

## **Keeping our focus on Francis**

AN SFO REVIEW - Fr. John Sullivan, ofm - 2002

The reasons for this series of review topics for SFO reflections stem from the fact that we profess to follow and try to absorb the spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi. How can we do this if we do not have frequent reminders of what he stands for, and what he did?

Thomas of Celano, ofm, in his first biography of Francis writes:

“...overflowing with burning charity, he [Francis] set out on the way of full perfection, reached out for the peak of perfect holiness, and saw the goal of all perfection. That is why every order, sex and age finds in him a clear pattern of the teaching of salvation and an outstanding example of holy deeds.”(#90).

Article 12 of the SFO General Constitutions states:

“Gaining inspiration from the example and the writings of St. Francis and, above all, filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit, each day the brothers and sisters faithfully live the great gift which Christ has given: the revelation of the Father.”

And even more pointedly do we find the reminder in Article 40,2: “The candidates are guided to read and meditate on Sacred Scripture, to come to know the person and writings of St. Francis and Franciscan spirituality, and to study the Rule and Constitutions.”

It is our hope that those who use these pages will find “inspiration from the example and writings of St. Francis” and a deeper knowledge of Franciscan spirituality.

In the monthly fraternity meeting, we are called to have ongoing formation. This present material has been developed as one way to answer this need. Our formation needs to reflect both on our SFO Rule with our Constitutions, and on aspects of St. Francis that can encourage us in our developing spiritualities. Hopefully we can review events in Francis’ life and find them not only inspiring and worthy of our admiration, but will then lead to imitation in some way in our personal lives. Francis’ life is always an encouragement, filled with amazement, of what can be done by cooperating with the grace of God as Francis did.

These pages are designed primarily to be used in small group sharing sessions; however, they could be used profitably by someone who is homebound or otherwise unable to gather to share their franciscan faith and vision together. And not all questions need to be used, depending on time.

Only one copy of a set is needed, since the fraternity leadership can make their own copies for their members, as many as they need.

Peace and all that is Good.  
Fr. John Sullivan, ofm - 2002

Here are the topics of these reflection pages of SFO Review titled **Keeping our focus on Francis**

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(There is no particular sequence arrangement that needs to be followed when using these topics.)

RECOMMENDED PROCEDURE FOR USING:

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A month before these discussion guides are to be used in a session of the SFO, enough copies are printed up so that each person can get one. Then at the meeting the month before their use, the guides are distributed (at the end of that meeting).

The SFO members are then asked to prepare for next month's session by reading through this new material and prayerfully reflecting on the questions during the coming month, and to bring this paper back with them to the next meeting.

In this way the SFO members will be prepared for the coming month's sharing time at the meeting, as well as benefit from thinking about this aspect of their franciscan calling at different times during the month.

- Fr. John S.

*Text Code References found on these pages:*

Omnibus [of Sources]- Franciscan Press; Quincy,IL

FA-1: Francis of Assisi,Vol.1; 1999, New City Press.

FA-2: Francis of Assisi,Vol.2; 2000, New City Press

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## SFO POVERTY

A1

have on hand: *SFO Rule; Catechism of Catholic Church.*

Begin with: *Today we spend a few minutes reviewing some of our understanding of poverty, one of the very prominent virtues of St. Francis of Assisi. (Today we're also covering from the SFO Rule - Articles 10,11,12.)*

Our Opening Prayer: taken from the memorial Mass of St. Elizabeth of Hungary (*Patroness of the whole SFO*):

**Father, you helped St. Elizabeth of Hungary to recognize and honor Christ in the poor of this world.**

**Let her prayers help us to serve our brothers and sisters in time of trouble and need.**

**May we follow the example of St. Elizabeth who worshiped you with love and served your people with generosity.**

**We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

A. Let's look at the **SFO Rule** as a reminder (*have participants take turns reading aloud each of them*):

art.4a - art.7a - art.10 - art.11 - art.12 -

POOR in Christ – We remember that Francis was called the little poor one, “Il Poverello”.

