

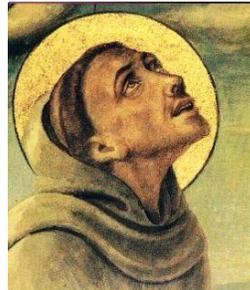


...IN THE WORLD, BUT NOT OF IT, FOR CHRIST!

## BONAVENTURE AND HIS LESSONS ON ST. FRANCIS:

### Some of the miracles which took place after St. Francis' death Chapter VII. The Blind Who Recovered Their Sight

2. At Thebes in Greece a blind woman fasted on bread and water on the vigil of the feast of St. Francis, and early on the morning of the feast her husband brought her to the friars' church. During Mass she opened her eyes at the elevation of Christ's Body; she saw it clearly and adored it devoutly. Even as she adored, she cried out and said to all those who had turned around when she shouted, "Thanks be to God and his saint! I can clearly see Christ's Body." When Mass was over, she went home in joy of spirit having recovered the sight of her eyes, but because through the merits of St. Francis and her own faith she had caught her first glimpse of the adorable Sacrament, which is the light of souls, living and true.



3. A fourteen-year-old boy from Pofi in Campania was attacked by a sudden illness and lost his left eye completely. Agonizing pain forced the eye from its socket, so that it hung down along his cheek by a sinew the full length of a finger; it remained like that

for a whole week and became completely dried up. The only thing left was to cut it off; the doctors had no hope. Then his father implored the help of St. Francis with all his heart. The saint never wearied of helping those in trouble and he was quick to come to the aid of this supplicant. He restored the eye to its proper position and its former health, giving back to the boy the sight he longed for.

4. At Castro dei Volsci in the same district a heavy pile of timber fell from a height and struck a priest on the head, blinding his left eye. It was St. Francis' vigil and as he lay on the ground, he appealed to him mournfully in a loud voice, saying, "Help me, holy father, so that I can go to your feast, as I promised your friars." There and then he stood up, perfectly healed, and he broke out into a hymn of joy and praise, so that the onlookers who were sympathizing with him were amazed and delighted. He went to the feast, telling everybody how he had experienced the saint's mercy and power.

*Bonaventure—Major Life of St. Francis (1263)*



### VISITOR'S MESSAGE

#### Homily by Fr. Robert Altier First Sunday in Lent, March 1, 2020

**Readings: Gen 2:7-9, 3:1-7; Rom 5:12-19; Mt 4:1-11**

In the second reading today St. Paul states that sin came into the world through one man. He also refers to the "trespass of Adam," and the disobedience of one man. However, in the first reading we hear about Eve being tempted by the enemy of our souls and falling prey to his cunning. Only after Eve had eaten of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, the tree from which our first parents were forbidden to eat, did Adam eat of the fruit at the behest

of his wife. So, how can it be the sin of Adam when Eve clearly ate the fruit first?

The real difference comes in the gravity of the sin. God told Adam directly that he could not eat the fruit of the forbidden tree; Adam told Eve what God had commanded. Eve knew fully well that what she was doing was a serious sin, but it was not as serious as the sin Adam committed, even though they both committed the same sin. Adam is guilty of the greater sin because



his action was in direct disobedience to a clear directive that was given specifically to him by God Himself. Eve knew she was being disobedient to God's directive, but since she received it from Adam rather than from God, her sin was not as grave.

It is also important to note that it was not until after Adam had eaten of the fruit that the eyes of both were opened and they realized they were naked. The text does not tell us that Eve's eyes were opened after she had eaten; rather, both had their eyes opened only after Adam succumbed to the temptation to eat the fruit. Perhaps one could also consider the unity of the couple, that is, Eve is more affected by Adam's choice to sin because she had received her humanity from him. Regardless of this, it is clear from the text that while Eve ate the fruit first, the disastrous effects on humanity took place only after Adam ate the fruit.

