

Francis and Franciscan Spirituality – Poverty & Joy – Wm. Short, OFM – pp 30-32

To understand Franciscan spirituality we must begin with the spirituality of Francis himself, *il Poverello*, ‘the little poor man’ of Assisi. And to begin, we may again use some remarks from Martial Lekeux:

*The life of the Poverello may seem more cheerful and more peaceful than that of some of the other saints. But the truth is that he was the saint of excesses: excess in sacrifice, excess in love: and it was by reason of his excesses that he held to the happy medium, because his disregard for moderation worked both ways, just as a scale insures better equilibrium the longer it is on both sides.

Francis is the saint of excesses and yet he is the saint with a smile, because he always fused the two. For him, penance was love, and sorrow ‘perfect joy.’ Using this standard, folly was wisdom and excess supreme moderation

We must make some sense of this ‘excessive’ saint if we wish to understand the beginnings and the permanent foundation of the Franciscan tradition. But understanding the tradition does not mean stopping with Francis. Otherwise we would have only the spirituality of an individual, not a ‘tradition.’ The word itself, from the Latin word for ‘handing over’, indicates that others received something from Francis. What was it? For his contemporaries, friends, companions, brothers and sisters, it was the experience of knowing Francis himself: he was the message. In a popular expression of the times, he taught them ‘by word and example’ (*verbo et exemplo*). And, by their own testimony, he was for them a living example of what he taught: He edified his listeners by his example as well as his words: ‘he made his whole body a tongue;’ ‘more than someone who prayed, he had become prayer’: these are some of the descriptions of Francis recalled by Thomas of Celano. That is, his whole person had become the message he was trying to communicate.

And what was that message? In a word, it was Jesus. To express it in such simple terms today may seem banal to us, or pious, or quaint. But for Francis, the discovery of Jesus, ‘Our Lord Jesus Christ’, was the ongoing revelation of his whole life in the twenty years after his conversion. In his early years, he discovered Jesus as the one who led him among the lepers, and made their presence ‘sweet’ to him, rather than ‘bitter’. He then discovered Jesus the preacher of conversion, announcing the reign of God. Over the years he began to see more clearly Jesus as the incarnate Son of God at Bethlehem, then as the Suffering Servant on Calvary, and finally, ‘the Lord’ of all things, raised up in glory after his death. And in this Lord, the glorified Son, he also understood the Trinitarian God.

It is through ‘the Lord Jesus Christ’ that Francis understands Mary, the Church, the Scriptures, priesthood, the poor, his brothers and sisters, and all creatures. It is ultimately through and in Jesus that Francis even understands himself. Though he seldom used the title ‘Christ’ by itself to refer to Jesus, his spirituality, and that of the Franciscan tradition after him, has been characterized as ‘Christocentric.’

If there is one word which does complete justice to Franciscan theology and spirituality, it is ‘Christocentric,’ and they have this as their distinguishing feature, because the faith and holiness of St. Francis were totally centered on Christ. In Jesus Christ the revelation is made to us of what the world, as a whole and in all its parts, means to God.

The Anonymous of Perugia – Chapter IV – The Founder – pp 41-42

HOW HE ADMONISHED THE BROTHERS AND SENT THEM THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

Saint Francis, since he was already filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit, predicted what would happen to his brothers. And calling together his six brothers in the woods next to the church of Saint Mary of the Portiuncula where they often went to pray, he told them: “My dear brothers, let us consider our calling because God has mercifully called us not only for our own good but also for the salvation of many. Therefore, let us go through the world, encouraging and teaching men and women by word and example to do penance for their sins and to remember the Lord’s commandments, which they have forgotten for such a long time.”

He also told them: “*Do not be afraid, little flock*, but have confidence in the Lord. And do not say among yourselves ‘We are simple and illiterate men, how should we preach?’ But be mindful of the Lord’s words to his disciples: ‘*You yourselves will not be the speakers; the Spirit of your Father will be speaking in you.*’ For the Lord Himself will give you spirit and wisdom to encourage and preach to men and their wives the way and deeds of the commandments. You will find, however faithful people – meek, humble and kind – who will receive you and your words with joy and love. You will find others – unfaithful, proud, and blasphemous – resisting and criticizing you and your words. Therefore, resolve in your hearts to bear all these things with patience and humility.”

When the brothers heard these words, they were afraid. Realizing that they were frightened, he told them: “Do not be frightened. Keep in mind that within a short time many learned, prudent and noble men will be with us. They will preach to nations and peoples, to kings and princes, and many people will be converted to the Lord. And the Lord will make His family grow and increase throughout the entire world.”

After saying this, Francis blessed them and they went on their way.

Love, Rules and Grace – US Catholic Catechism for Adults – page 318

LOVE, RULES, AND GRACE

Our culture frequently exalts individual autonomy against community and tradition. This can lead to a suspicion of rules and norms that come from a tradition. This can also be a cause of a healthy criticism of a legalism that can arise from concentrating on rules and norms.

Advocates of Christian morality can sometimes lapse into a legalism that leads to an unproductive moralizing. There is no doubt that love has to be the essential foundation of the moral life. But just as essential in this earthly realm are rules and laws that show how love may be applied in real life. In heaven, love alone will suffice. In this world, we need moral guidance from the Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, the Precepts of the Church, and other rules to see how love works.

Love alone, set adrift from moral direction, can easily descend into sentimentality that puts us at the mercy of our feelings. Popular entertainment romanticizes love and tends to omit the difficult demands of the moral order.

In our permissive culture, love is sometimes so romanticized that it is separated from sacrifice. Because of this, tough moral choices cannot be faced. The absence of sacrificial love dooms the possibility of an authentic moral life.

Scripturally and theologically, the Christian moral life begins with a loving relationship with God, a covenant love made possible by the sacrifice of Christ. The Commandments and other moral rules are given to us as ways of protecting the values that foster love of God and others. They provide us with ways to express love, sometimes by forbidding whatever contradicts love.

The moral life requires grace. The *Catechism* speaks of this in terms of life in Christ and the inner presence of the Holy Spirit, actively enlightening our moral compass and supplying the spiritual strength to do the right thing. The grace that comes to us from Christ in the Spirit is as essential as love and rules and, in fact, makes love and keeping the rules possible.

<http://ccc.usccb.org/flipbooks/uscca/#346/z>

Scripture reflection: 1 Timothy 6:3-19

If any one teaches otherwise and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching which accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit, he knows nothing; he has a morbid craving for controversy and for disputes about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, base suspicions, and wrangling among men who are depraved in mind and bereft of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. There is great gain in godliness with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world; but if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs.

But as for you, man of God, shun all this; aim at righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made the good confession in the presence of many

witnesses. In the presence of God who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ; and this will be made manifest at the proper time by the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

As for the rich in this world, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on uncertain riches but on God who richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good deeds, liberal and generous, thus laying up for themselves a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life which is life indeed.