

FRANCISCAN JOURNEY Additional Readings - Chapter 2

Praises of St. Francis - Bernard of Besse, St Francis of Assisi - The Prophet - Vol 3 Page 63-65

The following theme now concerns a vocation. But it has been proved that this religion, accepted by God, to which He calls people by means of a special sign, and which He first founded on perfect men as though on holy mountains, He adorned with most illustrious people as though with polished stones. Bishops, abbots, archdeacons, and established Masters of Theology entered the Order. So too did princes, nobles, and innumerable others who were noted for their dignity, their nobility, and their knowledge. They were the flower of nobility and learning. If an example is needed, we can omit all others and take Brother Alexander who is remembered to have been the greatest cleric or theologian in the world at that time. There was also Lord John, a soldier valiant in arms, a king and an emperor. He became a brother when he was emperor, in order that the Lord might fulfill the prophesy in Francis: I will go before you and humble the great men of the earth.

Who could count the number of brothers of the Order, who were approved and celebrated Doctors of Theology? We should not be silent in our praise for Christ who exalted the humble and wonderfully saw to it that just as a soldier of great dignity and goodness was found in the Order of Minors, so too there was found a very great Master of Philosophy and Theology who was also a great preacher. He was Brother John de La Rochelle who was renowned for his reverence for God, for his knowledge, and for his discernment. He possessed such talent that he added to the subtlety of his teachers and handed down the art and the excellent ways of preaching, and of lecturing in the Faculty of Theology. Both he and Brother Alexander were the authors of formal and useful writings.

After him there came the venerable Father, Brother Odo Rigaldi, who was illustrious in birth but more so in character. He was a Master of Theology, Archbishop of Rouen, and a most famous preacher. He was urged to become a member of the Curia and, just as he was illustrious for his life and teaching before in the Order, so now he was so excellent in guidance that he was considered a model for prelates.

The Second Order founded by blessed Francis is that of virgins and continent married women, whose proposal is to serve God in the enclosure, in perpetual silence, and in mortifying the flesh. The first member of this Order was the blessed Clare, a most devout disciple of blessed Francis. Seeing them living in a most holy way according to his teaching under the profession of the most exalted poverty, he promised her and the other women professing poverty in a similar way of life his counsel and assistance and that of the other brothers. Blessed Clare and her monastery have always observed this same proposal of poverty up to the present day.

The Third Order is of the Brothers and Sisters of Penance, shared by clerics, laity, virgins, widows, and married couples. Their purpose is to live uprightly in their own homes, to devote their attention to works of piety, and to flee the world's allurements. Therefore, you might see among them nobles, and even knights, and other people great in the world's estimation, dressed in proper cloaks of black fur, humble in both their clothing and mounts, so modestly associating with the indigent, that you would not doubt they are truly God-fearing. From the beginning a brother was assigned to them as a minister, but now, in each region, they are released to their ministers, but who, as confreres begotten by the same father, are still encouraged by the brothers with counsel and assistance.

In composing the rules or forms of living for their Order, Lord Pope Gregory of holy memory, at that time in a lesser capacity, united with blessed Francis through an intimate closeness, devoutly supplied what the holy man lacked in knowledgeable judgment. But not content with just these Orders, the saint was busy giving to every class of people a way of penance and salvation. One time when a parish priest told him that he wanted to be his brother while still retaining the church, after he gave him a way of living and acting, he is said to have told him that each year, when the income of the church had been collected, he should give for God whatever was left over from the preceding year.

Thus the Lord *made* his servant, Francis, grow *into a great nation*,
thus He gave him the blessing of all nations.

Legend of the Three Companions, St. Francis of Assisi - The Founder - Vol 2
Chapter III - Page 71-74

Chapter III

HOW THE LORD VISITED FRANCIS'S HEART FOR THE FIRST TIME
FILLING IT WITH MARVELOUS TENDERNESS THAT GAVE HIM STRENGTH
TO BEGIN TO PROGRESS SPIRITUALLY IN LOOKING DOWN ON HIMSELF
AND ALL VANITIES,
IN PRAYER, ALMSGIVING, AND POVERTY

A few days after he returned to Assisi, one evening his friends chose him to be in charge so that, according to his whim, he would pay their expenses. He made arrangements for a sumptuous banquet, as he had done so often in the past.

When they left the house bloated, his friends walked ahead of him, singing throughout the city. Holding in his hand the scepter of his office as their leader, he fell slightly behind them.¹ He was not singing, but was deeply preoccupied. Suddenly he was visited by the Lord who filled his heart with so much tenderness that he was unable to speak or move. He could only feel and hear this marvelous tenderness; it left him so estranged from any sensation that, as he himself said later, even if he had been completely cut to pieces, he would not have been able to move.

When his companions glanced back and saw him so removed from them, they went back surprised at seeing him already *changed into another man*.^{1 Sm 10:6} They asked him: "What were you thinking about that you did not follow us? Were you perhaps thinking about taking a wife?"

He answered in an unequivocal voice: "You are right! **I was thinking about taking a wife more noble, wealthier, and more beautiful than you have ever seen.**" *They laughed at him.* For he said this not of his own accord, but because he was inspired by God. In fact, the bride was the true religion that he later embraced, a bride more noble, richer and more beautiful because of her poverty.

From that very hour **he began to consider himself of little value** and to despise those things **which he had previously held in love**. Since he was not entirely detached from worldly vanities, this change was not yet perfect. **He retired for a short time from the tumult and business of the world and was anxious to keep Jesus Christ in his inmost self**, and, *after selling all he had*, he desired to buy *the pearl*, **concealing it from the eyes of mockers**. Often, almost daily, he withdrew secretly to pray. He was inclined to do so by that same tenderness he had tasted earlier, which now visited him ever more frequently, driving him to prayer in the piazza and in other public places.

