

Conference of National Spiritual Assistants

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Monthly Spiritual Message NOVEMBER 2018

CELEBRATING 40 YEARS THE RULE OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER (Part 9)

Charity and Holiness

As the Father sees in every person the features of his Son,
the firstborn of many brothers and sisters,
so the Secular Franciscans with a gentle and courteous spirit
accept all people as a gift of the Lord
and an image of Christ.¹

Secular Franciscans are called as a first priority to prayer. For this reason, welcoming people begins by including them in our prayers.

As Jesus was the true worshipper of the Father, so let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do. Let them participate in the sacramental life of the Church, above all the Eucharist. Let them join in liturgical prayer² reliving the mysteries of the life of Christ.³

This sense of being part of a fraternity of prayer is backed up again in Article 14: 4 of the General Constitutions:

The brothers and sisters, as well as the fraternities, should adhere to the indications of the Ritual with respect to the different forms of participating in the liturgical prayer of the Church, giving priority to the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours.⁴

Why is the Liturgy of the Hours so important? The simple answer is because it is the prayer of Christ! The addition of the Christian canticles gives a finality and completion to the ancient voice of Israel in the psalms.⁵ Let us look briefly at three of these Canticles of the New Testament.

It was not merely poetry that St Paul gives expression to when he declares “*He chose us in Him⁶ before the foundation of the world...*” This brilliant canticle at the beginning of his Letter to the Ephesians is full of insights for St Paul. These insights are a thunderclap of theology that continues to roll on with the words that follow: “*...that we should be holy and blameless before him.*”

Quite often mystics find that only poetry can express an insight that is grasped in an instant of clarity with such a density of insight that it takes a lifetime to explain – if at all. In three theologically packed canticles, St Paul outlines his brilliant understanding of Jesus of Nazareth. So important are these Canticles that they are repeated again and again in the Liturgy of the Hours⁷ – the Breviary.

¹ OFS Rule 13 paragraph 1.

² Reference to the “Divine Liturgy” the public worship of the Church, which includes not only the Mass, but all the sacraments, and the Liturgy of the Hours.

³ OFS Rule 8 (Also see footnote in the Rule: Church, 67; Laity 4a,b,c.)

⁴ *Ritual OFS*, Appendix 26, 27.

⁵ The Book of Psalms is the longest book in the Bible with 150 psalms. These are the prayers of Israel used in the Temple.

⁶ Christ.

⁷ “The Liturgy of the Hours” is mentioned many times in The Rule, Constitutions & Ritual. In its shortened or brief version it is also referred to as “The Breviary.”

Every Sunday Evening Prayer 1 has the Canticle from **Philippians** 2: 6-11. “*Though he was in the form of God, Jesus did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. He emptied himself being born in the likeness of men.*”

Every Monday Evening Prayer has the Canticle from **Ephesians** 1:3-10 “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.*”

Every Wednesday Evening Prayer has the Canticle from **Colossians** 1:12-20. “*Let us give thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.*” The scope of these canticles is astounding and demands a very deep meditation and understanding so that we more fully recognize the hope that God has for us since the beginning of creation, a hope that is fulfilled in Christ.⁸

Where did the Liturgy of the Hours come from: “*Over the course of time, a liturgy of psalms arose within the local churches, under the leadership of the priests, as a kind of necessary complement to the sacrifice of the Eucharist, the highest act of worship of God.*” *At definite times and places it extended this worship of the Eucharist into the different hours of daily life.*”⁹

Stirred into life by Holy Spirit, prayer to God is the breath of love¹⁰ that joined together in fraternity is like a great river of praise and thanksgiving.¹¹ When we pray the “Liturgy of the Hours” we step into this great river of wind, the breath of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of all those who pray, that begins to flow around the world before the dawn of each day. As the globe turns, it moves westward into morning, midday, evening and night moving onward again into morning following the Ordo¹² or Calendar of yearly feasts of the church.

Each time we step into this mystical river of religious poetry we join in the ancient psalms of Israel and the bright clear praise of the Christians canticles. In the Incarnation, Christ, the Son of Israel, took up this song to the Father. In praying the Liturgy of the Hours, we join Christ and become his voice, gathering up the joyful, sorrowful, glorious and luminous mysteries of life as his living body, as he sings to the Father. In all this, the Holy Spirit is the look of love that passes between the Father and the Son in the very singing of this song of life. This process is understood only by analogy or distinction - if you wish poetically. In truth, the consubstantiality of the three persons does not allow for such distinctions. It is more correct to say: The Trinity is dialogue; God is love.

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PLEASE distribute this Monthly Spiritual Message to all MEMBERS of your FRATERNITY.
(This includes Spiritual Assistants and isolated members)

⁸ Franciscan Theology teaches that at the very beginning of creation, the Incarnation was/is central to God’s vision and purpose of creation. The Incarnation is not a reaction, to sin, but the very impulse of love that caused creation and fulfills creation. The Incarnation is the very plan of creation. Wrapt in the glory of Christ each person is a “Gift” of God. Please read again the opening lines of this Message i.e. OFS Rule 13 paragraph 1. – and be stunned by these beautiful words of the Secular Franciscan Rule. “Lord make me an instrument of this great treasure of your love, teach me to pray for others and attend to them with respect and compassion.” C4

⁹ See Volume I of the Breviary, p.xi for the “Apostolic Constitution” of St Pope Paul VI. These words: “*In the course of time...*” are from the second paragraph. The Liturgy of the Hours is linked to the Eucharist. For this reason it is recommended that Morning Prayer be celebrated at times within the Mass to concentrate the faithful of this connection between the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours, which extends the Eucharistic praise throughout the day and night.

¹⁰ Capuchin Constitutions 45:1. “*Prayer to God is the breathing of love stirred into life by the Holy Spirit...*”

¹¹ St John Vianney: Vianney: “*Private prayer is like straw scattered here and there; if you set it on fire it makes a lot of little flames. But gather these straws into a bundle and light them, and you get a mighty fire, rising like a column into the sky; public prayer is like that.*”

¹² The ORDO (Order the Liturgy). As a General Calendar it is found at the beginning of the Breviary. It sets out the yearly feasts of the Church.