It is interesting, in this vein, that when Satan tempts our Lord, the first temptation has to do with eating, tempting our Lord in a way similar to how he tempted our first parents. The vile creature tempts our Lord to turn the stones into bread to satisfy His hunger. It is also worthy of note that our Lord's response is that one lives not on bread alone, but "on every word that comes from the mouth of God." Adam and Eve had chosen not to live by the words that came from the mouth of the Lord; Jesus, on the other hand, is the Word that comes forth from the Father, so in choosing to live by God's Word, He is choosing to live according to His own nature and being.

Of course, being God, Jesus could not sin. Satan had rejected the Incarnation, so his pride would not allow

him to accept the truth of Who our Lord is. This is why the disgusting fiend would only say "If you are the Son of God..." The other demons about whom we hear in the Gospels acknowledge the divinity of Jesus, but greatest of the least would not accept this truth.

When Jesus does not fall for the devil's tricks, that is, refusing to turn the stones into bread and refusing to jump from the parapet of the Temple, we then see the arrogance of the despicable one on full display. After refusing to acknowledge the divinity of Jesus, the vile thing wants Jesus to worship him. The foolishness of this temptation is almost laughable because he offers Jesus the glory of all the kingdoms of the earth, but our Lord *is* the King of the Universe, the King over all creation, including the despicable fiend. It is always important to remember that the Father of Lies made claim to all the kingdoms of the earth; in this case, Jesus did not respond by telling him the kingdoms were not his to give. So, the reason for the mess in the world can be traced directly to this point.

Original Sin and its consequences were passed on to each of us because Adam and Eve squandered the inheritance they were supposed to pass on to their children. Our Lord's obedience, on the other hand, has won salvation for us. St. Paul says the gift from God through Jesus is not like the transgression of Adam. Every person is subject to sin and bodily death because of Adam's disobedience; but the grace God gives because of our Lord's obedience, that is, the life of God in our souls, overflows for the many. The devil's lies bring momentary pleasure and end in death; God's life and love are forever.

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## ADMINISTRATOR'S MESSAGE... Dark Nights

The dark night of the flesh and of the spirit have been things that have been extensively written about. St. Theresa of Avila particularly has written of them. They relate very heavily to our journey to God and they are something that every human being experiences to some extent, some more than others. They relate certainly very heavily to our Lenten practices, experiences, and hopes. These dark nights all have to do with our purification, from the world and from its lures. That is why every human being on the planet experiences them. God uses them to bring us to Himself.

The dark nights of flesh and spirit are essential to our growth in the spirit. St. Paul says the flesh and the spirit are opposed to each other. The flesh, naturally, pulls us towards and into the world. The spirit draws us, also

naturally, towards God. We cannot seek to live and excel in the flesh and expect to grow in the spirit. God might let us do that if our focus is on the world and not on Him. Many people, and many of those who are very rich in a worldly way with money and *beaucoup* possessions, just keep on acquiring and succeeding in every worldly endeavor. Their reward is here. The Lord said: **'Woe to you rich, you have received your consolation...'** (Lk 6:24) in the sermon on the mount. So, God lets them succeed and they become rich. Their state in the life to come may not be so pleasant.

The dark night of the flesh usually comes first for most people and in a vast variety of ways. The primary way these dark nights come for most people is through illness, whether great or small, short time or lifelong. They include anything that affects us in our body, and include fasting and abstinence which we might impose for spiritual reasons, or even martyrdom. These 'dark nights' are tough. They destroy or distort our lives and



joy in the world, and no one really wants them unless they have chosen them for spiritual reasons. They come anyway. They come to everyone even those not at all concerned about their life in the spirit. We need to offer them to God, and accept them as they are. There is great and holy merit in doing this. Never lose the chance to offer your illnesses and sufferings to God, in union with Christ on the cross. That said, we certainly can try to minimize them, or be healed from them, as we all have the right to life and to strive to improve our lives in the world.

The dark night of the spirit is much worse than that of the flesh. Included in this night are all of the negative things that happen to us in the spirit. Depression, anxiety, failure, hopelessness, frustration, difficult children, unhappy marriages, and the list can go on and on. Everyone goes through these too. So many people have no clue that God uses these things to perfect us.

