

## **SPIRITUAL MESSAGE FOR THE MONTH OF OCTOBER 2009**

### **FRANCIS THE SIGN THAT POINTS TO CHRIST**

Thomas of Celano wrote about St. Francis, "...that he set about upon the way of total perfection," and the French historian Renan says of Francis that "After Jesus, (Francis was) the only perfect Christian." (Moorman, p.13)

Francis is often portrayed as a gentle young man of a flowery nature in many films that we see about him. But when one reads what Celano, Bonaventure and the other Franciscan Sources say of Francis, one sees someone completely different. What does one see? Who is this man so mysterious, yet who points to Jesus his Master?

Francis started out wanting to be a knight, to win the heart of some beautiful young maiden, to be given lands, honour, wealth and privileges. All these ambitions are good and were perhaps the dreams of many other young men and women of his time. Yet Francis would become a 'sign of contradiction.' Instead of achieving his ambitions, he became a sign that spoke more about the Gospel than of worldly ambitions. He came into contact with the Living God, and through Him, his Son Jesus portrayed in the Fullness of the Book of the Gospels. And, choosing to respond to God, through his Son, Jesus, Francis began to follow and imitate this Jesus of the Gospels who was a 'sign of contradiction' to the people of his time too. Francis begins his journey to become the Sign and fierce Warrior of the Gospels.'

He was well loved by his father and mother by his friends and others as well. Jesus began to invite Francis to look around him and to see what was going on in his life, family and his church. Jesus was asking Francis to see how he could challenge the 'status quo' of his society. Where do we see the model for Francis to follow, where do we read and in what book of instructions, does one find this model? Where will he find his ideals, motivation and courage to carry out this challenge and change in his life, then translate it into a practical example for others to see and follow? The deeper question might be, "how is Jesus calling Francis to change, perhaps through a deep personal and total renunciation of self, is that possible?

Yes, it is possible. Jesus came and he proclaimed "I have come in the name of my Father and you refuse to accept me; if someone else comes in his own name you will accept him." (Jn.5:43). Francis accepted the call of total renunciation for the sake of the Jesus and for his gospel. He was sent free by Jesus and his Spirit to be fully open to his sanctifying grace and presence. Francis immediately set out to proclaim the full contents of the gospel. This gospel contained the fullness of the Father's revelation of his Son Jesus. Just as Jesus was sent to show everyone the way back to the Father, so through Francis, Jesus was proclaimed, imitated and made visible by works of faith. Francis was nourished through the Eucharist and lived out the fullness of the Eucharist of Jesus, so much so that he became the

living Icon of Jesus. Wherever Francis went he attracted people back to Jesus and to the Father.

Jesus came with a clear motive to meet men and women where they were and in their daily life. He came to meet them and give them if they had faith in him, the gift of a relationship with his Father, based on reconciliation and healing and nourishment. He came to heal the sick and give sight to the blind, to speak to them his word that would undo the paralysing fear and sin that caused them to turn away from the Father to empty idols, "...made of human hands..." and to return to the Father once again. Francis heard this voice crying out in his heart and responded to it. He became the 'fierce warrior and sign' of the Crucified and Risen Lord of the Gospel. He met Jesus in the caves, in the old churches round about, and began to see that these old structures may be the external sign of the 'status quo.' Francis sees and knows that he must start with himself. He must embrace a complete self renunciation and listen to what the Lord is saying to him. "Francis I want you to renounce yourself and all that is around you, then take up your cross and follow me..."

Francis starts his inner journey of self renunciation that will manifest itself externally in the way he lives and preaches this Jesus of the Gospel. He slowly strips himself of his goods, his family (because he saw what the disproportionate love of possessions can do to one...his father). Once this act for Christ happened Francis began to live the Gospel life. He had a guide and benefactor in the Bishop of Assisi, who encouraged Francis to follow the Lord. The Lord in turn drew others to him. And, Francis through a life of deep prayer and devotion to the Crucified Lord and service to all people especially the poor and the sick he was moulded into the image of the Crucified One who constantly strengthened and nourished Francis to become more like him. In becoming like Christ, Francis's words which were on fire with the love of Christ, made an immediate impact on all who heard him speak, even if they didn't like him. Francis became that great warrior of the Gospel in order to bring Jesus alive to everyone. But he had to pay what seems to be a terrible price, his life. Yet Francis at the end of his life didn't see that this terrible price was too much. No, he only prayed that he could give and do more.

In reading and seeing in our mind's eye the life of Francis, 'that thoroughly catholic man' do we see the price Jesus asked of Francis as being too much? Are we willing to pay the price to become another Christ to others, as followers of St. Francis? Are we willing to sacrifice something small to receive a gift that only the Lord can give that will satisfy the deepest desire of the human heart?

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**Regional Ministers are requested to distribute this monthly spiritual message to all local Fraternities in the Regional Fraternity.**

