

*Friary Chapter
Reflection and
Discussion Guides
2010*

Finding Francis



Following Christ



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The Spoleto Experience Withdrawing from Violence in Order to Have the Scriptures Fulfilled in Us

In 1202 Francis was taken prisoner by Perugia at the Battle of Collestrada. He stayed in prison for a year until his illness finally persuaded his Father to ransom. He returned home very sick, quite likely suffering from what we would call today PTS (Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome).

When he was well enough, around 1204, he decided to stop wandering around and go to Apulia to join Walter of Brienne in order to fulfill his dream of becoming a knight. On the way, Francis had a dream. In fact he had two dreams. The first found him in a room filled with armaments and other military symbols. This led him to believe he had made the right decision; his future would be identified with the glory that came from knighthood and its militaristic approach to life. These defined the religiously-sanctioned violence of Assisi and the Roman world around him. They had captured his imagination to the point that Celano writes that “he had not yet fully shaken from his neck the yoke of perverse servitude” that kept him from fulfilling God’s plan in his life (see 1C I, 2). *This interpretation invites us to investigate which forces keep us in servitude and where violence may be more a part of our lives than we imagine.*

The second dream changed his life. Spending the night in Spoleto, he had a dream of a similar room filled with armaments. Only now he heard a voice asking him about who could do more for him: the servant or the lord. When he said “the lord,” he heard the voice say to him in that world dominated by honor/shame patterns: “Then why are you abandoning the lord for the servant, and the patron for the client?” At this Francis responded: “Lord, what do you want me to do?” “Go back,” it said, “to your own land to do what the Lord will tell you” (AP I, 6).

In the version of this incident found in the Legend of the Three Companions, we find basically the same story. Only the ending adds this critical verse: “You must understand in another way the vision which you saw” (L3C II, 6).

“To understand in another way” than a way of life defined by militarism and violence is how I interpret this launching of the beginning of Francis’ conversion process. Ultimately, it contains the same command to each of us: to find a way on our journey that frees us from violence in order to be open to hear what God wants to tell us.,

The process of beginning to become free of violence in order to have God’s word and will echoed in our lives reflects a triad found at least four times in Matthew’s Gospel (Mt. 2:13-15, 19-23; 4:12-16; 12: 14-21). The first dynamic in the triad refers to some overpowering form of violence, a destructive force that generates great fear. This leads to a decision to “*anachorein*,” to withdraw from that reality which otherwise will consume the person(s) involved. In the withdrawal from the violence (as Francis did from the military machine reflected

in the Crusades and knighthood), the third part of the triad is made possible: the fulfillment of God's nonviolent way in one's life.

It is clear that, by withdrawing from the way of life defined by the Crusades and knighthood, Francis embarked on a journey into nonviolence in a way that ultimately allowed God's word to be the reality he served. *We might investigate how this triad may be working its pattern in our lives. Only if we remove ourselves from violence in all its forms through withdrawing from its dynamics in, among and around us, will we be open to have the scriptures fulfilled in our lives.*

The triad is a goal that will be worked out in our lives if we are faithful to the spiritual journey, even when we may resist it. This is clear from Francis' own life, if we consider the account in the Assisi Compilation.

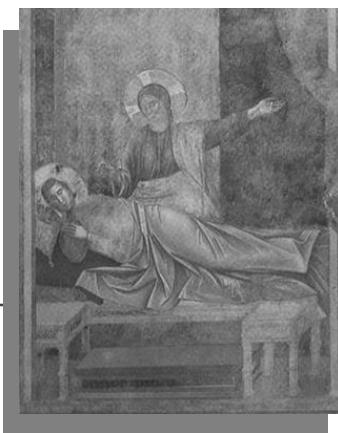
Trying to penetrate its rhetorical style it seems that, upon his return from trying to convert the Sultan in 1221, Francis found the Order going in exactly the opposite direction from his vision. He resigned from being Minister of the Order and went into a negative form of "withdrawal" in reaction to the violence-to-the-vision he experienced. The Assisi Compilation tells us that this "Great Temptation" led him into a two year depression during which he did not talk to the brothers and abstained from food. I see the latter as form of "un/holy anorexia" insofar as it was often a form of protest over realities beyond one's power to change.

Within this unhealthy "withdrawal" to an overpowering force of negativity, Francis heard something coming to him while at prayer at the Portiuncula:

If you have faith like a mustard seed, and you tell that mountain to move from this place and move to another place, it will happen." Francis replied: "What is that mountain?" He was told: "That mountain is your temptation." "In that case, Lord," said blessed Francis, "be it done to me as you have said."

Immediately he was freed in such a way that it seemed to him that he never had that temptation (AC, 63).

This experience followed the triad but it reveals that, by allowing the violence of what had happened to his vision of the Order control him, Francis' "withdrawal" from it was equally violent and unhealthy. However, even in his failure to allow the scriptures be fulfilled in him according to a positive way of letting the triad work through his life, the word itself was more powerful and would accomplish what it had come to do. Upon realizing the mountain or overpowering reality that he had allowed to control him was his temptation to despair and withdraw into negativity. By allowing the word to be fulfilled in him he became free of the violence that led to his unhealthy "withdrawal."



Hymn of Gathering

Servant Song

Donna Marie McGargill, OSM

1. What do you want of me, Lord? Where do you want me to serve you? Where can I sing your praises? I am your song. Jesus, Jesus, you are the Lord. Jesus, Jesus, you are the way.
2. I hear you call my name Lord, and I am moved within me. Your Spirit stirs my deepest self. Sing your songs in me. Jesus, Jesus, you are my Lord. Jesus, Jesus, you are the way.
3. Above, below, and around me, before, behind, and all through me, your Spirit burns deep within me. Fire my life with your love. Jesus, Jesus, be the warmth of my heart. Jesus, Jesus, you are the way.
4. You are the light in my darkness. You are my strength when I'm weary. You give me sight when I'm blinded. Come, see for me. Jesus, Jesus, you are my Light. Jesus, Jesus, you are the way.
5. I am your song and servant, singing your praise like Mary. Surrendered to your Spirit, "Let it be done to me." Jesus, Jesus, "Let it be done to me." Jesus, Jesus, you are the way.

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Scripture: Matthew: 12: 14-21

But the Pharisees went out and took counsel against him to put him to death. When Jesus realized this, he withdrew from that place. Many (people) followed him, and he cured them all, but he warned them not to make him known. This was to fulfill what had been spoken through Isaiah the prophet: "Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved in whom I delight; I shall place my spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not contend or cry out, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets.

A bruised reed he will not break, a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory. And in his name the Gentiles will hope."