What is perfection? It is Jesus Christ. Pure, and simple. To be like Him. To serve Him. To love Him. We all need to seek perfection, that is Jesus, and we all can do it in our own way. We are blessed in the Church in that we can follow Jesus the way he established that we should. Catholics are among those to whom much has been given, Our Lady has said in recent apparitions. And to whom much is given much is expected.

Jesus allows us to move in our own way and exercise our own wills in the things of life. We, each and every one of us, will be judged on the decisions we make and how we relate to those around us and to God. The dark nights can help us reach God. He uses them to influence our thinking. If we are concerned about God and loving Him we can offer them to God and gain great merit from doing so. If we are not concerned about God we just suffer, and we might well suffer in this life and worse, in the life to come.

We can influence the dark nights in our life. We can even add to them to gain merit, and that is the real benefit of the sacrifices demanded by our Rule in our lives. Fasting and abstinence, to name two, are 'dark nights' of the flesh. So is dressing modestly, and every other thing we do to live the Rule with commitment. These dark nights of our flesh, as we impose them on ourselves to grow in our Rule, and offer them to God, help us to grow also in our spirit. Without them we will not experience the joys of the spirit. That is a simple fact. In them we will draw from the flesh the strengths we need to grow in the spirit. And we will all face the dark nights of the spirit and must embrace them zealously, to grow in the spirit. And these nights add greatly to our Lenten journey, if we use them, and offer them to God.

The dark nights of the spirit, St. John of the Cross, said

are much worse than the dark nights of the flesh. These dark nights are different for each of us. They embrace a broad base of things. Depression, anxiety, failure, hopelessness, frustration, difficult children, unhappy marriages, broken friendships, unfaithful friends, financial problems, distractions at prayer, feelings our prayers are worthless, and relentless pain due to physical problems. All these things are spiritual things more than physical, and if they are not spiritual we should make them spiritual, and add them to our prayer. Whatever we suffer from these things we can add to them our fasting, abstinence, and living the demands of our Rule. And from these dark nights of the spirit, more even than from the dark nights of the flesh, we learn to put God first, and He helps us to surmount them. Without Him we just won't make it and so many in our world don't. Why do you suppose suicides are up? With Him we cannot fail.

Fortunately, the dark nights in our lives will end. Obviously they will all end when we die, and we all die. But for those living in the spirit they end when we draw into a closer relationship with God, through prayer and living our Faith to the full, and begin to understand that we must suffer to be like Christ and merit heaven by God's goodness, not our own. Then they can even become joy for us, as we suffer for Christ. Hence all the authors on prayer—and St. Theresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross were two of the greatest—say the dark nights end when we enter into deep prayer. When we grow in prayer. Our prayer overcomes all in our lives that is negative, in the flesh, and in the spirit, even though we might have to suffer with these things all of our life. Especially contemplative prayer brings this peace and mystical delights, as God wills.

So this Lent offer these dark nights to God with your other Lenten sacrifices and prayers. Accept them at face value and don't fret over them. Realize that by making a sacrifice of them to God you please God, and He will strengthen you and may even shower you with mystical favors. These same favors that the Saints received as they moved through their lives. Which Saint have you ever read about that did not do penance and pray? Usually at great length, and that was certainly true in the life of St. Francis, who abandoned the world, gave away his wealth, and lived in absolute poverty and among the poor, not to mention that he suffered many physical ailments. Yet these same Saints, when they passed through the dark nights of their lives, were showered with mystical favors, dreams, visions, joy, ecstasy, and in the case of St. Francis even the stigmata.

Have a holy and happy Lent.

May the Lord bless and lead us all.

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



## Be Not Afraid

### by Janet Klasson, BSP



From the Lenten Gospel readings

**While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!' When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, 'Get up and do not be afraid.' And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.**

(Mt 17:5-8)

**Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.' When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'** (Jn 11:39-44)

### Purification

It seems that each day we have further proof that God will at nothing to purify his Bride. As incredibly painful as it is, we can only be grateful. Archbishop Chaput wisely said during a recent Synod: *"We also need to thank God for the gift of this present, difficult moment. Because conflict always does two things: It purifies the church, and it clarifies the character of the enemies who hate her."*

I have been thinking again of Fr. Altier's words which I paraphrased last June. He said that **when Jesus cleared the temple, he cleaned like a man, moving only the big stuff. But now His Mother is doing the cleaning, and she cleans like a woman, getting in all the corners!** Yes, God's Bride has been sullied and trampled upon, but He will wash her clean, dress her in the finest robes, anoint her head with perfumed oil.

