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***Monthly Spiritual Message***

*December 2012-140*

**WHAT CAN I OFFER HIM?**

We know how Our Seraphic Father had a great love for the celebration of Christmas and his devotion to the Incarnation shown to us by his experience at Greccio of Christ's birth.

There are people who dislike devotion to the Christ Child, but our Franciscan tradition shows us a rich tradition of devotion to the crib. His devotion reminds us of the God's great love for us that he would humble himself to become a baby on earth for us, but also that we must be like children in our total dependence on our Heavenly Father. I will never forget Christmas in a Hispanic parish in California where the children all came up to receive the blessing from the baby Jesus!!

Let this celebration of Our Lord's Birth be for us an examination of conscience as we come before the crib of the Christ Child. As children love to visit the crib, let us be like little children with our hearts and surrender all our concerns and needs to Jesus, our Lord and God.

Let us approach 2013 with trust in the providential goodness of our Father in heaven who knows best for his children. Our Australian Saint, Mother Mary of the Cross, frequently said and lived this sentiment: "Trust in the will of Our Good God". Saints didn't escape difficulty or problems but surrendering all to God, but they were given the grace to put up with much suffering and acute sorrow in their lives!

We know that our Father Francis loved the feast of Christmas and the friars popularised carols as well as the Christmas crèche. But above all Francis knew that Christmas proclaimed the great redemptive love the Lord has for each of us: "And we thank you for, just as through your Son you created us, so also through your holy love, with which you have loved us, you caused him to be born true, God and man, of the glorious, ever Virgin most Blessed and Holy Mary, and you willed to redeem us captives through his cross, death and Blood" (Non-approved Rule, Chapter 23).

In this Year of Faith and Grace, when I come to the newborn Prince of Peace in the Crib, what can I offer Him?

As a Franciscan, what are the gifts that I can use to serve the Lord's people?

Have I sought to serve Him, by my concern for those in need who come my way? Do I have concern for the poor and those suffering?

Have I sought to spend time with Him in the Blessed Sacrament where He is fully present as He was in the crib of hay?

Do I meditate on the Gospels, allowing the Word of God to direct and guide me as the Star guided the Magi?

Do I ask his Immaculate Mother and St Joseph to help me bring Him to others as they presented him to the shepherds?

The Crib points to Calvary. In this year of grace, do we allow the sacraments to flow into our souls the saving graces of the Risen Christ?

Calvary is like a reservoir of divine life or grace. From it there flow seven different kinds of sanctification for humanity in different stages of our existence. Each of these seven sacraments is a sacrament by which the power of the risen Christ is bestowed on souls by a spiritual and effective contact. This divine life pours into the soul when we receive the sacraments unless we put a barrier in the way. So, the sacraments do not confer grace as magical signs; they communicate it only because they are in contact with the Risen Christ.

As we come to celebrate Christmas, may we be renewed in our love for the same Lord who humbled himself to be born of the Holy Virgin in a cave with animals, and to be born in our hearts as we receive Him in the Blessed Eucharist. Let us ask St Francis to pray for us that we may grow in greater love for the Divine mystery of the Holy Eucharist!

May the Infant Saviour of Bethlehem bless us and our dear ones. May the Immaculate Virgin and St Joseph keep us within the embrace of the Christ Child.

Br Louis Schmid OFM Conv  
National Spiritual Assistant, OFS – Oceania

**Regional Assistants are requested to distribute this Monthly Spiritual Message to all local Assistants of our Order in the Regional Fraternity.**