Divine Mercy in My Soul, Diary (36)

This is not meant to be cause for fear, but is an unimaginable grace leading to a far deeper repentance than we could ever imagine. What a gift! Whether or not you believe that this global event is coming, it is ever prudent to keep our spiritual house in order, especially through the merciful grace of the sacraments.

This week in the Office of Readings for Wednesday of the Third Week of Ordinary time, we read a reflection by Saint Bernard, abbot. Though it was penned almost 1000 years ago, it remains a timeless teaching on every sinner's right to the mercy of God. I was going to use excerpts but could not decide which jewel was superfluous. So, here is the entire reading:

Second Reading in the Office of Readings, Wednesday, Third Week in Ordinary Time

"Where can the weak find a place of firm security and peace, except in the wounds of the Savior? Indeed, the more secure is my place there the more he can do to help me. The world rages, the flesh is heavy, and the devil lays his snares, but I do not fall, for my feet are planted on firm rock. I may have sinned gravely. My conscience would be distressed, but it would not be in turmoil, for I would recall the wounds of the Lord: he was wounded for our iniquities. What sin is there so deadly that it cannot be pardoned by the death of Christ? And so if I bear in mind this strong, effective remedy, I can never again be terrified by the malignancy of sin.

"Surely the man who said: My sin is too great to merit pardon, was wrong. He was speaking as though he were not a member of Christ and had no share in his merits, so that he could claim them as his own, as a member of the body can claim what belongs to the head. As for me, what can I appropriate that I lack from the heart of the Lord who abounds in mercy? They pierced his hands and feet and opened his side with a spear. Through the openings of these wounds I may drink honey from the rock and oil from the hardest stone: that is, I may taste and see that the Lord is sweet.

"He was thinking thoughts of peace, and I did not know it, for who knows the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? But the piercing nail has become a key to unlock the door, that I may see the good will of the Lord. And what can I see as I look through the hole? Both the nail and the

wound cry out that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. The sword pierced his soul and came close to his heart, so that he might be able to feel compassion for me in my weaknesses.

"Through these sacred wounds we can see the secret of his heart, the great mystery of love, the sincerity of his mercy with which he visited us from on high. Where have your love, your mercy, your compassion shone out more luminously than in your wounds, sweet, gentle Lord of mercy? More mercy than this no one has than that he lay down his life for those who are doomed to death.

"My merit comes from his mercy; for I do not lack

merit so long as he does not lack pity. And if the Lord's mercies are many, then I am rich in merits. For even if I am aware of many sins, what does it matter? Where sin abounded grace has overflowed. And if the Lord's mercies are from all ages for ever, I too will sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever. Will I not sing of my own righteousness? No, Lord, I shall be mindful only of your justice. Yet that too is my own; for God has made you my righteousness."

(*"The Warning" is available for purchase at Queen of Peace Media or Amazon)

Janet Klasson BSP, Divine Mercy Chapter, Canada



FROM THE 'SPARROW'

The Refiner...

Peace my little sparrow friends! Reading through Scripture I came upon the Old Testament reading of Malachi 3:1-3 which I now paraphrase with, "Behold...the Lord...is like a refiner's fire...And He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver." All sparrows are aware of what refined gold or silver is and the intrinsic value of the finished product. Let us meditate on the "refiner" because it is more to Him that this verse focuses on rather than the refined or finished product.

Using our wonderful sparrow insightful imagination let us visualize a "refiner" sitting before a blazing fire with a pot of molten metal over it, heated from the pumping bellows. He looks into the pot and studies the liquid silver. He is refining it to its purest form. He is drenched in sweat from the extreme heat, yet his face is calm except for the intent look in his eyes. He is watching for the perfect time when all the dross settles to the bottom of the pot and he can see his reflection in the refined silver. At that instant he draws the pot out of the fire, knowing that further heat would be ruinous. Thus he accomplishes what he wanted.

Lives in the World...

Peace little sparrows! St. Francis moved his focus from the "world" to the "cross" and he seemingly never looked back at the world with the same eyes he had for it previously. That in itself seems a miracle especially when we sparrows look about us at the fast and ever-changing world around us. Let us examine the concept of world versus cross.



In the same manner as above the Lord our Refiner wants to do the same thing with us. He sees the dross in our lives, so He puts us over the fire of trial and hardship at times. He knows just how much heat it will take to remove the impurities in us. The instant He sees His likeness reflected in our life He turns off the heat lest He ruin us by allowing temptation above what we are able to bear (1 Cor. 10:13).

In the midst of this intense heat, we are tempted to complain that it is too much. But we fail to remember that our Maker is in the heat with us, constantly looking for His reflection. The apostle Paul could actually "take pleasure" in these testings. The literal meaning is that he thought well of the infirmities, reproaches, necessities, persecutions, and distresses that he endured. Have we sparrows come to the place where we allow God to work in our lives without any reservation? If so, He will show His strength in our weaknesses, and His reflection will be clearly visible in our sparrow lives.

Jesus more and more desires a throne of pure gold, and this throne is your pure heart.

—St. Therese, the Little Flower

One of the greatest salvation principles in Scripture that St. Francis read was the principle of denying himself (meaning as well ourselves too!). It is a walk in death to the old man; that is to the selfish desires of the flesh. We, like St. Francis, should let no one talk us out of this course of action. When Jesus foretold His suffering, death, and resurrection, Peter

declared that it must not be so. Christ immediately rebuked Peter, calling him Satan. From this we learn that the devil is the source of all attempts to soften the truth of self-denial and death to self. Many voices out there are telling us that self-denial is NOT necessary, but we must not listen to them. Self-denial is a privilege for the Christian.

The life of Christ is a fact that St. Francis knew well and one that must be seen in us as well. This is one of the truths of God that too few men understand (emphasis added!). We are to follow Him in death, the death of the old sinful man in us. Romans 6:8 says that if we are dead with Christ, we shall also live with Him. Dying together precedes living together. When we get these things clear in our minds, and we understand how important self-denial is in following Christ, we will come to truly "hate" our life in this world. This means that we will despise our inclinations to sin, because we recognize that loving

a fleshly life will ultimately cause us to lose eternal life.

What will it profit us if we gain the whole world and lose our own soul? What are we willing to give in exchange for our soul? (See Mark 6:36-37). Some people exchange their souls for very little - a night of illicit passion or drunkenness, a lie on a tax form, a grudge held for many years. Do we sparrows really want to lose so much in order to gain so little? St. Francis thought about this and thought "not so" to the world and we as sparrows think "not so" too!

SELF-LOVE AND CHRIST-LOVE CANNOT OCCUPY THE SAME HEART.

We should look for no support except in Jesus. He alone is immutable. What joy to think that He will never change.

—St. Therese, the Little Flower

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.)

A Letter from Bill Crowe, BSP

Dear members of the BSP,

My name is Bill Crowe, and I live in Advance, Missouri. I would like to share with you my vocation story.

I made my profession on January 31, 2018, the feast of St. John Bosco, priest. As Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen said: "Life is worth living." My vocation, and living it, makes me very happy and fulfilled.

I do a lot of volunteer work at Church, and at our assisted living home. Helping people makes you happy too.

Don't ever give up on your vocation. I can truly say: "Try it and see what happens. You will never regret it."

Bruce Fahey is my formator, and I sure thank him a lot. He was simply fantastic.

Use the sacraments of Holy Eucharist and Confession frequently.

God bless you,

Bill Crowe



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.

+ *Blessed Lent Brothers & Sisters!*

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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