

St. Clare Fraternity

NEWSLETTER

March 2020

Our Council: Arlene Stewart, Minister Tom Brown, Vice
Minister Katie Roberts, Formation Director Maryanne Sheofsky,
Secretary Anne Pennsy, Treasurer Victoria Snyder,
Councilor Brother Mike Tripka, TOR, Spiritual Assistant

Minister's Message

Lent is a time of repentance, fasting and preparation for the coming of Easter. It is a time of self-examination and reflection. To focus on our relationship with God, growing as disciples.

In 1224, St. Francis climbed a remote mountain La Verna for a forty-day fast and spiritual retreat for the feast of St. Michael. On the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, September 14th, while contemplating the passion and death of Christ, St. Francis had a vision of a six-winged Seraphim fixed on a cross and flying towards him. As it came closer, he recognized that it was Jesus with his hands and feet nailed to the cross. St. Francis understood the vision to mean that he himself would be transformed by his seraphic love of God into a perfect image of the crucified Christ. Waking from the vision, St. Francis found he had received Christ's wounds into his very own body, holes in his hands and feet, and a wound in his side. He had received the sacred *stigmata* as a testament to the oneness of spirit he had with Christ, recalling the words of St. Paul, perhaps the Church's first stigmatist, "For I bear on my body the marks of Jesus." (Gal. 6:17) For the next two years until his death, St. Francis bore the stigmata as a sign for all, enduring this painful martyrdom supernaturally manifested in perfect unity with Christ's passion.

St. Francis embraced his sufferings out of love for God and his neighbor. St. Bonaventure quotes him as saying, "Nothing would make me more happy than to have you afflict me with pain and not spare me. Doing your will is consolation enough, and more than enough, for me." It was at this point that the saint composed his "Canticle of Brother Sun," including the line "May thou be praised, my Lord, for those who forgive for the sake of They love and endure infirmity and tribulation." Having trouble walking from the wounds in his feet, and his eyes now nearly blind, the little poor man of Assisi approached death on the evening of October 3, 1226. In recollection of his initial conversion, and in perfect imitation with the poverty and death of the Lord, he asked to be placed naked on the ground in anticipation of his own death. With his dying breaths, St. Francis implored his followers to hold fast to the Gospel and the faith of the Church. With that, he entered into his eternal reward.

In meditating on the life of St. Francis we are reminded of the stages of martyrdom he went through in his life, from renouncing his wealth and possessions, to serving lepers

and the poor, to placing himself in danger by evangelizing Muslims, to suffering through infirmities, to eventually receiving the very wounds of Christ Himself with the stigmata. As much as anyone in the history of the Church, he imaged Christ perfectly. St. Francis believed in a life of sacrifice, poverty, and humility. He lived his whole life out of this great love for the Lord, in imitation of the life of Christ. He also believed that vicarious and redemptive suffering, when offered to God, can be meritorious for the salvation of souls. His concern for the salvation of all souls was central to his life. As members of the Mystical Body of Christ, we are all called to complete what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ and share in His redemptive work, for as Jesus said, “where I am, there shall My servant be also.” (Jn. 12:26) Most High, glorious God enlighten the darkness of my heart and give me true faith, certain hope, and perfect charity, sense and knowledge, Lord, that I may carry out Your holy and true command.

OFS National & Regional News

Summer Seminar “Called to Act With Justice” July 9-12,2020

Speakers: Fr. Christopher Panagoplos, TOR and David Seitz, OFS

This seminar is endorsed by the National Executive Council of the Secular Franciscan Order--USA

St. Clare Fraternity News

The St. Clare Fraternity will host a reception for the newly Confirmed members of St. Cosmas and Damian Parish as well as their families, friends, and parishioners on March 15th following the 11 AM Mass.

It was decided that our Fraternity would purchase a San Damiano Cross for our Meeting Room.

Fraternity members are reminded of the Cluster Meeting on April 25th in Altoona. More details will be given when available.

Fraternity members are encouraged to participate in various Pro-Life Activities such as the Pro-Life Rosary, Spiritual Adoption, and Vigils in Pittsburgh, during the Lenten season. Contact Maria McSteen for more information.

It was decided that we would provide [The Franciscan Journey](#) books to the candidates at Christ the King Manor.