Franciscan Source

The Later Rule (1223), Chapter 3

Indeed, I counsel, warn and exhort my friars in the Lord Jesus Christ, that when they go about through the world, they are not to quarrel nor contend in words (cf 2 Tim 2:14), nor are they to judge others, but they are to be meek, peaceable and modest, meek and humble, speaking uprightly to all, as is fitting. And they should not ride horseback, unless

they are driven [to do so] by manifest necessity or infirmity. *Into whatever house* they may enter, first let them say: "*Peace to this house.*" (cf Lk 10:5) And according to the Holy Gospel it is lawful to eat of any of the foods, which are placed before them. (cf Lk 10:8)

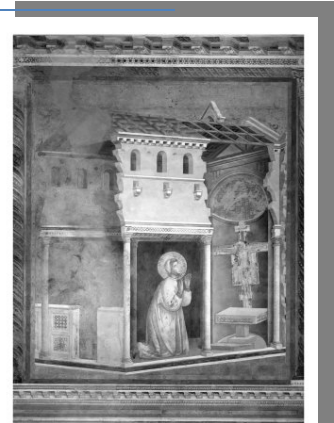
Questions for Personal Reflection and Sharing

1. When have you been in a violent or hostile situation (in ministry, the friary or personal relationship) and decided to withdraw instead of facing hostility with hostility? What value came from refraining from further violence or hostility?
2. What experience do you have with a negative form of withdrawal (like Francis did) in reaction to a violent or hostile situation? What brought you out of that unhealthy reaction?
3. What other ways have you found to deal with violence (physical, verbal, economic) that have been effective?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, Prince of Peace, help us to withdraw from violence, whether it be physical, verbal, or economic. Teach us to be gentle with those who are bruised or broken, and to bring justice and hope to those who live in darkness. We ask this in your name. Amen.

“Francis, Repair My House; You Can See It Is Falling into Ruin” Examining the “House” as Metaphor for Our Lives



It is not clear how the two years after Spoleto developed in Francis' life except that he had three key experiences that reinforced his decision to “withdraw” from the world: the San Damiano experience of hearing the words from the Cross, the experience of the leper that he said “began” his conversion and, finally, his disrobing in front of his Father to begin the creation of an alternative family. Different accounts have these three experiences told in different sequence. I will follow the sequence above.

In her wonderful article, “Home and Pilgrimage: Companion Metaphors for Personal and Social Transformation,” Sharon Daloz Parks notes that two parallel metaphors need to be (re)appropriated if we are to have a more adequate understanding of spiritual development: “detachment *and* connection, pilgrims *and* homemakers, journeying *and* homesteading.”¹

With Francis “withdrawal,” he began his gradual detachment, pilgrimage and journey. Now he was ready to make a deeper connection through a new form of home-making of the Church and homesteading with the eventual foundation of the Order.

Usually interpreters go immediately to the famous words Francis heard while praying in the abandoned Church of San Damiano: “Francis, don’t you see that my house is being destroyed? Go, then, and rebuild it for me.” (L3C, 5, 13). However, there are two points that I think should color our effort to unpack the meaning of those words: 1) the nature of the Crucifix from which he heard the words and 2) the context of those words in the Gospel of Matthew.

First of all, when we gaze on the Cross of San Damiano, it is clear that it reflects the interpretation of Jesus’ Crucifixion from the lens of the Gospel according to John. In that Gospel we read about who was “standing by the cross of Jesus:” especially his Mother and the disciple whom he loved (Jn. 19:25-27). Based on insights from Raymond Brown, this has led me to believe that the future role of the Order, as encapsulated in this vision, was the creation of a Community of the Beloved Disciple within the Petrine/Apostolic Church that would lead the whole church to a return to the Gospel.

¹ Sharon Daloz Parks, “Home and Pilgrimage: Companion Metaphors for Personal and Social Transformation,” *Soundings* 72: 2-3 (Summer/Fall 1989), 301.

The second point that needs mentioning is the use of the same word (i.e., “my”) from Jesus in this vision as Matthew has Jesus speaking in the famous “you are Peter” triad in the first Gospel: “. . . on this rock I will build *my church*.” Francis heard the command to rebuild “*my house*” that was being destroyed. By what? By whom? It seems to me it was by those forces that had come to be equated with the violence of militarism and patriarchal clericalism in the Church of Jesus Christ.

Having noted this context, I think it is critical that we ask ourselves whether the “model” for the repair job demanded of Francis could be anything less than a reconstruction of the church based on the model of the Divine Householder, namely the Trinity who is the architect of all “floor plans” by which the universe and all in it are to be constructed.

The Divine Household is what we call the Holy Trinity. Theologians call this “Household” called Trinity the “Economic Trinity” because it is composed of the three key elements in all economies: persons, relations and resources. The Greek word for economy is *oikia/oikos* + *nomos* = *oikonomia*. Therefore, if our “households” are going to reflect that of the Divine Architect, they must be modeled on the way it orders resources among its trinity of “I AMs.”

I like to play on the metaphor of house or “*oikia/oikos*” by recalling the command that led to the creation of our Order: the need to bring/preach “peace” to every house.

Many psychologists, especially Jungians, note that a key image of dreams that point to a person is the image of one being in a house. The house, the *oikia*, therefore, represents one’s personal life. At the personal level of our own “households,” we realize the need to get them “in order” according to some pattern. *What in myself is not “making room” for God’s presence? What in my life is resisting God’s project of the Gospel from being fulfilled in me?*

At the second level of the “house,” we look to our own local fraternities. What is our fraternal economy (*oikonomia*) or house-ordering. If the “house” at the time of Francis Bernadone, represented the family business, *is there any unfinished business that I need to address with my brothers/sisters* to repair it?

The Greek word for the whole/inhabited world is *oikoumènē* (Mt. 24:14). When we consider the economic collapse that has created ever greater disparities between rich and poor in this nation and the whole inhabited world, *do we feel called to offer another kind of fraternal economy that is not based on notions of entitlement, greed and domination?*

Finally we seek an underlying way of life that represents an *oikologia* where everyone will be subject to each other for the integrity of the universe. This is the fourth level of the “house” that is being destroyed and which must be rebuilt. This demands that we consider our ecological footprint and ensure that we walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ in a way that builds up our earth rather than adds to its destruction.



Hymn of Gathering

All Are Welcome

Marty Haugen

1. Let us build a house where love can dwell and all can safely live, a place where saints and children tell how hearts learn to forgive. Built of hopes and dreams and visions, Rock of faith and vault of grace; here the love of Christ shall end divisions:

Refrain:

All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

2. Let us build a house where prophets speak, and words are strong and true, where all God's children dare to seek to dream God's reign anew. Here the cross shall stand as witness and as symbol of God's grace; here as one we claim the faith of Jesus: ***Refrain***
3. Let us build a house where love is found in water, wine and wheat: a banquet hall on holy ground, where peace and justice meet. Here the love of God, through Jesus, is revealed in time and space; as we share in Christ the feast that frees us: ***Refrain***
4. Let us build a house where hands will reach beyond the wood and stone to heal and strengthen, serve and teach, and live the Word they've known. Here the outcast and the stranger bear the image of God's face; let us bring an end to fear and danger: ***Refrain***
5. Let us build a house where all are named, their songs and visions heard and loved and treasured, taught and claimed as words within the Word. Built of tears and cries and laughter, prayers of faith and songs of grace, let this house proclaim from floor to rafter: ***Refrain***

Text: 96 86 87 10 with refrain. Music: TWO OAKS.

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Scripture Luke 6: 46-49

A good person out of the store of goodness in his heart produces good, but an evil person out of a store of evil produces evil; for from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks. "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' but not do what I command? I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, listens to my words, and acts on them. That one is like a person building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when the

flood came, the river burst against that house but could not shake it because it had been well built. But the one who listens and does not act is like a person who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, it collapsed at once and was completely destroyed."