We were shocked recently by the revelations of sexual abuse by a man often referred to as a living saint. Jean Vanier (who died in May 2019) was founder of the international network of L'Arche communities, which serves and cares for people with intellectual disabilities. Now he has been found to have abused at least six adult women (non-disabled) under the guise of spiritual direction. Lord have mercy, what a horror! The damage and suffering he has caused not just to his victims, but also to those who have given their lives to serve the L'Arche core members, and the Church as a whole, is grave indeed. Those affected are greatly in need of our compassion and prayers. There is a cautionary theme here, let us be careful not to canonize anyone ahead of time—only God knows the secrets of the heart. May our gracious Lord have mercy on his soul.

It can be no coincidence that this recent crisis involves an ark, "l'arche" in French. It brings to mind two other times an ark was present when the Lord renewed the world. We recall the time ushered in by Noah and his

Ark, and most gloriously, the era of Redemption ushered in by Our Lady, the Ark of the New Covenant. There are no coincidences with God, the purification is underway—of the Church and the world.

### Hope

Always we remember that we are people of the **Good News**. The message of the Gospel is always, **Be not afraid!** We have countless reasons for hope. Here I list but a few.

The scripture passages above show us that God is in charge, no matter how things appear. In the first passage Peter, James, and John witness—just days before the crucifixion—the glory of Jesus, Son of God. Jesus wanted to give them, and us, a glorious ray of light to dispel the darkness that was to follow.

The second scripture passage above presents a more pithy lesson: When something seems to have died, even if there is a great stench, we need to do all we can to ignore what our senses tell us, maintain our trust in God, and wait in joyful hope for him to do something spectacular! Pray, "Jesus I trust in you." Pray it until you mean it!

Our Lord has indeed given us countless consolations and graces for the times we are in. Who can forget this passage from the diary of St. Faustina:

*1791 "When a great storm was approaching, I began to say the chaplet (of Divine Mercy). Suddenly I heard the voice of an angel: "I cannot approach in this storm, because the light which comes from her mouth drives back both me and the storm." Such was the angel's complaint to God. I then recognized how much havoc he was to have made through this storm; but I also recognized that this prayer was pleasing to God, and that this chaplet was most powerful."*

A great sign of hope is our own Rule. As penitents, we have been exercising our spiritual muscle through the Rule of 1221, some of us for decades. With St. Francis as our personal trainer we understand better than many how no suffering is wasted when it is linked to the cross. Standing with Mary at the foot of the cross we are learning to say *fiat* to all that comes as we ponder all these things in our hearts.

The Office of Readings, which many of us read daily, always has very beautiful words of encouragement. On February 21 the second reading was from a letter by St. Peter Damian, titled "Let us rejoice in the joy that follows sadness". Here are a few passages:

*"Consolation is already within your reach, if your good sense has not been dulled. My son, come to the service of God. Stand in justice and fear. Prepare your soul; it is about to be tested. These words of Scripture show that you are a son of God and, as such, should take possession of your inheritance. What could be clearer than this exhortation?"*

*"But for God's chosen ones there is great comfort; the torment lasts but a short time. Then God bends down, cradles the fallen figure, whispers words of consolation. With hope in his heart, man picks himself up and walks again toward the glory of happiness in heaven." [...]*

*"Therefore, my brother, scorned as you are by men, lashed as it were by God, do not despair. Do not be depressed. Do not let your weakness make you impatient. Instead, let the serenity of your spirit shine through your face. Let the joy of your mind burst forth. Let words of thanks break from your lips." [...]*

*"The Scriptures reassure us: let your understanding strengthen your patience. In serenity look forward to the joy that follows sadness. Hope leads you to that joy and love enkindles your zeal. The well-prepared mind forgets the suffering inflicted from without and glides eagerly to what it has contemplated within itself."*

### **The Twenty-Four Hours of the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ**

Another very powerful grace, especially during Lent, and one well-suited to penitents, is "The Twenty-Four Hours of the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ" by Servant of God, Luisa Piccarreta. The writings are based on the experiences Luisa had as a teenager when Jesus invited her to continue giving Him uninterrupted company during the twenty-four hours of His Sorrowful Passion and death. This document was written under obedience to her confessor, (now Saint) Annibale di Francia, was given its first *nihil obstat* and *imprimatur* in 1915 and it has been in continual use since.