- To quote Francis' friar biographer Thomas of Celano

(I-Celano;chap.28,par.76):

“The father of the poor, the poor Francis, conforming himself to the poor in all things, was distressed to see anyone poorer than himself, not out of any desire for empty glory, but from a feeling of simple compassion. Though he was content with a ragged and rough tunic, he often wished to divide it with some poor person.

“This richest poor man, moved by a great feeling of pity, in order to help the poor in some way, used to approach the

rich people of this world during the coldest times of the year, asking them to loan him their cloaks or furs. As they responded even more gladly than the blessed father asked, he used to say to them, “I shall accept this from you only on the condition that you never expect to have it returned.” The first poor man who happened to meet him, he would then clothe with whatever he had received, exulting and rejoicing.

“He was deeply troubled whenever he saw one of the poor insulted or heard a curse hurled at any creature. It happened that a certain brother insulted a poor man begging alms, saying: “Are you sure that you are not really rich and just pretending to be poor?” When St. Francis, the father of the poor, heard this, he was deeply hurt and he severely rebuked the brother who had said these things. Then he ordered the brother to strip naked in front of the poor man and to kiss his feet, to beg his forgiveness. He used to say: “Anyone who curses the poor insults Christ whose noble banner the poor carry, since Christ made himself poor for us in this world.” That is also why, when he met poor people burdened with wood or other heavy loads, he would offer his own weak shoulders to help them.

“The holy man overflowed with the spirit of charity,....”

B. The meaning of “poverty”

POVERTY has several definitions -

Q1. Can you give some definitions of poverty ?

Q2. Which definition is being used here in our SFO Rule?

*(after the above is discussed and compared...)*

poverty may be defined as...

**a virtue, a form of penance and conversion, by which we detach ourselves from our possessions for the sake of others in imitation of (following the example of) Jesus Christ.**

*(explain the various elements of this description.)*

Poverty is either involuntary (so many around us, due to circumstances of life)  
or voluntary (by free choice, by pledge, by vow).

I encourage you to read from the Catechism of Catholic Church: especially paragraphs 2443 to 2449 & 2451-2452. (you may wish to give some examples of what they have written there....)

Q3. Can you think and recall any examples by people to imitate:

Christ / Francis / Clare / Mary (Rule9) / Elizabeth of Hungary

*(give the participants time to recall and explain....)*

C. Foundational requirements:

a trust in divine providence and  
concern for others (not selfish).

D. Examples of what can be done:

How do we practice this poverty?

by sharing - TIME.....

- TALENT.....

- TREASURE.....

(Remember: When I give of my time, my talent, and/or my treasure, I am giving some of myself!!)

Q4.- In what way is this true?

Q5.- What priorities have I developed for my franciscan poverty – of my time, talent, treasure?

Q6. How do I share myself with and for others in these three areas of my life? Give some specifics...

Q7. Can I do more in these areas of my life?

Q8. How does the monthly fraternity collection fit into my understanding of poverty and penance?

Q9. How does shopping at second-hand stores (e.g., garage sales/Good Will/Salvation Army/etc.) for clothing and furniture show concern for the environment and natural resources?

Q.10. What is my attitude toward money? ...toward possessions?

Q.11. Am I comfortable curbing my desire to “want more”? Can I think of examples of doing this?

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## PRAYER LIFE WITH FRANCIS

A2

*have on hand: SFO Rule; Catechism of Catholic Church.*

*Begin with:* Today we spend a few minutes reviewing some of our understanding of prayer in the life of St. Francis, and hopefully in our own lives. (we're also covering SFO Rule, art.8)

*Our Opening Prayer (Francis' Prayer before the Crucifix):*

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.

*Friar Bernard of Quintavalle testified that Francis could spend much of a night praying: "My God and My All."*

*Here is another prayer that is attributed to Francis:*

You are the holy Lord God Who does wonderful things.  
You are strong. You are great. You are the most high.  
You are the almighty king. You holy Father, King of heaven and earth.

You are three and one, the Lord God of gods;  
You are the good, all good, the highest good, Lord God living and true.

You are love, charity; You are wisdom, You are humility, You are patience,  
You are beauty, You are meekness, You are security, You are rest,  
You are gladness and joy, You are our hope, You are justice,  
You are moderation, You are all our riches in sufficiency.