Franciscan Source

Bonaventure, *The Major Legend of Saint Francis* (Chapter 9, 4)

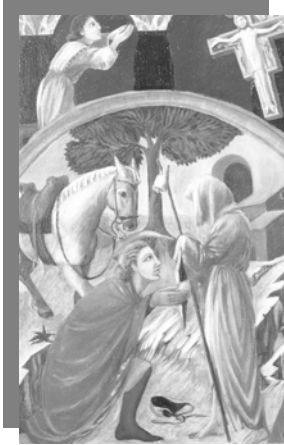
The exceptional devotion of his charity so bore him aloft into the divine that his loving kindness was enlarged and extended to those who shared with him nature and grace. Since the piety of heart had made him a brother to other creatures, no wonder the charity of Christ made him even more a brother to those who are marked in the image of the Creator and redeemed with the blood of their Author. For he would not consider himself a friend of Christ, unless he cared for the souls whom Christ had redeemed. He used to say that nothing should be preferred to the salvation of souls, demonstrating this forcefully with the fact that the Only-begotten Son of God saw fit to hang on the cross for the sake of souls.

Questions for Personal Reflection and Sharing

1. What in myself is not "making room" for God's presence? What in my life is resisting God's project of the Gospel from being fulfilled in me?
2. In my own local fraternity or situation, is there any unfinished business that I need to address with my brothers/sisters to repair it?
3. What do I do (or we do as a community) to decrease the disparities between the rich and the poor?
4. What do I do (or we do as a community) for ecology to build up the earth rather than add to its destruction?

Prayer

Lord, help us to prepare a home for you in our hearts, in our house. Help us to be grounded on the rock of our salvation. Help us to repair that which has been battered by the difficulties of living each day. Teach us to turn away from that which keeps us from you, and to seek out strength in fraternity and faith. We ask this in peace. Amen.



The Leper Experience Discovering a Way to “Leave the World” that Reflects an Embrace of Love

At the very beginning of his Testament, Francis equated his “leaving the world” with withdrawing from the way of “sin” and beginning to “*facere poenitentium*,” to do penance. This means that Francis envisioned his calling as a way of withdrawing from the violence (*exivi saculum*) or sin of the world (*fuga mundi*), to embark on what would become a Gospel-based way of life that demanded ongoing conversion or penance. He describes it eloquently:

The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, thus to begin doing penance in this way: for when I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I showed mercy to them. And when I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body. And afterwards I delayed a little and left the world (T, 1-3).

“Doing penance” at the time of Francis was far from what we try to do during Lent (and possible Advent). As is evident from the Testament, Francis tied three notions together: “doing penance,” “stopping sin[ning]” and “leaving the world.” This form of penance meant to stop being part of the “sin of the world.” It involved non-participation in its violent ways. This included a kind of “leaving” or “withdrawing” from the cultural patterns that brought about personal, communal and social sin. It invited the creation of a counter-cultural, “other” worldly way of living that would be based on imagining a way of relating to all, especially those most rejected by society, which would ultimately reflect the “*oikonomia*” of Trinitarian relationships.

At the time of Francis, lepers (along with heretics, Jews and homosexuals [as well as women who did not submit to men] were scapegoats. As such they suffered the experience and effects of religiously-sanctioned violence. Indeed the Fourth Lateran Council declared that leprosy resulted from sin. It would be interesting to see how Francis saw himself abiding by that Decree!

It was his encounter with the leper, in that world of scapegoating, that Francis defined as the beginning of *his conversion*. As such, since it was the Lord who led him to “leave sin” by embracing this one defined by his church as sin-filled, that Francis began to live by another religious mandate. Whether it was Francis who touched the leper or the leper who kissed Francis as he offered an alms, we will not know because the accounts differ. What we do know is this:

the one who was found repellent in body and spirit enabled Francis to be transformed totally, i.e., in “soul and body.” Ultimately, we know that Francis’ encounter with the leper found him identifying this member of the body of Christ with the Crucified One. Thus Celano would recall his words: “Anyone who curses the poor insults Christ whose noble banner the poor carry, since Christ made himself poor in this world for us” (1 C, 28, 76).

For years I have been intrigued by these opening words in Francis’ Testament. I have been challenged to find a way to embrace the leper in, among and around me. I even remember trying to offer the Dubuque Franciscans a way of conversion based on its dynamics. Yet I never felt I captured the heart of its dynamic.

However, *it was not until I came across the writings of Kurt Wolff, with his notion of “surrender and catch,” that I was able to make the connections that I thought would help us translate Francis’ conversion process and our own.*

For Wolff, surrender and catch was another word for “falling in love.” He believed it constituted the heart of religious experience. As he examined the “conversions” of significant people as they articulated their experiences, Wolff, a professor of phenomenology and linguistics at Brandeis University, was able to develop a taxonomy of the process of their “surrender and catch.” However, what made his theory all the more compelling to me was the fact that, while “surrender and catch,” as it happened for Francis came outside one’s own power (i.e., “The Lord gave me. . .”), humans could try to replicate it in a process he called “surrendering to.”

In the grid below I take Francis’ Testament narration of his “surrender and catch” and parallel it with the steps of Wolff’s “surrendering to.”

CONVERSION / HEART CHANGE

St Francis

- The Lord gave me, thus to do penance in this way
- When I was in sin it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers
- and the Lord led me among them.
- When I left them, what once was bitter to me was turned to sweetness of soul + body.
- Afterward I delayed a little
- and left the world.

Kurt Wolff

- **SURRENDER** involving
 - Suspension of received notions
- **CATCH** involving
 - Becoming involved with the “other”
 - to the point of transformation
- Acceptance of risk
- Pertinence of everything



Hymn of Gathering

Led by the Spirit

Kingsfold

1. Led by the Spirit of our God, we go to fast and pray with Christ into the wilderness; we join his paschal way. “Rend not your garments, rend your hearts. Turn back your lives to me.” Thus says our kind and gracious God, whose reign is liberty.
2. Led by the Spirit, we confront temptation face to face, and know full well we must rely on God’s redeeming grace. On bread alone we cannot live, but nourished by the Word. We seek the will of God to do: this is our drink and food.
3. Led by the Spirit, now draw near the waters of rebirth with hearts that long to worship God in spirit and in truth. “Whoever drinks the drink I give shall never thirst again.” Thus says the Lord who died for us, our Savior, in and friend.
4. Led by the Spirit, now sing praise to God the Trinity: the Source of Life, the living Word made flesh to set us free, The Spirit blowing where it will to make us friends of God: This myst’ry far beyond our reach, yet near in healing love.

Text: CMD; based on Joel 2:12-13; Matthew 4:1-4; Mark 1:12-15; John 4:5-42; Bob Hurd, © 1996, Bob Hurd.
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Adapt. By Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1872-1958.

Scripture Luke 4: 1-2, 13-19

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, to be tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over he was hungry.

When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time. Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news of him spread throughout the whole region. He taught in their synagogues and was praised by all. He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the Sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to

proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord."

Franciscan Source

Bonaventure, *The Minor Legend of Saint Francis* (Chapter I, Eight Lesson)

Then as a lover of total of total humility he gave himself to the service of lepers, so that while he was subjecting himself to miserable and outcast people under the yoke of servitude, he could first learn perfect contempt of himself and of the world before he would teach it to others. Surely, since he used to fear lepers more than any other group of people, grace was given to him in more abundance. He moved to the lepers and gave himself up to their service with such a humble heart that he washed their feet, bandaged their sores, drew puss from wounds, and wiped the filth from them. In an excess of unheard of fervor, he would fall down to kiss their ulcerous sores, putting his *mouth to the dust*, so that *filled with reproaches* (Lam. 3:29,30), he might efficaciously subject the pride of the flesh to the *law of the spirit* and, once the enemy within him was subdued, possess peaceful dominion over himself.