Here is an excerpt from his Preface to the book:

*"To 'do' an Hour of the Passion means to read it*

*attentively, meditating on it, contemplating it, making it one's own life... It is not just remembering and compassionating the sufferings of Jesus as something that happened many centuries ago in a far away place; but rather, it is, first of all, to enter into the Divine Will, in which everything is present and in act, and to participate in the interior acts and sufferings of Our Lord, which are present and in act at this precise moment, so as to repeat His life within us, to grow in His likeness, and to pour upon everyone the infinite value, merits and effects of His Passion.*

*"Jesus Himself explains this very important difference: 'To repeat my Passion in act in the creature, is different from one who only thinks of my pains and compassionates them. The first is an act of my Life, which takes my place in order to repeat my pains, and I feel I am given back the effects and the value of a Divine Life; while in thinking of my pains and in compassionating Me, it is only the company of the creature that I feel. But do you know in whom I can repeat my pains, in act, of my Passion? In one who has my Will as center of life.' (October 24, 1925 Vol. 18)*

*"One can comprehend, then, how the Hours of the Passion are not just a reading, and not even a devotion, but a formation of life: the interior life of Jesus. In this way, day after day, we will feel more and more that Jesus is truly living in us - not just our life, but His very Divine Life."*

Praying the Hours comes with many graces and blessings. From a letter of Luisa to her extraordinary Confessor:

*"...The satisfaction that blessed Jesus receives from the meditation of these Hours is so great, that He would want at least one copy of these meditations to be present and practiced in each city or town. In fact, it would happen, then, as if Jesus heard His own voice and His prayers being reproduced in those reparations, just as the ones He raised to His Father during the 24 hours of His sorrowful Passion. And if this were done in each town or city at least, by as many souls, Jesus seems to make me understand that Divine Justice would be placated in part, and in these sad times of torments and bloodshed, Its scourges would be stopped, in part, and as though dampened. I let you, reverend Father, make appeal to all; may you complete, in this way, the little work that my lovable Jesus had me do..."*

Jesus wants everyone to accompany him in his Passion, especially through this prayer done in the Divine Will. Luisa goes on to say in her letter that the main purpose of the Hours is to offer reparation to Jesus. The entire letter may be found as a preface by St. Annibale in the book he published.

The Hours may be prayed in several ways, St. Annibale explains, either individually or shared in groups where

each person prays one or more of the hours. The important thing, the critical thing I would say, is to enter into His Will and pray them as your duties allow. (Note: each "hour" represents a time-frame of the passion and not an actual 60-minute period.)

"The 24 hours of the Passion" may be purchased at <http://www.comingofthekingdom.org/store-2/volumes/> or ordered by phone: 1-423-566-5178. Or it may be downloaded here: [https://www.queenofthedivinewill.org/wp-](https://www.queenofthedivinewill.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/The-24-Hours-of-the-Passion-Of-Our-Lord-Jesus-Christ.pdf)

[content/uploads/2017/11/The-24-Hours-of-the-Passion-Of-Our-Lord-Jesus-Christ.pdf](https://www.queenofthedivinewill.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/The-24-Hours-of-the-Passion-Of-Our-Lord-Jesus-Christ.pdf) (196 pages). This document also lists the effects of the Hours beginning on page 10 with excerpts from Luisa's writings.

