

Conference of National Spiritual Assistants

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Monthly Spiritual Message MAY 2019

CELEBRATING 40 YEARS THE RULE OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER (Part 15 Final)

Mary in the midst of our Fraternity – a Meditation

The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order gives us a simple and beautiful example of how we are to live our fraternal life. It presents us with the image of Mary, the mother of Jesus as a person of “*self-giving service*.”

We need to put on the eyes of faith if we wish to see the Blessed Virgin Mary in the midst of our fraternity. We will find her only if we give up all sense of self-importance and enter into an attitude of listening service¹ to the fraternity and constantly ask ourselves: “*What needs to be done?*” Mary will be quietly taking responsibility for the little things that go into making the time of fraternity a very special time each month, and a memorable place of encouragement for us, in our busy lives.

Saint Francis describes the perfect friar minor as one who has all the qualities of several holy friars who were his companions. In this way, Saint Francis shows that the true Franciscan can only be seen when witness is given by the combined virtues of the whole fraternity.² So too then, the Blessed Virgin Mary cannot be seen among us in fraternity unless we have a sense of the combined virtue of everyone in that fraternity and only then when the fraternity is focused on our Lord Jesus Christ. The words of the Prophet Samuel are appropriate: “*Here I am Lord, I come to do your will!*”³

Mary will be the most courteous among us; the very first to arrive; the one to make sure that everything is ready; a table cloth on the table, flowers to brighten the room. Mary will be the one with a little food to share; the one who knows who is having a tough time; who is ill and tired and needs cheering up. Mary will greet everyone with a knowing smile; these are her friends; these are her family.

Mary will welcome any new people into this family, keep an eye on them, be attentive to everyone; miss nothing. Mary will always be seeking solutions to the challenges that confront us, rather than seeking to blame anyone. Mary will be a peace-maker, an untier of knots, in difficult situations. Mary will be humble, but not weak because her love for others will be steady and boundless. Mary will hope for the best in others, not expect it! Always encouraging others to be the best they can be. Mary will not be upset when people fail and don’t fulfill their promises or commitments because Mary has the patience of a wife, a mother, a friend. Mary will rejoice in the gifts and virtues of others, and when they leave the room, Mary will always say something good about them.⁴

¹ Psychologists use the word “attending” to better describe the listening attitude necessary to properly take in all aspects of a person that you are caring for.

² In all the stories about St Francis this description of the “perfect friar” is found only in Number 85 of the Mirror of Perfection (Omnibus page 1218). This beautiful text is too long to quote here. I cannot give you another reference because I cannot find the *Speculum Perfectionis* any where else.

³ This is the cry of the boy prophet Samuel (1 Sam 3:1) It is a beautiful story of when the Lord first called to the little boy Samuel and Samuel was completely confused.

⁴ Admonition 25. Good Gossip always finds its source. Bad gossip is always anonymous.

Mary will make sure that there is a book of the Gospels open on the table at a part that is inspiring and helpful. Mary will make certain that there is a burning candle nearby because her son is the light of the world.⁵ Mary will make sure that all is in readiness for “the family” to arrive because the spirit of the Secular Franciscan Order is all about “family”! Indeed, as a mother, Mary is all about family. As a mother, Mary will be always attentive; always listening; always concerned, but above all gently, with everyone.

**The Virgin Mary,
humble servant of the Lord,
was open to every word and call,
of her son Jesus.⁶**

Mary knows that the true beauty of Secular Franciscan life is this sense of belonging to the Franciscan family. This spirit of family extends to all Franciscans, the Poor Clares, the tertiary religious, and of course, the friars. Even when the friars don’t want to be included, when they are too busy, have other things to do, seem grumpy and out of sorts, the spirit of Mary among the Seculars will always include them, pray for them, and invite them to be part of the family, even if they are not Spiritual Assistants. Mary knows that what is true for the Seculars is also true for the Friars; they cannot truly say they follow Saint Francis unless they also embrace the whole Franciscan Family.

Mary loves in a special way those who, although part of the family, are for so many reasons, valid and invalid, isolated from the fraternity. The meditation of the English poet John Donne holds true, “*No man is an island entire of itself.*”⁷ All who make profession and promise God to be part of a fraternity are still included as part of the entire Franciscan Family, Mary’s family.

**She was embraced by Francis with indescribable love
and declared the protectress and advocate of his family.⁸**

So then, to Mary, the word “meeting” would be a word more suited to the business world. For her, the heart of our fraternal life together is the family spirit of the Gospel; the family that gathers around her son.

**The Secular Franciscans should express their ardent love for her
by imitating her complete self-giving
and by praying earnestly and confidently.⁹**

Let us always remember that the Secular Franciscan way of life is in giving witness to the gospel every day by a ministry to others, especially the members of the fraternity. Our way of life is always to be lived out in apostolic activity, for we are a truly Catholic family.¹⁰

PLEASE distribute this Monthly Spiritual Message to all MEMBERS of your FRATERNITY.

⁵ A candle always calls us to prayer and reflection. A lit candle always shines in another’s eyes.

⁶ OFS Rule 9

⁷ John Donne (1572 - 1631) No Man is an Island. Meditation XVII.

No man is an island entire of itself; every man
is a piece of the continent, a part of the main;
if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe
is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as
well as any manner of thy friends or of thine
own were; any man's death diminishes me,
because I am involved in mankind.
And therefore never send to know for whom
the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

⁸ 2 *Celano* 198 (*Omnibus* p. 521); (Francis of Assisi: Early Documents “The Founder.” p. 374) (Abbr.: The Founder) In *The Founder* 2 *Celano* is called “The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul.”

⁹ The Rule of the OFS No: 9

¹⁰ Catholic in the sense of universal world wide.