Questions for Personal Reflection and Sharing

1. Recall a time of conversion (big or small) in your own life. What brought it about? What was it a conversion from and a conversion to?
2. How did it change the way you looked upon others or things or situations? How did it affect your relationships?
3. What effect did it have on your ministry or the way you went about living the Gospel (Franciscan) life?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you call us to embrace the leper in our time, to turn away from temptation and sin and accept the call to ministry. Help us to transform our lives through penitence and prayer, through the power of the Spirit which sends us forth to bring Good News to the poor. With Francis we follow you in justice and peace. Amen.

The Exchange of Fathers: Converting from the Cultural of Patriarchy to a Culture of Universal Brother/Sisterhood under God the “Father”



Even though I had thought I had developed my ideas quite clearly about Francis’ experience with his Father and Bishop Guido in *Finding Francis, Following Christ*, it was only in preparing for the retreat with the Province of Our Lady of Consolation in 2009 that things really made more and more sense. In the process I have come to conclude that this may be the most radical of all the three “conversion” calls in Francis’ stage of “withdrawal” from violence before he experienced an openness to let the Gospel be fulfilled in him, the third part of the triad discussed in the first conference.

First, let’s review Francis’ relationship with his Father that brought him to his famous “de-nuding.” It seems that, business being business (*oikonomía*), the market meant more to Pietro Bernadone than the birth of his son. Furthermore, if that market was tied to France, the renaming of the newborn John Baptist Bernadone to Francis (i.e. “Frenchy”) probably had more to do with economics than any saint, including the Precursor. It is further evident that money meant more to Pietro than his son in the latter’s captivity in Perugia. It was only when Francis was truly at peril that his Father relented and ransomed him. From here things went downhill fast.

Early in his First Book Thomas of Celano describes the cultural context that led to Francis’ critical break that led to the ultimate rupture between them:

Inclined and strengthened by the Holy Spirit the blessed servant of the Most High, seeing that the appointed time was at hand, followed the blessed impulse of his soul. Thus, as he trampled upon worldly things, he made his way to the greatest good. He could no longer delay, for by then a fatal disease had spread everywhere and infected the limbs of so many that, were the doctor to delay just a little, it would stifle breath and snatch life away (1 C 4, 8).

As I interpret this passage “the fatal disease” that “had spread everywhere and infected the limbs of so many” was the “sin” or “violence” of the world that was defined by patriarchy, materialism and clericalism. The incident then immediately described by Celano shows how these dynamics led to Francis’ ultimate “leaving the world.”

As he describes it, Francis took his Father’s cloth along with his Father’s horse (which were critical to his Father’s *oikonomía*), went to nearby Foligno and sold them. He took the

proceeds to a priest at San Damiano but the priest refused, afraid to incur the well-known wrath of one Pietro Bernadone. At this Francis threw the money onto a window opening (1 C 4,8-9).

At that Pietro Bernadone tried to drag Francis into civil court. However, by now Francis had declared himself a servant of the church and, upon hearing of his Father's efforts, declared himself under church or canon law rather than civil law. This led the Father to demand a hearing before Bishop Guido.

While Celano gives an overview of the meeting (1 C 6, 15) we find the dialogue in the Legend of the Three Companions most revealing. When told by Bishop Guido that he was wrong in selling his Father's goods, Francis went into one of the Bishop's rooms, took off all his clothes and returned naked before the whole assembled group. At this he declared:

Listen to me, all of you, and understand. Until now I have called Pietro di Bernadone my father. But, because I have proposed to serve God, I return to him the money on account which he was so upset, and also all the clothing which is his, wanting to say from now on: "Our Father who are in heaven," and not "My father, Pietro di Barnadone."

These were not empty words nor did they constitute an empty promise. In my mind, this incident constitutes Francis' ultimate break in his "leaving the world." This was the "*oikonomia*" or house-ordering of materialism, patriarchy, abuse and violence.

First of all, what did Francis stop being part of:

1. Any house-ordering that was based on the domination defined by patriarchy.
2. In contrast to the "abbot" of Benedictinism, he refused to have anyone in his new "family" be called "Father." Leaders were ministers.
3. There is no evidence at all in his subsequent writings where he ever referred to an "earthly" Father in positive terms. In fact, when he did refer to such, it was in negative terms.

Secondly, when Francis referred to "Our Father who are in heaven," this entailed:

1. A notion of God as "Father" that was not patriarchal or even that of being a "patron," but, as is clear from his commentary on the "Our Father," the reality of the one called "Father" as inseparable from the other members of the Trinity. Thus he wrote in his *Expositio in Pater Noster* that the one we call "Our Father most holy" is "Our Creator, Redeemer, Consoler and Savior."
2. The "Our" part of the "Our Father" reflected his vision of everyone being equal and, furthermore, if the world would continue to be defined by patriarchal forms of majores and minores, his followers would opt to be called the least of all.
3. The "Our" part of the "Our Father" invited him and his followers to find a new way of solidarity with each other and all creation and to become subject to *every* creature.



Hymn of Gathering

The Summons

Kelvingrove

1. Will you come and follow me if I but call your name? Will you go where you don't know and never be the same? Will you let my love be shown, will you let my name be known, will you let my lie be grown in you and you in me?
2. Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name? will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same? Will you risk the hostile stare should your life attract or scare? Will you let me answer pray'r in you and you in me?
3. Will you let the blinded see if I but call your name? Will you set the pris'ners free and never be the same? Will you kiss the leper clean, and do such as this unseen, and admit to what I mean in you and you in me?
4. Will you love the 'you' you hide if I but call your name? will you quell the fear inside and never be the same? Will you use the faith you've found to reshape the world around, through my sight and touch and sound in you and you in me?
5. Lord, your summons echoes true when you but call my name. Let me turn and follow you and never be the same. In your company I'll go where your love and footsteps show. Thus I'll move and live and grow in you and you in me.

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Scripture Mathew 23:8-11

As for you, do not be called 'Rabbi.' You have but one teacher, and you are all brothers.
Call no one on earth your father; you have but one Father in heaven.
Do not be called 'Master'; you have but one master, the Messiah.
The greatest among you must be your servant.

Franciscan Source

A paraphrase of the Our Father

OUR FATHER MOST HOLY, our creator and redeemer, our Savior and Consoler.

WHO ARE IN HEAVEN, in the angels and saints enlightening them that they may know you, for you, Lord, are love, dwelling in them and filling them with your divinity, that bliss may be theirs, for you, Lord, are the highest Good, the eternal Good, from whom all goodness flows, without whom nothing is good.

YOUR NAME BE HELD HOLY: may our knowledge of you shine ever more clearly within us, that we may perceive the breadth of your blessings, the extent of your promises, the height of your majesty, the depth of your judgments.

YOUR KINGDOM COME: rule us now, through grace, and bring us at last to your kingdom of light where we shall see you as you are, and our love for you will be made perfect, our union blissful, our joy unending, in you.

YOUR WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IN HEAVEN may we love you with all our heart, ever thinking of you; with all our soul, ever longing for you; with all our mind, directing all our aims to you and seeking nothing but your glory; with all our strength, spending all our energies and all our senses of soul and body to serve only your love and nothing else.

May we love our neighbors as ourselves; drawing them all to your love in so far as we can, sharing their good fortune as if it were our own, helping them to bear their trials and doing them no wrong.