May our merciful Jesus grant us increased faith, courage, and strength to stand with Our Mother and the other saints at the foot of the cross as we anticipate in certain hope of the day of resurrection. *Fiat!*

*Janet Klasson BSP, Divine Mercy Chapter, Canada*



## FROM THE 'SPARROW' The Wounds of Our Lady...



Peace to all of the little sparrows as we move into this Lenten season. Some thoughts that quite naturally always come up during this season are the "wounds of Jesus Christ", i.e., the stigmata. When a Franciscan thinks on these wounds they are led to think about the visual stigmata that was recorded for the first time in Church history with regard to St. Francis of Assisi. There seems not to be any other visual stigmatic occurrences before him as was recorded in the early thirteenth century. Before we travel along our little "sparrow trail" of imaginative adventure let us first introduce some contextual facts from the Catholic Dictionary on this subject:

*"STIGMATA (Greek word meaning "marks"). Wounds or scars, corresponding to those in the hands, feet, side and brow of the crucified Christ, imprinted in the flesh of a human being and accompanied by physical pain; they may be recurrent or permanent; sometimes there is the local suffering without visible marks. [...] With some few exceptions the best known "stigmatizes" were either friars, nuns, or of a tertiary of one of the mendicant orders. The first, most famous and one of the best substantiated cases of the stigmata was that of St. Francis of Assisi. [...] It appears then that God singles out certain noble souls to be united more closely with the sufferings of His Son, souls who are willing in a peculiarly fitting way to expiate the sins of others."*

The best-known person in our era to have exhibited the stigmata was the beloved Franciscan Friar, St. Padre Pio. He bore the invisible stigmata for a number of years before he received and bore the visible wounds for 50 years! Before his death on September 23, 1968, the stigmata was visually recognizable and photographed numerous times by many people. There is no question about the historical existence of those who bore the visible stigmata.

It was in meditation, with further inquiry about the "invisible stigmata" and the history thereof—or should it be said the lack of the history—that has led to an open-mindedness that has produced (in this sparrow) a spiritual theory that cannot be proved or disproved...the only thing possible is to share it with fellow sparrows and "let the feathers fall where they may."

As previously stated above the recorded history of the physical stigmata is in evidence in Church and historical records. Not so in instances of the invisible stigmata. In fact, there is disputed evidence that those with the invisible stigmata may have pre-dated the thirteenth century appearances as far back as the first century and the time of the apostles. One of the most controversial examples is found in Scripture in Galatians:

**I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. And I live, now not I; but Christ lived in me. [...]**

**May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. [...]**

**From now on, let no one make trouble for me; for I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body. (Gal. 2:19-20; 6:14, 17)**

Theologians have debated St. Paul's intentions and meaning. One school of thought states that Paul was describing his physical and emotional suffering hyperbolically in these rather comparative stark terms that alludes to the sufferings of Jesus. Yet, another school has taken these words of Paul in a literal sense and they imply that Paul actually may have had the real physical stigmata or at the very least been subjected to the invisible stigmata. Which school of thought is right

is beyond the purview of this humble sparrow. Yet it presents, in either event, a further inquiry of Scripture which presents to us a sublime meditation on Our Lady.

The writer of the Gospel of Luke openly addresses the "wounds" that Our Lady would endure through the life and death of Her Son when he wrote:

**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—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.'** (Luke 2:34-35)

The above is the first citation of Mary's suffering and wounds, found in the Infancy Narrative in Scripture. The next instance of this suffering and possible wounds came 33 years later at the crucifixion of Jesus wherein St. John relates to us that:

**Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.** (Jn 19:25)

Our Lady was present at the crucifixion. Let us stop here for a moment and examine our own feelings, whether paternal or maternal, should we have witnessed a similar violent act done to one of our own children. It has been attested to from many parents of injured, hurt, or wounded children of their own that in

some way they could feel in their own bodies and interior soul the same torment their child was undergoing. All one has to do is witness the pain-filled eyes and anguished souls of the parents to realize the intensity and depth of the suffering that they seemingly share with their child.

How much more was the suffering of Our Lady as she looked on with tear-filled eyes, as she heard the cruel hammer strike the nails that not only drove literally through Our Lord's flesh but at the same instant in a mystical way drove through the Mother of Mercy's body! Those standing with her at Calvary could only see the wounds of Jesus. Yet was hers another set of invisible stigmata that existed then and still exist to this very day in Our Lady of Sorrows as she continues to coax and encourage us to follow her Son?