You are beauty, You are meekness, You are the protector, You are our custodian and defender,  
You are strength, You are refreshment, You are our hope,  
You are our faith, You are our charity, You are all our sweetness, You are our eternal life:  
Great and wonderful Lord, Almighty God, Merciful Savior.

*His opening prayer for praying the office are these words:*

Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty,  
Who is, and Who was, and Who is to come.... And let us praise and glorify Him forever.  
O Lord our God, You are worthy to receive praise, glory and honor and blessing.

And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

The Lamb Who was slain is worthy to receive power and divinity,  
wisdom and strength, honor and glory and blessing... And let us praise and glorify Him forever.  
Let us bless the Father and the Son with the Holy Spirit.

And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

Bless the Lord, all you works of the Lord.... And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

Sing praise to our God, all you His servants

and you who fear God, the small and the great.... And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

Let heaven and earth praise Him Who is glorious.... And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

Every creature in heaven, on earth and under the earth

and in the sea and those which are in it.... And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever.... And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

Q1. What attitudes do these prayers create in me?

Q2. Can I identify with these prayers? Is this my approach to prayer?

Q3. Is my prayer-life like Christ and St. Francis?

Q4. Have I fallen into the habit of “reciting prayers” rather than “praying prayers”? What’s the difference?

*Remember Christ’s advice on prayer: Matthew 6:5-9: When you are praying, do not behave like the hypocrites who love to stand and pray in synagogues or on street corners in order to be noticed. I give you my word, they are already repaid. When you pray, go to your room, close your door, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees what no man sees, will repay you. In your prayer do not rattle on like the pagans. They think they will win a hearing by the sheer multiplication of words. Do not imitate them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. This is how you are to pray: Our Father....”*

*Read our SFO Rule, (Art 8): “**As Jesus was the true worshipper of the Father, so let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do.**”*

Notice that the Rule says Prayer “AND” Contemplation, not either/or. We know we need to capture this spirit of prayer as we imitate St. Francis. (...and imitating Mary’s life of prayer, Rule, art.9)

Besides article #2699, in article #2708, the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994), we find these challenging words: [after speaking of meditation] “Christian prayer tries above all to meditate on the mysteries of Christ, as in *lectio divina* or the rosary. This form of prayerful reflection is of great value, but Christian prayer should go further: to the knowledge of the love of the Lord Jesus, to union with him”[which is contemplation].

Q.5 Have I taken this SFO challenge seriously? What forms of prayer do I actually use?

Q6. Like St. Francis, do I use structured prayers; meditation; and contemplation? (Why,...or why not?) Should I?

Q7. What are the forms of recommended structured prayers for “our SFO office” (see Ritual, pp103-104). Is this what I use?

Q8. Have I read the explanations about contemplative prayer in the Catechism of the Catholic Church? Could this help my understanding?

Q9. How many pages in the Catechism of the Catholic Church are devoted to instructing us about prayer? Have we read these pages, and reflected on them? Can we learn from them? Why do we think the Church has devoted this space to publish this section on prayer?

Q10. Do my prayers express or capture the same exuberance we find in Francis? How do I explain this?

(other prayers: see SFO Ritual,p.81, p.74,middle)

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## **FRANCIS' THREE LOVES**

**A3**

In the course of history, analyzers of St. Francis began to collect many aspects of his life around three themes: the crib, the cross, and the Eucharist.

Today we want to address ourselves to one of these loves:

### **A. the CRIB – the Greccio story –**

In the Life of St. Francis by friar Julian of Speyer (chap.X,53-55, written ca. 1235) we read:

“Moreover, something marvelous happened three years before the blessed passing of Blessed Francis and, although many other things have been neglected, I think it is worthy of being recalled. The holy man assiduously meditated particularly on the things that were done in the time of Christ, and did not wish, if he could help it, to neglect even a jot or tittle of what was narrated in the books of the holy gospel. Quite the contrary, he considered everything written about Christ, but above all the vicissitudes of his life, and longed to experience the very sweet yoke and light burden of the Master himself.

Therefore, desiring to represent as faithfully as possible the lowly poverty of the infancy of the Savior born at Bethlehem, when the Feast of the Nativity was at hand, the man of God sent word to a religious nobleman in the town of Greccio named John, who provided an ox and an ass, with a stable, in anticipation of the joys of the coming celebration.