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD: your beloved Son our Lord Jesus Christ, that we may remember, understand and revere the love he showed for us, and all he said and did and suffered for our sake.

FORGIVE US OUR SINS through your mercy beyond words, through the power of the passion of your beloved Son, through the merits and intercession of the Virgin Mary and of all your chosen ones.

AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO SIN AGAINST US and that we ourselves cannot fully forgive, make us fully forgive; make us love our enemies, truly, for your sake; teach us how to pray sincerely to you on their behalf; and not to render harm for harm to anyone, but rather try to do good to all, in you!

AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION whether veiled or visible, sudden or searing and prolonged.

BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL past, present and to come. Amen

Questions for Personal Reflection and Sharing

1. How have you been affected by the “fatal disease” of the “sin” or “violence” of the world defined as patriarchy, materialism or violence? What helps you to deal with it?
2. How would you describe your image of and your relationship with God the Father? What role does God the Father play in your prayer and spirituality?
3. In Francis’ vision of the “Our Father” all people are equal and in solidarity with one another. How do you live out or express this solidarity with others and try to be at peace with all?

Prayer

God our Father, we turn to you often, asking for your guidance and assistance. Help us to turn away from evil and violence, to become messengers of peace. May we keep faith at the center of our hearts, rather than seek comfort in money or riches. Grant us humility, to be servants of one another in the Spirit of St. Francis. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



Finding the Pearl of Great Price: “To Live the Gospel” Embracing the Gospel of the Kingdom of Trinitarian Relations on Earth as in Heaven

With the three incidents core to Francis’ “withdrawal” from the violence in, among and around him, he was now open to move to the third part of the triad: to have the scriptures become fulfilled in him, to have the word enfleshed in his body and blood, to have “it” done to him according to God’s word, to hear the word of God and keep and thus become like the wise man who built his house on a rock instead of sand.

We all know the story:

One day the gospel was being read in that church [the Portiuncula] about how the Lord sent out his disciples to preach. The holy man of God, who was attending there, in order to understand better the words of the gospel, humbly begged the priest after celebrating the solemnities of the Mass to explain the gospel to him. The priest explained it all to him thoroughly line by line. When he heard that Christ’s disciples should not possess gold or silver or money, or carry on their journey a wallet or a sack, nor bread nor a staff, nor to have shoes nor two tunics, but that they should preach the kingdom of God and penance, the holy man, Francis, immediately exulted in the spirit of God. “This is what I want,” he said, “this is what I seek, this is what I desire with all my heart” (1C 9, 22).

How many times have we heard people say that they live “by gospel values”?

How often is the word “gospel” proclaimed as something that is supposed to mean something. However, when you ask the average Christian (and, I would add friar as well), you’ll get almost as many interpretations of what “gospel” means as questions asked! Yet all of us have vowed “to live the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.” What does living this Gospel really mean? This demands that we unpack what “gospel” means in the first place.

Another challenge facing us regarding “living the gospel,” is that the word “gospel” has been applied in so many ways to so many different processes and worldviews that it has lost its effective meaning. Thus we have the “gospels” according to Peanuts, Oprah and the Simpsons. Then we have the “gospel” of organizational gurus like Marcus Buckingham or financial academics like Milton Friedman. We even have the “prosperity gospel” taught by many of our Sunday preachers. It goes like this: “God wants you to be successful. Success involves financial success. Therefore God wants you to be financially successful.” This watering down of the

Gospel with another gospel incurred the wrath of Paul in the Letter to the Galatians. *Yet we ourselves can be caught adrift when we talk about our “gospel way of life.”*

At the time of Jesus, the “gospel” (*euangelion*) had a broad meaning and a quite specific, culturally-defined, meaning. Broadly speaking, it meant “good news” coming via some kind of communal salvation or liberation from some violence or enemy who threatened to do violence. However, more specifically it had a culturally-defined meaning: the expansion in (geographic) space and time of the imperial rule or governance of Caesar and his household. When Caesar’s armies conquered a new land (and, thus, expanded the empire), the “gospel would be proclaimed.” In a parallel way, when Caesar’s wife or son’s wife brought forth a male child/heir, the “gospel would be proclaimed.” All were expected to rejoice because the “*basileía*” (kingdom) of Caesar was now extended spatially and temporally. The right way to rejoice at such a gospel was to adapt to its “Pax Romana” and not be subversive.

When Jesus assumed the mantle of John and began his public ministry, his first words in Matthew demanded a conversion [from the reign of Caesar with its synchophants in the Jewish leadership group] to the *basileía* (kingdom/kingdom) of God. Almost immediately, upon calling the first four disciples, Matthew gives another triad about Jesus going about preaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing sickness and disease of every kind (Mt. 4: 17-23)

When I now talk about “the kingdom of God,” I find it helpful to use contemporary words for what it must have meant at the time of Jesus:

1. Other words for “kingdom” are many: empire, reign, rule, governance, power, energy, authority, way, will, dream, project, plan, realm, etc.
2. Other words for God, as we have learned from Councils and theologians reveal this God to be Trinitarian relatedness. While we traditionally call this God “Father, Son and Holy Spirit” we have seen that Francis found this Trinitarian Godhead to be defined by God as “Creator, Redeemer and Consoler.” Others define God as Lover, Beloved and Love. Building on the scriptural revelation of God as the “I am” and the trouble it got the historical Jesus into when he used it (in John’s Gospel), I like Heribert Mülen’s Trinitarian adaptation of Martin Büber’s “I, Thou and We.”

This makes me believe that Francis’ ultimate embrace of the gospel which was to find him bringing its peace to every household (oikonomía) demands that everything on earth must reveal the Trinitarian relations of the reign of the Godhead in heaven. Anything falling short of that is outside the gospel and demands conversion. This has radical implications in our threefold “houses” for the integrity of the fourth household: creation itself.



Hymn of Gathering

Holy, Holy, Holy

Nicaea

1. Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God almighty! Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee; Holy, Holy, Holy! Merciful and mighty god in three Persons, blessed Trinity.
2. Holy, Holy, Holy! All the saints adore thee, casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea; Cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee, who was, and is, and evermore shall be.
3. Holy, Holy, Holy! Though the darkness hide thee, though the eye made blind by sin thy glory may not see, only thou art holy; there is none beside thee, perfect in pow'r, in love, and purity.
4. Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty! All thy works shall praise thy Name, in earth, and sky, and sea; Holy, Holy, Holy! Merciful and mighty, God in three Persons, blessed Trinity.

Text 11 12 12 10; Reginald Heber, 1783-1826, alt. Music: John B. Dykes, 1823-1876.

Scripture 1 Cor. 9:14. 20-23

In the same way, the Lord ordered that those who preach the gospel should live by the gospel. To the Jews I became like a Jew to win over Jews; to those under the law I became like one under the law--though I myself am not under the law--to win over those under the law. To those outside the law I became like one outside the law--though I am not outside God's law but within the law of Christ--to win over those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, to win over the weak. I have become all things to all, to save at least some. All this I do for the sake of the gospel, so that I too may have a share in it.

Franciscan Source

Bonaventure, *Major Legend of Saint Francis*, XI, 1

Once, when the brothers asked him whether he was pleased that the learned men, who, by that time, had been received into the Order, were devoting themselves to the study of Sacred Scripture, he replied: "I am indeed pleased, as long as, after the example of Christ, of whom we read that he prayed more than he read, they do not neglect zeal for prayer; and, as long as they study, not to know what they should say, but to practice what they

have heard and, once they have put it into practice, propose it to others. I want my brothers,” he said, “to be Gospel disciples and so progress in knowledge of the truth that they increase in pure simplicity without separating the simplicity of the dove from the wisdom of the serpent which our eminent Teacher joined together in a statement from his own blessed lips.”