May we this Lent keep in our minds and hearts the motherly love and concern Our Lady has for all the children of her Son's Church.

*"In the church of the Virgin Mother of God, therefore, her servant Francis made his devout delay, and he implored her insistently with continuous sighs--she who conceived the Word full of grace and truth, that she might deign to become his advocate; and through the merits of the Mother of Mercy, he himself conceived and gave birth to the spirit of evangelical truth. –St. Bonaventure, Major Life, III:i*

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.)



## LENTEN LETTER TO THE ST. ANTHONY CHAPTER By Brother Christopher O'Donnell, BSP, Minister February 26, 2020, Ash Wednesday



Dearest brothers and sisters,

*Pax et Bonum*—'Peace and All Good!' Today begins a great season of grace for those of us who have been called to the way of penance. These forty-six days are ones that can be used to great efficacy in our spiritual journey if we make the proper use of them with the right disposition. If our patron and spiritual father Saint Francis of Assisi has taught us anything it is that our life as Christians must possess both CLARITY and CHARITY. This is simply the way and manner in which our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ lived and taught and Saint Paul summarized this principle when he taught the Christians at Ephesus that *"living the truth in love, we should grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ"* [Eph. 4:15]. We must *"live the*

*truth"*—that is, clarity—"in love"—that is, charity; thus, clarity and charity should permeate everything that we do as Franciscans.

Normally, each Lent we focus all of our attention and energies upon the 'three good works' of deeper, more frequent PRAYER, deeds of loving service and ALMSGIVING, and the discipline of FASTING and abstinence [cf. Mt. 6:1-8, 16-18]. This is a wonderful testimony to our life as penitents and should be embraced and lived zealously. At the same time, this Lent I would like to draw us a little deeper into the intimacy of the Trinitarian life as I believe Saint Francis would continually exhort us to. For, ultimately, what is the purpose of all our penitential acts if not to serve as

means to enter more fully into the heart of our God? My humble appeal to all of you in conscience and faith, as beloved brothers and sisters, is that we seek, this Lent, to really surrender our lives to God more radically than we have ever done before. One way of helping us to do this lies in that simple catchphrase I mentioned above: clarity and charity.

The Christian life is grounded in truth—the Truth that is the Word of God himself who entered into our human condition incarnately to share our lives side by side with us and ‘from within’ by the power of the Spirit, so as to enable us to be reconciled with the Father and enter into the eternal life of love with Him forever. We cannot ever, as Catholics (and Franciscans), act “*deceitfully...falsifying the word of God*” [2 Cor. 4:2b] or, in any way, obscure the teachings of the Gospel which is “*the word of truth*” [Col. 1:5]. Our Lord said to us explicitly that “*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*” [Jn. 14:6]. If we believe that this is true that we must fully embrace the public proclamation of our Lord and recognize that “*it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes*” [Rom. 1:16b] so that we desire to make it known to all “*by the open declaration of the truth we commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God*” [2 Cor. 4:2c]. Thus, we must always possess CLARITY by speaking the truth openly, without embarrassment, in its totality. The words we speak are not our own but our Master’s and the world needs to hear that divine message, whole and unadulterated.

At the same time because the Truth is a Person, the eternal Son of the Father and Word of God, and “*God is Love*” [1 Jn.], then Truth is also God’s Love, for He, being utterly simple, has no parts of attributes—everything we say of God is infinitely true of Him. So God’s Love is His Truth which is His beauty which is His being! It is all the same reality simply viewed from a different, limited human perspective. Thus as Saint Paul teaches, “*love...does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth*” [1 Cor. 13:6]. Truth and love can never be divorced but our love is always grounded in the truth and the truth is simply a manifestation of our love. We can never, in the name of a false compassion or sentimentality, do something out of ‘love’ that violates the ‘truth.’ However, in living and speaking the truth, we must do so from the heart and not from a place of judgment or pity or anger or self-righteousness for this will never accomplish the will of God. Instead we are to “*conduct ourselves wisely towards outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let our speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that we may know how we should respond to each*

*one*” [Col. 4:5-6]. In other words, come to each person as an individual made in the image and likeness of God, with their own story and history, and desire to lead them closer to Christ out of a sense of love. One can say all the correct things but in a manner and a demeanor that does not come from a place of concern for the other person but from our pride and the message will fall flat. Being candid, just ‘telling it like it is’, is the most certain way to stifle the work of the Spirit and to cause one to regress even further from God and His holy Catholic Church.