“Finally, the holy night arrived. Blessed Francis was there with many of his brothers gathered around him.

The hay in the manger is prepared, the ox and the ass are arranged around the manger, and the vigil celebration begins with joy. A great multitude of people stream together from various places, the night is filled with an unaccustomed joy and made luminous by candles and torches. And so, with a new ritual, the festival of a new Bethlehem is celebrated.”

The brothers also paid their debt of praise to the Lord, and all present acclaimed him with new songs of praise. Blessed Francis, however, was standing before the manger full of sighs of joy and suffused by an indescribable sweetness. Finally, when Solemn Mass was celebrated above the manger, the holy Levite of God dressed in festive vestments proclaimed the gospel with a sonorous voice and then with a voice flowing with honey he preached to the people about the poor King born in Bethlehem. Truly, he was so overcome by sweet devotion toward the infancy of that King, that whenever he had to speak the name of Jesus Christ, he would, as if stuttering, call him “the babe of Bethlehem”, out of an excess of loving tenderness.

Lest it be thought that these things happened without divine approval, a miraculous vision was shown to a certain virtuous man, who saw Blessed Francis go up to the manger and waken, as if from a deep sleep, a child who seemed to be laying there lifeless. It is therefore believed, and not without reason, that the Lord Jesus aptly revealed his infancy in this vision to the one who reflected upon it. He who was asleep or dead in the hearts of many, owing to forgetfulness, was awakened and recalled to memory by the teaching and example of Blessed Francis. The solemnities were completed with great exultation, and everyone happily returned to their homes.”

Unfortunately, by contrast, we know only too well that some people in our society do not even want to look at the crib scene.

The crib scene recalls for us one of the two greatest events of all history - God-becoming-man (and God being our Redeemer). The crib carries the message: "I bring you news of great joy - you are loved."

When Blessed John Duns Scotus, ofm, was beatified, they wrote on the medal struck for the occasion: "Incarnatio – Summum Opus Dei" ["The Incarnation - the Greatest Work of God!"] This awesome fact manifests one of the key elements of our rich franciscan theology.

We always have a choice: to look at the crib scene, or to be a part of the scene, as Francis did. There we see and experience the powerful messages and examples of poverty/humility/dependency/love.

As St. John's gospel starts out (in his prologue), after Christ becomes man, he says: "he came unto his own, and his own received him not"! What an indictment!

But we gather to let the whole world know that we want to accept him, to receive Him -

- as our Priest (who offered the great sacrifice once and for all to redeem us)

- as our Prophet (our teacher, by his words and his example, of how life should be lived; what's important, etc.)

- as our King; a King with his Kingdom (the Prince of Peace as we express in our songs).

And we receive Communion as the seal on this acceptance - we accept him as Priest, Prophet, and King in our own lives once again.

Francis did not just want to look at a crib scene; he wanted to become a part of it!!

In fact, we come to realize that for Francis the crib was not just for Christmas! It can be for our prayerful appreciation every day of the year.

Q1. What does Christmas mean for me...really? What customs do I follow which show this? How does this compare with Francis?

Q2. Many of us set up cribs in our homes. Do we ever use the crib as a "prayer-site"? ...For myself and/or my family? How might I do this?

Q3. What kind of Christmas cards do I send? Are they the generic "seasons's greetings" (sometimes even with cute cats or dolls or snowmen) or do they contain words and pictures that express what Christmas is really about?

Q4. How do we celebrate the "Christmas season"? Do we follow the pattern of our commercial society and "become tired of Christmas decorations" the day after Christmas, and remove them? Or do we manifest our celebrating the season from Christmas day to Epiphany and on to the Baptism of Christ?

Q5. Do I see the crib scene as a symbol of God's longing to be with us?

Q6. In what way is the crib a reminder of poverty? / humility? / helplessness?

Another reading about Greccio can be found in Celano-I.84-87;(OMN,pp299-302; & FA-1:pp.254-7.)

# **Keeping our focus on Francis**

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Another of Francis' Loves: the CROSS

A4

have on hand: SFO Rule.