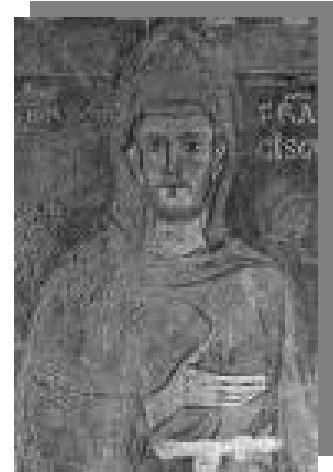
Questions for Personal Reflection and Sharing

1. What are the Gospel values that speak most strongly to you and guide your life?
2. What do you still want, seek, and desire with all your heart? How are you attempting to attain it?
3. What part of the Gospel is challenging you at this time in your life to continue to grow in your spiritual and religious life?

Prayer

Lord, help us to recognize that it is the true gospel that we are called to preach. By our lives we give witness to our trust in God and our desire to make your Word known to all who are ready to hear. Give us wisdom, give us commitment, and may you be known as Father, Son, and Spirit throughout the world. Amen.

“The Lord Gave Me Brothers” Giving Franciscan Flesh to the Eternal Question: “Who Is My Brother”



Some years ago I was asked to give the keynote to a group of Franciscan friars from two Provinces. One had many large institutions, one of them quite prestigious in some church circles. The other, smaller one, was highly leveraged in parishes, many of them poor. The title for my talks was “The Lord gave me brothers,” from the Testament of Francis.

I noticed when I arrived at the venue that the members of the first group referred to themselves as “Father” or “Brother” when introducing themselves to me. The second group called themselves only by their given names, without the titles.

Given this experience I changed my opening remarks to say, “I have been given the title of ‘The Lord gave me brothers’ for my series of talks. I think it’s important that we begin by being clear: Francis did not say: ‘The Lord gave me brothers and priests.’”

My talk went downhill from there, especially with the members of the Province defined by the first group.

According to Celano, when Francis was joined by “a man from Assisi,” , and then Bernard of Quintavale, they went to find their way of life defined more fully by probing the gospels. Their embrace of the three texts which appeared soon led to a total of 12, including Francis. This led the dreaming-dozen to Rome for papal approval of their “gospel” way of brotherhood which, with Clare, eventually became a brother/sisterhood.

It seems to me that one can only understand this uniquely familial oriented movement by returning to Francis’ earlier statement about wanting only to say “*Our* Father who are in heaven.”

Since his was a gospel-grounded community of equals reflecting Trinitarian relationships, a key passage in Matthew’s gospel sheds further light on his desire that his followers witness to that kind of community of disciples envisioned by Jesus himself. Building on Mark’s source (Mk. 3:31-35) about who constitute Jesus’ family members—his mother, brothers and sisters, Matthew said such were those disciples who did “the will of my Father in heaven” (Mt. 12:50).

In some key passages Francis developed this notion in terms of deep bonds of intimacy and relatedness. We find them especially in the two Letters to the Faithful. It was the Spirit who gave him brothers and sisters; now with that Spirit making its home and dwelling place among them, they were to become children of the heavenly Father in their works, becoming “spouses,

brothers, and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ.” He developed this notion in terms of deep intimacy by immediately saying:

We are spouses when the faithful soul is joined by the Holy Spirit to our Lord Jesus Christ. We are brothers to Him when we do the will of the Father who is in heaven. We are mothers when we carry Him in our heart and body through a divine love and a pure and sincere conscience and give birth to Him through a holy activity which must be seen as an example before others (1LtF 1, 7-10; see 2LtF 48-55).

In this same vein of creating familial relations of intimacy, Francis gave a clear model of how the brothers in the Spirit were to relate to each other—as a Mother loves her child according to the flesh: “Wherever the brothers may be and meet one another, let them show that they are members of the same family. Let each one confidently make known his need to the other . . . When any brother falls sick, the other brothers must serve him as they would wish to be served themselves” (LR 6, 7-8, 9)

It is clear here, as well as his Rule for Hermitages, that if any “parental” modeling would be embraced by the brothers, that model would not be coming from patriarchal forms but inclusive, nurturing ways. Within a world of patriarchal and clerical structures, his community was to be structured by what he called “evangelical” ways of relating and trusting. Rather than critique the existing patriarchal and clerical church as contra God’s vision for community or Jesus’ clear definition of what constituted his mother, brothers and sisters under the one he called his “heavenly Father,” Francis just created an alternative, nurturing community. Ultimately, it seems, he had to make a choice. His was the creation of a nurturing model of mutuality rather than one which was defined by hierarchy and mutually exclusive roles.

In his very helpful book *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*, George Lakoff indicates that today, all of us create our basic moral stance toward life and ultimate worldview from one of the two models from which Francis chose his way of life: the “Strict Father model” or the “Nurturing Parent model.” His “basic claim” is that the former represents a conservative stance while the latter sees the world as one of equals nurturing each other.² Certainly the latter would be the model if we follow Francis’ approach to creation in personifying its elements in terms of them being his brothers and sisters. Such a nurturing model finds its apogee in the Canticle of Creation.

At the first retreat one of the friars suggested that a third model is being replicated more and more: the “Absent Father” model. This results in dynamics among people that reflect more chaos, anomie and indifference. I think he has a good point.



² George Lakoff, *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 32-36.

Hymn of Gathering

We Are Many Parts

Marty Haugen

Refrain:

We are many parts, we are all one body, and the gifts we have we are given to share. May the Spirit of love make us one indeed; one, the love that we share, one, our hope in despair, one, the cross that we bear.

1. God of all, we look to you, we would be your servants true, let us be your love to all the world. **Refrain.**
2. So my pain is pain for you, in your joy is my joy, too; all is brought together in the Lord. **Refrain.**
3. All you seekers great and small, seek the greatest gift of all; if you love, then you will know the Lord. **Refrain.**

Text: Based on 1 Corinthians 12, 13. Text and music © 1980, 1986, GIA Publications, Inc.
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Scripture Matthew 12: 46-50

While he was still speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brothers appeared outside, wishing to speak with him. Someone told him, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, asking to speak with you." But he said in reply to the one who told him, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother."

Franciscan Source

Francis of Assisi, A Rule for Hermitages

Let those who wish to live religiously in hermitages, be three brothers or four at most. Let two of them be mothers and have two sons, or at least one. Let the two former lead the life of Martha and the other two the life of Mary Magdalene. Let those who lead the life of Mary have one cloister and each his own place, so that they may not live or sleep together. And let them always say Compline of the day toward sunset, and let them be careful to keep silence and to say their Hours and to rise for Matins, and let them seek first "the kingdom of God and His justice." And let them say Prime and Tierce at the proper time, and, after the hour of Tierce, they may break

silence and may speak and, when it is pleasing to them, they may go to their mothers and may ask an alms from them for the love of the Lord God, like little poor ones. And after that, let them say Sext and Nones and Vespers at the appointed time.