Although he had been for some time a benefactor of the poor, **he proposed in his heart**, from then on, **never to deny** alms to any poor person **begging from him for God's sake**, but rather to give more willingly and abundantly than usual. When away from home, if he could, he always gave money to any poor person requesting alms. If he had no money, he gave him his hat or belt, making sure never to send him away empty-handed. If he lacked even these things, he would go to a deserted place, take off his shirt, and give it to the poor man, begging him to take it for the love of God. He would even purchase furnishings for adorning churches, and would secretly send them to poor priests.

When his father was away and he was at home alone with his mother, although only two of them took their meals, he filled the table with loaves of bread as if he were preparing for an entire family. When his mother asked why he put so much food on the table, he answered that it would be *given as alms* for the poor, since he had resolved to give to anyone begging alms for God's sake. Because his mother loved him more than the other children, she tolerated him in such matters, noticing the things he did and admiring in his heart many more.

For he was so accustomed to setting his heart on joining his companions when they called him, and was so captivated by their company, that he would frequently leave the table even if he had eaten only a little. In this way he would upset his parents by his thoughtless flight. Now, however, his whole heart was intent on seeing the poor, listening to them, and giving them alms.

He was so changed by divine grace that, although he was still in secular attire, he yearned to be in another city where, as someone unknown, he would take off his own clothes and, in exchange, put on the rags of a poor man. And he would try begging alms for the love of God.

At this time he happened to go to Rome on pilgrimage. As he was entering the church of Saint Peter, he noticed the meager offerings made by some, and said to himself: "Since the Prince of the Apostles should be greatly honored, why do they make such meager offerings in the church where his body rests?" With great enthusiasm, he took a handful of coins from his money pouch, and threw them through a grating of the altar, making such a loud noise that all the bystanders were astonished at his generosity.

As he was leaving and passed the doors of the church, where there were many poor people begging alms, he secretly exchanged clothes with one of those poor people and put them on. Standing on the steps of the church with the other poor, he begged for alms in French, because he would speak French spontaneously, although he did not do so correctly.

After taking off the beggar's clothes and putting on his own, he returned to Assisi, and began to pray that the Lord would direct his way. He did not share his secret with anyone; nor did he seek counsel from anyone, except from God alone, and, periodically, from the bishop of Assisi. For at that time no one possessed the real poverty that he desired more than anything else in this world, in which he yearned to live and die.

***Deus Caritas Est* – Pope Benedict XVI – Paragraph 19**

When we consider the immensity of others' needs, we can, on the one hand, be driven towards an ideology that would aim at doing what God's governance of the world apparently cannot: fully resolving every problem. Or we can be tempted to give in to inertia, since it would seem that in any event nothing can be accomplished. At such times, a living relationship with Christ is decisive if we are to keep on the right path, without falling into an arrogant contempt for man, something not only unconstructive but actually destructive, or surrendering to a resignation which would prevent us from being guided by love in the service of others. Prayer, as a means of drawing ever new strength from Christ, is concretely and urgently needed. People who pray are not wasting their time, even though the situation appears desperate and seems to call for action alone. Piety does not undermine the struggle against the poverty of our neighbours, however extreme. In the example of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta we have a clear illustration of the fact that time devoted to God in prayer not only does not detract from effective and loving service to our neighbour but is in fact the inexhaustible source of that service. In her letter for Lent 1996, Blessed Teresa wrote to her lay co-workers: "We need this deep connection with God in our daily life. How can we obtain it? By prayer".

It is time to reaffirm the importance of prayer in the face of the activism and the growing secularism of many Christians engaged in charitable work. Clearly, the Christian who prays does not claim to be able to change God's plans or correct what he has foreseen. Rather, he seeks an encounter with the Father of Jesus Christ, asking God to be present with the consolation of the Spirit to him and his work. A personal relationship with God and an abandonment to his will can prevent man from being demeaned and save him from falling prey to the teaching of fanaticism and terrorism. An authentically religious attitude prevents man from presuming to judge God, accusing him of allowing poverty and failing to have compassion for his creatures. When people claim to build a case against God in defence of man, on whom can they depend when human activity proves powerless? The Spirit is also the energy which transforms the heart of the ecclesial community, so that it becomes a witness before the world to the love of the Father, who wishes to make humanity a single family in his Son. The entire activity of the Church is an expression of a love that seeks the integral good of man: it seeks his evangelization through Word and Sacrament, an undertaking that is often heroic in the way it is acted out in history; and it seeks to promote man in the various arenas of life and human activity. Love is therefore the service that the Church carries out in order to attend constantly to man's sufferings and his needs, including material needs. And this is the aspect, this service of charity, on which I want to focus in the second part of the Encyclical.

Acts 15:3-23 (RSV2CE)

The Council at Jerusalem

So, being sent on their way by the Church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, reporting the conversion of the Gentiles, and they gave great joy to all the brethren. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the Church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up, and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the law of Moses."

The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. And after there had been much debate, Peter rose and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God who knows the heart bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us; and he made no distinction between us and them, but cleansed their hearts by faith. Now therefore why do you make trial of God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will."

And all the assembly kept silence; and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. After they finished speaking, James replied, "Brethren, listen to me. Symeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, as it is written,

After this I will return,
and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen;
I will rebuild its ruins,
and I will set it up,
that the rest of men may seek the Lord,

and all the Gentiles who are called by my name,
says the Lord, who has made these things known from of old.'

Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the pollutions of idols and from unchastity and from what is strangled and from blood. For from early generations Moses has had in every city those who preach him, for he is read every sabbath in the synagogues."

The Council's Letter to the Gentile Believers

Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole Church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, with the following letter: "The brethren, both the apostles and the elders, to the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greeting.