*Opening prayer:*

**God our Father,**

**in obedience to you**

**your only Son accepted death on the cross**

**for the salvation of mankind.**

**We acknowledge the mystery of the cross on earth.**

**You decreed that man should be saved**

**through the wood of the cross.**

**The tree of man's defeat became his tree of victory;**

**where life was lost, there life has been restored through Christ our Lord.**

**May each of us receive the gift of redemption in heaven. AMEN.**

Ask someone to read from the SFO Rule, articles 7 & 8.

It is from the Cross that Francis received his first conversion message; and it was the cross that transfixed him at the end of his life. Seeing the naked figure of our Lord as a victim of expiation for the sins of the world became a daily theme for his meditations and contemplation.

Friar St. Bonaventure tells us about Francis: "His whole soul seemed to melt away; and so deeply was the memory of Christ's Passion impressed on his heart, that it pierced even to the marrow of his bones. From that hour, whenever he thought of the Passion of Christ he could scarcely restrain his tears and sighs."

Similarly friar Celano recounts: (Celano-II, n.10+):

"From that hour he [Francis] was pierced with compassion for the Crucified Savior, so that for the rest of his life he bore in his heart the holy wounds, which later were also impressed upon his body. The sufferings of Christ were ever before his eyes, and filled them with ever-flowing tears."

In this same vein, friar Celano speaks about Francis in his conversion: "He chose this costume [the habit] because of its poverty, but also desired to express the mystery of the Cross. He wished his entire body to be clothed with the Cross of Christ, even as his spirit had put on the Crucified; and since God had vanquished the powers of hell in this sign, so also the Franciscan army should serve its Liege Lord under this standard."

At the Portiuncula in Assisi, we find the Chapel of Tears, a reminder of Francis' absorption with this love for Christ and what he was willing to do for us. The Legend of the Three Companions, #14, tells us:

"One day he [Francis] was roaming about alone near the church of St. Mary of the Angels, weeping and lamenting aloud. A certain God-fearing man heard him and, thinking he must be ill, asked pityingly the reason for his distress. Francis replied: "I weep for the passion of my Lord Jesus Christ; and I should not be ashamed to go weeping through the whole world for his sake." Then the other man fell to crying and lamenting with him."

Francis himself writes in his admonitions to us:

(Admon.5) - "And all creatures under heaven serve, know, and obey their Creator, each according to its own nature, better than you. And even the demons did not crucify Him; but you, together, with them, have crucified Him and are still crucifying Him by delighting in vices and sins."

and

(Admon.6) - "Let all of us, brothers, consider the Good Shepherd Who bore the suffering of the cross to save His sheep. The Lord's sheep followed Him in tribulation and persecution, in shame and hunger, in weakness and temptation and in other ways; and for these things they received eternal life from the Lord."

The Sacred Scriptures give us the setting for all this:

St. Paul writes in his letter to the Philippians (2:6-11)

"Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at.

Rather, he emptied himself and took the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men.

He was known to be of human estate and it was thus that he humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, death on a cross!"

And it is St. Luke who reminds us of the requirement of discipleship (Luke, 9:22-25): Jesus said to his disciples: "The Son of Man must first endure many sufferings, be rejected by the elders, the high priests and the scribes, and be put to death, and then be raised up on the third day."

Jesus said to all: "**Whoever wishes to be my follower must deny his very self, take up his cross each day, and follow in my steps** Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. What profit does he show who gains the whole world and destroys himself in the process?"

Francis realized he was so privileged at Mass to be present to and identify with the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ, to be a living part of the paschal mystery - life/death/life of Jesus and ourselves.

Q1. Thinking of our opening prayer for this lesson, from the Feast of the Holy Cross (Sept.14), we say we "acknowledge the mystery of the cross on earth"; ... what does this mean?

Q2. At every Mass, right after the Consecration, we proclaim the "mystery" of faith... Is this the mystery of MY faith?

Q3. Using Luke's description, how much of a disciple am I?

Q4. How can I use the devotion of the Way of the Cross (the Stations) to enrich my meditation on the Lord's Passion- which he suffered for me?

Q5. Do I appreciate the great price that Jesus underwent so that I might be reinstated in the holiness of God? How might I, as Francis did, express this appreciation?