And they must not allow any person to enter into the cloister where they live, or let them eat there. Let those brothers who are mothers endeavor to keep apart from every person and, by the obedience of their custos, let them guard their sons from every person, so that no one may speak with them. And let these sons not speak with any person except with their mothers and with their custos, when it shall please him to visit them with the blessing of God. But the sons must sometimes in turn assume the office of mothers, for a time, according as it may seem to them to dispose. Let them strive to observe all the above diligently and earnestly.

Questions for Personal Reflection and Sharing

1. What experience do you have of the Strict Father model, the Nurturing Parent model and also of the Absent Father model?
2. How confident are you that your needs would be met if you made them known to your brothers? How has this happened well, and how might this not have happened so well?
3. In what ways are you willing to meet the needs of your brothers, even at some sacrifice to yourself? What are the limits that you think can justifiably be drawn?

Prayer

Lord, help us not to cling to titles or to positions, but rather to see one another as brothers in Christ. As “minor” brothers our goal is to attend to the needs of one another, and others rather than asking them to serve us. Let us be attentive to our place in Creation as those who give thanks and rejoice in the gift of life. Amen.



The Result of “Living the Gospel:” Imitating Jesus, Becoming the Christ

Early on, Celano writes one of my favorite passages about Francis and the goal of his life: “For it had to be that the gospel call be fulfilled in the one who was to be in faith and truth a minister of the gospel” (1C 3, 7).

When Francis heard the words of the Gospels, both when he asked the priest to unpack the “missionary narrative” to him as well as when he, Bernard and the disputed other “man,” sometimes called Peter opened the Book of the Gospels three times, it is clear that such an approach indicated his desire, even early on, to have them “fulfilled” in his life and that of his followers.

Francis spent his life in fidelity to the gospel, trying to transform his life into an embodiment of it. In the process the Word became fulfilled in him to the point that he bore the wounds of the Crucified One in his body. This is recognized by the Roman Church in the passage from Galatians that is used on the Feast of St. Francis, October 4:

May I never boast of anything but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ! Through it, the world has been crucified to me and I to the world. It means nothing whether one is circumcised or not. All that matters is that one is created anew. Peace and mercy on all who follow this rule of life . . .

Henceforth, let no one trouble me, for I bear the brand marks of Jesus in my body.

Brothers and sisters, may the favor of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Amen (Gal. 6:14-18).

Earlier Paul told the Church, the Body of Christ, located in Galatia that he was “again in travail until Christ be formed in you!” (Gal. 5:19).

Francis’ conversion “into Christ” began with his “withdrawal” at Spoleto. This gradually found him “leaving the world” in a way that the world became crucified to him and in him (in the way he identified with lepers and others rejected by “the world”). Through his solidarity with those who were marginated, becoming their brothers and sisters, in his body, he became an embodiment of the one who was/is crucified continually in His members.

For Francis, the only thing that seemed to matter to him, as with Paul, was that he be “created anew.” In the process he had fulfilled in his body and blood that wonderful passage from 2 Corinthians that seems to be an echo of the passage from Galatians: “From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, whoever is in Christ is a new creation; the old order has passed away; behold a new order has come” (2 Cor. 5: 16-17).

I have not done a word search (yet) of Francis’ references to Jesus compared to those where he uses the word “Christ.” However, it seems quite clear that, while he definitely saw the

historical Jesus as an inspiration and one to be imitated by “walking in the footsteps” of that ideal, there was something deeper in his spirituality than that. It is clear that because of his inspiration and imitation of Jesus in his own body and blood that he integrated the pattern of Jesus in himself to the degree that he became its incarnation or living testament. In the process of this integration, he moved from being inspired and imitating Jesus to becoming an embodiment of “the Christ.” He moved to identification with “the Christ.” He became Christified. In the process of becoming this “other Christ,” he revealed himself to be a new creation; the old order was gone.

How we become this “new order” will be exhibited in our relationships and how we make sure there is no one “outside” our concerns, there is no discrimination in our lives and relationships, and that we work for the kind of justice (personally, communally/fraternally, and organizationally) that will bring this about.

By our fidelity to live the Gospel of Trinitarian Relationships, inspired by the historical Jesus and imitating him by “walking in his footprints,” we gradually integrate his values and teachings in our body and blood. This moves us to becoming transformed into “the Christ,” by identification (see 2Cor. 3:17-4:7). The process can be outlined like this:

- 1. Inspiration (the “Lord inspired me”)*
- 2. Imitation (to “walk in the footprints” of the historical Jesus)*
- 3. Integration (the more we “do,” the more we become).*
- 4. Identification (we become one with the source of our life)*

This is our goal as well: to so embody the Gospel way of life in the dynamics by which we proclaim and embody the reign or rule of Trinitarian relations in our personal, fraternal/communal and organizational lives, that we ourselves “become the Christ.” The old order is gone.



Hymn of Gathering

Praise to You, O Christ, Our Savior

Bernadette Farrell

Refrain:

Praise to you, O Christ, our Savior, Word of the Father, calling us to life; Son of God who leads us to freedom: glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

1. You are the word who calls us out of darkness; you are the Word who leads us into light; you are the Word who brings us through the desert: glory to you Lord Jesus Christ!

Refrain

2. You are the one whom prophets hoped and longed for; you are the one who speaks to us today; you are the one who leads us to our future: glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

Refrain

3. You are the Word who calls us to be servants; you are the Word whose only law is love; you are the Word-made-flesh who lives among us: glory to you , Lord Jesus Christ!

Refrain

4. You are the Word who binds us and unites us; you are the Word who calls us to be one; you are the Word who teaches us forgiveness: glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ! **Refrain**

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Scripture Thes. 2:10-14

You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers. As you know, we treated each one of you as a father treats his children, exhorting and encouraging you and insisting that you conduct yourselves as worthy of the God who calls you into his kingdom and glory. And for this reason we too give thanks to God unceasingly, that, in receiving the word of God from hearing us, you received not a human word but, as it truly is, the word of God, which is now at work in you who believe. For you, brothers, have become imitators of the churches of God that are in Judea in Christ Jesus.

Franciscan Source

Bonaventure, *The Minor Legend of Saint Francis*, VI, Ninth Lesson

This blessed man certainly appeared worthy to be marked with this singular privilege since his whole endeavor, both public and private, centered around the cross of the Lord. What else than

his wonderful gentleness, the austerity of his life, his profound humility, his prompt obedience, his extreme poverty, his unimpaired chastity; what else than the bitterness of his compunction, his flow of tears, his heartfelt compassion, his zeal for emulation, his desire for martyrdom, his outstanding charity, and finally the privilege of the many virtues that made him Christ-like: what else stood out in him than these similarities to Christ, these preparations for the sacred stigmata? For this reason, the whole course of his life, from the time of his conversion, was adorned with the remarkable mysteries of the cross of Christ. Finally, at the sight of the sublime Seraph and the humble Crucified, he was transformed totally by a fiery, divine power into the likeness of the form which he saw. Those who saw them, touched them, and kissed them testified to this; and after having touched these most sacred wounds, they confirmed them with greater certitude by swearing that they saw them and that they were exactly as reported.

Questions for Personal Reflection and Sharing

1. How have you been formed and changed by the living out of the gospel in your ministerial and personal life?
2. What is being created in you now, in what way are you being called and/or inspired to further growth in the Spirit at this time in your life?
3. In the new order established by Christ, everyone has a place. Who do you find difficult to include in your life?