Our Prayer Petitions: *Mary Neal, Jim McNeely, Mike DeFelice, Bill Hough*

FRATERNITY DATES TO REMEMBER

- March 9 Fraternity Meeting Reschini Hall 11:30 am
- March 15 Celebration for Newly Confirmed Members of SSCD Parish
Weinker Hall after the 11:00 AM Mass
- March 16 Candidate Formation after the 9 AM Mass
- March 17 Fun with Friars The Friary Loretto
- March TBA Rosary for Opioid Addiction

Happy March Birthday to:

**4th Margie Meenan 8th Mary Lou
McConnaughey**

Franciscan Holy Days

- March 2 St. Agnes of Prague
- March 9 St. Frances of Rome
- March 24 Blessed Didacus Joseph of Cadiz

Lenten Help from St. Francis of Assisi

Saint Francis of Assisi loved the Ash Wednesday through Holy Saturday Lent so much that he observed two more: the period between Epiphany and Ash Wednesday and later the 40 days before the September 29 feast of Saint Michael the Archangel. Francis sometimes observed these lents at LaVerna, a mountainous retreat in Tuscany, or in similarly isolated spots. In a sense, Francis lived Lent year-round. During these times of prayer, Francis explored the three questions below at deeper and deeper levels.

Who Is God for Me?

We inevitably become like the God whom we worship. Our first Lenten priority, therefore, is prayer to purify our ideas and feelings about our God. That means taking a new look at God's self-revelation in Scripture.

Becoming comfortable with the God described in some parts of Scripture is usually pretty easy. In fact, sometimes this is too easy! Pagans were good at domesticating their

gods and goddesses, making sure that they never required very much of humans. Christians and Jews have sometimes preferred comfort over truth in dealing with the biblical God.

Lectio divina is a good Lenten practice. The prayerful reading of Scripture predates Jesus, but it took on a new importance after him.

In praying this way, Francis of Assisi was simply following Luke's high praise of Jesus' mother: "And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart" (2:19) and "his mother kept all these things in her heart" (2:51b).

Francis once criticized those friars who wished only to know the words of Scripture and interpret them for others. He continued, "And those people are brought to life by the spirit of the divine letter who do not attribute every letter they know, or wish to know, to the body but, by word and example, return them to the most high Lord God to Whom every good belongs" (Admonition VII). Francis gave his Admonitions to the friars during their meetings in Assisi.

We become different people in the course of honest and persevering prayer. By recognizing our previous blind spots and repenting for them, we move closer to being the people God created us to be.

This Lent, can we see more of God's self-revelation in Scripture?

God's Creatures or Competitors?

During his three lents, Francis drew closer to people through prayerfully realizing how much God loves each person.

We sometimes forget this when we encounter one another's sins. The Pharisee praying in the Jerusalem temple recognized the tax collector's sins but not his own (Lk 18:9-12). On the other hand, the tax collector prayed, "O God, be merciful to me a sinner" (18:13). Jesus concludes: "I tell you; the latter went home justified, not the former; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted" (18:14).

Francis told the friars: "Nothing should displease a servant of God except sin. And no matter how another person may sin, if a servant of God becomes disturbed or angry because of this and not because of charity, he is storing up guilt for himself" (Admonition XI).

On another occasion, Francis told the friars: "That person truly loves his enemy who is not hurt by an injury done to him, but, because of love of God, is stung by the sin of his soul. Let him show him love by his deeds" (Admonition IX).

Righteous indignation can be misplaced. It's all too easy to have a short list of people who truly matter to us and a long list of those who don't. How easily we see many people

as competitors instead of recognizing them as women and men created and loved by God! The compassionate deeds of Saint Francis began in prayer and self-denial.

Can we become more compassionate people before Easter?

Who Am I Before God?

Francis once told his friars, “What a person is before God, that he is and no more” (Admonition XIX). We can rightly add, “and no less.”

Telling lies about ourselves is no more virtuous than telling lies about other people. In fact, it is even more dangerous. Jesus came so that we might live in the truth, which, like a candle’s light, shines in every direction.

How we “see” God also determines how we see others and ourselves. Lent would be very dangerous if we allowed it to reinforce a distorted image about God, others and ourselves. Prayer and fasting had apparently made the Pharisee praying in the temple more blind to his own sins.

Honest and persevering prayer will eventually expose all our blind spots, leading us to be more grateful to God and more compassionate toward all God’s creatures, including ourselves.

Can this Lent help us live more integrated lives?

Source: Barbara Beckwith was the managing editor of St. Anthony Messenger for over 30 years. She is a freelance editor now living in Cincinnati, Ohio. <https://www.franciscanmedia.org/lenten-help-from-saint-francis-of-assisi/>