Q6. How does our SFO "TAU insignia" compare to the "habit" Francis adopted as his public sign of commitment?

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## Another of Francis' Loves: the EUCHARIST

A5

have on hand: *Parish Missalette, SFO Rule, Catechism of Catholic Church, Omnibus*

Today we will spend some time on another of Francis' great loves - **the Holy Eucharist.**

*Together we begin with Francis' prayer :*

**We adore you O most holy Lord Jesus Christ,  
here and in all the churches in the whole world;  
and we praise you, because by your holy cross  
you have redeemed the world.\***

Friar Thomas of Celano says this about Francis' devotion to the Eucharist:

"Francis burned with a love that came from his whole being for the sacrament of the Lord's Body, and he was carried away with wonder at the loving condescension and the most condescending love shown there." *I encourage you to read the rest of this lengthy paragraph of Celano-II, par.201 (as found in Omnibus, pp.522-523).*

St. Francis himself concentrates our attention to this great Sacrament:

"And just as to the holy apostles in true flesh, now in the same way he shows himself to us in the Sacred Bread. And just as they, by their fleshly sight, only saw his flesh, but, contemplating with their spiritual eyes, believed him to be God; so too we, seeing the bread and wine with our corporeal eyes, should see and believe firmly that it is his most holy body and blood, living and true.

"And in such manner the Lord is always with his faithful, just as he says: Behold I am with you until the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20). You can read the rest of Francis' faith-filled Admonition #1 at your leisure (as found in FA-1, p.128-129).

*Francis wrote to the whole Order (FA-1, p118):*

"Let everyone be struck with fear,  
let the whole world tremble,  
and let the heavens exult  
when Christ, the Son of the living God,  
is present on the altar in the hands of a priest!  
O wonderful loftiness and stupendous dignity!  
O sublime humility!  
O humble sublimity!  
The Lord of the universe,  
God and the Son of God,  
so humbles Himself  
that for our salvation  
He hides Himself  
under an ordinary piece of bread!  
Brother, look at the humility of God,  
and pour out your hearts before Him!  
Humble yourselves  
that you may be exalted by Him!

Hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves,  
that He Who gives Himself totally to you  
may receive you totally!"

Have someone read **art.5 of our SFO Rule** so that we can review it....

Q1. What two loves of Francis are expressed in this prayer (our opening prayer here) Francis prayed on entering a church?

Q2. What kind of nourishment do I seek when I receive Christ in the Eucharist?

Q3. How do I use Communion to renew my pledge to sacrifice for the Body of Christ?

Q4. How do I use Communion to renew my pledge to accept the Body of Christ, with all her limitations and weaknesses?

Q5. While we speak of receiving the Consecrated Bread and Wine, do we include adoration of the Divinity in our prayers at Communion?

Q6. In what way(s) is the Eucharist for healing?

Catholic teaching reminds us that we have a dual reality in receiving Holy Communion. First, that we believe in the real presence of the Living God under the appearances of Bread and Wine; and second, that when we receive the Eucharist we are proclaiming that we are one in our commitment and profession of faith. (See your missalette for the explanation why non-Catholics normally do not receive Communion with us, since they are not united with us in one profession of faith.)

Q7. Do I ever give public witness to my neighborhood that I believe in the Real Presence in the Blessed Sacrament by stopping by for a brief visit when driving near the church?  
Would this be something I could build into my busy schedule?

Q8. Does our parish encourage the devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament? Can we help bring this about, or help with it? On Holy Thursday evening adoration; monthly; weekly?

Q9. Have I ever prayed over (meditated on) the rich understanding of the Eucharist by reading the Catechism of the Catholic Church, par.1322 to 1419?  
Might I benefit from doing so?

reference: FA-1 = Francis of Assisi, The Saint ,vol.1 (1999), New City Press

\*Found in Celano-1,ch.17,#45 (p.222,FA-1); also Bonaventure, Major Life,chap.4,#3; also Legend of Three Companions, p.90, in FA-2.

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have on hand: SFO Rule

## EVANGELIZERS in Christ

A6

We recall those challenging words of Christ in His invitation to Francis: "...rebuild my house..." Let's spend a few minutes reflecting on Francis and the San Damiano Message.