Prayer

Jesus Christ, you called Francis of Assisi to be one with you, even to the sharing in your suffering. Instill within us the Spirit which gives us both joy in being with you, and hope in times of struggle and pain. May we be “Christified” in that we carry your power within us at all time, and bear witness to your love and compassion in all we do. Amen.

Proclaiming and Becoming the Peace of the Christ Redefining Our Charism



I think we have gotten our charism wrong. If you'd ask most every Franciscan, as well as our experts, you'd hear them say: "The Franciscan charism is poverty." However, if we look at a charism as something grounded in God's Spirit we know there is no poverty in God. So poverty is not something we should be aiming for. Indeed, in our ministries among humans who are living in poverty, our effort is to bring them "good news" by trying to take poverty away.

I believe a fuller examination of "the Sources" reveals that poverty is the means Francis embraced when he asked the priest to explain the Gospel in detail to bring about a greater goal: the proclamation of penance and peace to every "house" (Mk. 3:8-11; Mt. 10:5-14; Lk. 9:2-5).

In the *Testament* Francis does not tell us that "the Lord" inspired him with a mission to proclaim poverty to the world but "peace." The way they would embody that peace and not be a contradiction to it would be by their personal and fraternal way of poverty:

And I worked with my hands, and I still desire to work; and I honestly desire all brothers to give themselves to honest work. Let those who do not know how to work learn, not from desire to receive wages, but for example and to avoid idleness. And when we are not paid for our work, let us have recourse to the table of the Lord, begging alms from door to door. The Lord revealed a greeting to me that we should say: "May the Lord give you peace."

If a charism is meant to build up the body of the Church and Society, there is no greater need in it than peace, especially as we find ourselves almost immunized by the violence in, among and around us, including the violence in our Church and Society.

As I study the Sources, I find Francis had a powerful insight as to what created conflicts and violence in the world and what was the biggest obstacle to bringing out the penance and peace to which he was called to proclaim in his ministry: issues related to wealth in its various forms: power, possessions and pride/prestige. This is made clear in a passage found in both the *Anonymous of Perugia* and the *Legend of the Three Companions*.

One day when the blessed Francis had gone to that bishop [Guido of Assisi, his counselor], the bishop told him: "It seems to me that your life is very rough and hard, not having or possessing anything in this world." The saint of God answered: "Lord, if we had any possessions, we would need arms to protect them because they [wealth in the

form of power, possessions and pride/prestige] cause many disputes and lawsuits. And possessions usually impede the love of God and neighbor. Therefore we do not want to possess anything in this world” (AP 3, 17; L3C 9, 35).

Shalom was the promised sign of the scriptures being fulfilled in the world; the result of the inbreaking of God’s Trinitarian reign or rule in our personal, communal/fraternal and organizational lives. Isaiah reminds us that *shalom* is another name for “the Christ.”

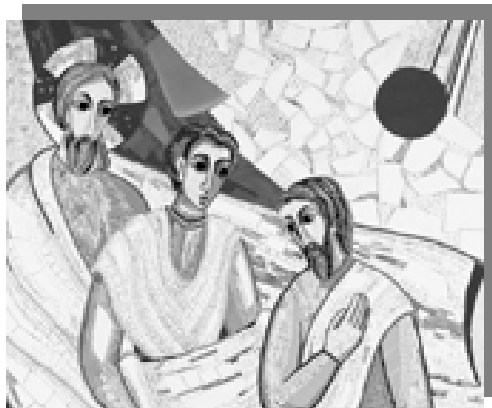
When we analyze the above passage from AP and L3C we find that Francis saw that violence, the antidote of peace, arose because of conflicts related to disputes arising from competing property, power and prestige claims. Therefore, to eliminate the possibility of war in himself and his followers, they would not own anything so that they might proclaim in word and deed the core message of the gospel: “peace to this house.”

When we analyze Francis’ writings further, we find that the core of his “way of poverty” revolved around the notion of “non-appropriation” or becoming possession-less, power-less and prestige-less. In the process of non-appropriating “anything” to themselves the friars would truly become counter-cultural. By non-appropriating prestige they would separate themselves from feudalism, by non-appropriating “house nor place nor anything at all” they would separate themselves from materialism (and its incipient expression in capitalism), and, finally, by non-appropriating any controlling power to themselves they would distance themselves from the basic power arrangement at the heart of all the sin of Francis’ world: the difference between the *majores* and *minores*.

If peace is to come to every “house,” we need to follow Francis in finding ways that move us to non-appropriation at four levels of our various “households:”

1. *Non-appropriation of self-will and non-retaliation in our individual lives (Ad. 22).*
2. *Non-appropriation among ourselves in our fraternities in the way we settle disputes (LR 7, 3).*
3. *Non-appropriation as we go about “the world” proclaiming peace (LR 3,10-14).*
4. *Non-appropriation that will bring about a new order between the lion and lamb or, following Franciscan lore, the wolf and Gubbio.*

The goal of all is to come to that “true and perfect joy” that results from making no claims to anything or about ourselves, but truly becoming submissive to every creature for God’s sake. *When we have nothing to defend vis-à-vis any claim to power, possessions or even our name, that brothers is true and perfect joy.*



Hymn of Gathering

Prayer of St. Francis

Sebastian Temple

1. Make me a channel of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me bring your love. Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord, and where there's doubt, true faith in your.
2. Make me a channel of your peace. Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope. Where there is darkness only light, and where there's sadness ever joy.
3. O Master, grant that I may never seek so much to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved, as to love, with all my soul.
4. Make me a channel of your peace. It is in pardoning that we are pardoned, in giving of ourselves that we receive, and in dying that we're born to eternal life

Text: Based on the prayer traditionally ascr. To St. Francis of Assisi, ca. 1182-1226.
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Scripture Romans 12:9-18

Let love be sincere; hate what is evil, hold on to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; anticipate one another in showing honor. Do not grow slack in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the holy ones, exercise hospitality. Bless those who persecute (you), bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Have the same regard for one another; do not be haughty but associate with the lowly; do not be wise in your own estimation. Do not repay anyone evil for evil; be concerned for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, on your part, live at peace with all.

Franciscan Source

Bonaventure, *The Major Life of Saint Francis*, III, 2

Through divine prompting the man of God began to become a model of evangelical perfection and invite others to penance. His statements were neither hollow nor worthy of ridicule, but filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, they penetrated the marrow of the heart, so that they moved those hearing them in stunned amazement. In all his preaching, he announced peace by saying: "May the Lord give you peace." Thus he greeted the people at the beginning of his talk. As he later testified, he had learned this greeting by the Lord revealing it to him. Thus it happened that, filled with the spirit of prophets and

according to a prophetic passage, he proclaimed peace, preached salvation, brought to true peace many who had previously lived at odds with Christ and far from salvation.

Questions for Personal Reflection and Sharing

1. When have you appropriated your self-will or retaliation in your life? What was the result? When have you been more open to the will of others or to forgiveness? What was the result?
2. In the way we settle disputes, how difficult is it for you to let go of your own position and listen to others? How has success in this area been a grace?
3. What is your experience of being a peacemaker? How could you be a better proclaimer of peace?

Prayer

Brother Jesus, you were a man of peace. You chose not to respond to violence with force, but rather with calm compassion. You lived a simple life in such a way that you did not need to defend your wealth or pride. You gave your total self to bring forgiveness of sin to all who believe. And now you call us to be messengers of peace through our actions and our words. Guide us, help us to let go of what can cause disputes. Let us be brothers who keep alive the words of Francis, "Peace and Good." Amen.



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