Instead, we must be prepared to truly embrace the Cross. We surrender absolutely our own agenda, concerns, and desires in order to “*become all things to all, to save at least some*” [1 Cor. 9:22b]. This is the model we also see in our seraphic father, Saint Francis of Assisi. Only when he put aside his prejudices and fears in order to embrace the leper as a brother was he changed. Are we willing to walk with those who are sinners, with little baby steps, to draw them piece by piece into the arms of Christ? Will we embrace those who reject our faith, ridicule our hope, and mock the love we offer? Can we set aside our own ways of living the faith and see in others differing ways a response from the heart to the same God and with the same faith? In other words, are we willing to really try to ‘be Christ’ rather than simply talking about what he did. Saint Francis had this harsh word to speak to those who did not get their own hands dirty in the work of the Kingdom:

*“Look at the Good Shepherd, my brothers. To save His sheep He endured the agony of the Cross. They followed Him in trials and persecutions, in ignominy, hunger, and thirst, in humiliations and temptations, and so on. And for this God rewarded them with eternal life. We ought to be ashamed of ourselves; the saints endured all that, but we who are servants of God try to win honor and glory by recounting and making known what they have done.” –Adm. #6*

We claim that we are the sons and daughters of the Poverello. Are we living up to that lineage or have we, against our founder’s express wishes, simply recounting the glory that God accomplished in his life but not entering fully into the Spirit-filled life in Christ? As Franciscans, we must become the ‘church on the borders’ and those who go boldly into the margins to bring the love of God into the darkness of so many lives. Our Holy Father Pope Francis, in his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, ‘The Joy of the Gospel’, has reaffirmed these common themes of Franciscan life and spirituality. We must always be on guard against “spiritual worldliness” which, though appearing pious and loyal to the Church, really

"consists in not seeking the Lord's glory but human glory and personal well-being" [EG 93]. The Holy Father teaches that:

*"This worldliness can be fuelled in two deeply interrelated ways. One is the attraction of Gnosticism, a purely subjective faith whose only interest is a certain experience or set of ideas and bits of information which are meant to console and enlighten, but which ultimately keep one imprisoned in his or her own thoughts and feelings. The other is the self-absorbed promethean neopelagianism of those who ultimately trust only in their own powers and feel superior to others because they observe certain rules or remain intransigently faithful to a particular Catholic style from the past. A supposed soundness of doctrine or discipline leads instead to a narcissistic and authoritarian elitism, whereby instead of evangelizing, one analyzes and classifies others, and instead of opening the door to grace, one exhausts his or her energies in inspecting and*

*verifying. In neither case is one really concerned about Jesus Christ or others. These are manifestations of an anthropocentric immanentism. It is impossible to think that a genuine evangelizing thrust could emerge from these adulterated forms of Christianity."* -EG 94

Let us not be 'counter-witnesses' to the Gospel but, as Saint Francis described himself, 'Heralds of the Great King,' who seek to proclaim the truth of Christ in joy and compassion and so draw all near to the throne of grace. Do not be afraid to get your hands dirty for the Lord! This Lent, brothers and sisters, be sure to pray more frequently and more intimately, be certain to learn that there is more to life than eating drinking through fasting, and always give generously in almsgiving but this Lent, I beg of you, surrender your whole hearts to Trinity so that, like Francis, you will truly be filled with the divine joy and peace which the world cannot give!

Pax et Bonum!

Brother Christopher O'Donnell, BSP, Minister, Saint Anthony chapter

## 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.

Remember that you are dust...

...and to dust you shall return.

# 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*



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