Opening prayer:

**God, our Father, you will all people to be saved  
and come to the knowledge of your truth.  
Send workers into your great harvest  
that the gospel may be preached to every creature  
and your people, gathered together by the Word of life  
and strengthened by the power of the sacraments,  
may advance in the way of salvation and love.  
We make this prayer through Christ, our Lord. AMEN.**

Have participants take turns reading from the SFO Rule, art.6 - 10 - 14 - 15 - 16 - 17 - 18 - 19. There can hardly be any doubt that the SFOs are called to evangelize.

### ***Cel-I,n89,(p.259 - FA-1)***

Friar Celano writes: "As the teachings of the gospel had declined seriously in practice - not just in some cases but in general everywhere - this man was sent from God so that everywhere, throughout the whole world, after the example of the Apostles, he might bear witness to the truth. And so it was, with the Christ leading, that his teaching showed clearly that all the wisdom of the world was foolish; and quickly, he turned all toward the true wisdom of God through the foolishness of his preaching.

In these last times a new Evangelist,  
like one of the rivers of Paradise,  
has poured out the streams of the gospel  
in a holy flood over the whole world.  
He preached the way of the Son of God  
and the teaching of truth in his deeds.  
In him and through him  
an unexpected joy and a holy newness  
came into the world.  
A shoot of the ancient religion  
suddenly renewed the old and decrepit.  
A new spirit was placed in the hearts of the elect  
and a holy anointing has been poured out in their midst.  
This holy servant of Christ,  
like one of the lights of heaven,  
shone from above with a new rite and new signs."

### Friar ***Bonaventure, Major Life, chap.2,#1:***

"For one day when Francis went out to meditate in the fields, he walked near the church of San Damiano which was threatening to collapse because of age. Impelled by the Spirit, he went inside to pray. Prostrate before an image of the Crucified, he was filled with no little consolation as he prayed. While his tear-filled eyes were gazing at the Lord's cross, he heard with his bodily ears a voice

coming from that cross, telling him three times: "Francis, go and repair my house which, as you see, is all being destroyed."

Trembling, Francis was stunned at the sound of such an astonishing voice, since he was alone in the church; and as he absorbed the power of the divine words into his heart, he fell into an ecstasy of mind. At last, coming back to himself, he prepared himself to obey and pulled himself together to carry out the command of repairing the material church, although the principal intention of the words referred to that which Christ purchased with his own blood, as the Holy Spirit taught him and as he himself later disclosed to the brothers.

Then, after fortifying himself with the sign of the cross, he arose, and taking cloth to sell, {... sold the cloth and the horse at Foligno...}. Returning to Assisi, he reverently entered the church he had received the command to repair. When he found the poor priest there, he showed him fitting reverence, offered him money for the repair of the church and for the use of the poor, and humbly requested that he be allowed to stay with him for a time."

Q1. How did Francis take this San Damiano message?

Q2. What was Christ really asking Francis to do?

Q3. Do I take this San Damiano message as a message for ME? How?

We also read in friar Julian of Speyer's Life of Francis:

"For even if, when he [Francis] thought he was prepared to say this or that, it happened that when he came to preach he forgot all those things he had thought out beforehand, and did not have anything at all to say, not even then was he ashamed to admit his failing in front of everyone, and thus, all of a sudden, he began to overflow with a miraculous eloquence. Continually dependent, in all hopefulness, on the generous Providence of the Lord alone, he had no confidence at all in his own works." (FA-1,p.408-9)

Q4. As a secular franciscan, how am I finding ways to spread the faith of Christ?

Q5. What are the means to accomplish this goal today? What pointed advice have the Popes given during the past 25 years?

Q6. Whom does the Church tell us to evangelize? (see esp. Pope Paul VI: "Evangelii Nunciandi".) Do we do it?

Q7. Am I familiar with this particular San Damiano Cross image which hung in this chapel we're speaking about? Where is the original preserved now?

Check also:

**Francis visits the Sultan**...Celano-I,57b,(In FA-1,p.231) or in Bonaventure,Major Life,#8-9  
and Francis and **the first martyred brothers in Morocco**.....  
and Francis and **friars to the Germans**