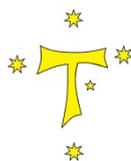


CONFERENCE OF NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSISTANTS, OFS - OCEANIA

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Monthly Spiritual Message March 2014

LENT

Dear Friends,

Lent is upon us, although it seems like we just finished the last of our Christmas cake. The Church's liturgical cycle continues to draw us through the whole act of our redemption. For many of us, the New Year so far has been battling the heat and being vigilant about bushfires. The ashes of Lent call us to battle sin in our lives with renewed trust in the power of Christ's grace and to be vigilant as God's children with the tools of prayer, fasting and alms.

We know that our Seraphic Father Francis had a great love for Jesus Crucified and for the sufferings and passion of Our Lord. Francis' selflessness becomes more complete as his thought turns to pity for him whose - Love is not loved!

"I weep over the sufferings of my Lord Jesus Christ, and I ought not to be ashamed to go all over the world weeping aloud for his sake."

We know that the Way of the Cross was developed and promoted by the Franciscans until adopted by the universal Church. It would be good as a fraternity, or individually, to make the Stations and to reflect upon the sufferings of Christ for our salvation. I particularly ask for the grace to be forgiving through the Way of the Cross. You may ask for the same grace, remembering the words of St Francis from his Prayer inspired by the Pater Noster.

"As we forgive those who trespass against us: and what we do not fully forgive, make us Lord, forgive fully, so that for your sake we may truly love our enemies and devotedly intercede with You for them, giving nobody evil in return for evil and trying to be helpful toward everybody in your name."

The Franciscans have been known as the Order of Penance. Encouraged by Saint Francis and Saint Clare, we make sacrifices of what is good so as to grow into closer communion with God and to show our sorrow for the sins of ourselves and the world. Maybe we should ask ourselves what penitential acts we do in our lives, remembering that our selected practices are not for show. Penance is to draw us closer to Our Lord Jesus Christ in union with His sufferings; and to help us to be more loving towards our neighbour. The Church universal, still holds each Friday of the year as a day of penance unless it's a solemnity. The bishops of each country are to determine the custom for each nation. In Australia, abstinence from meat is optional, but if we do eat meat on Friday then we are called to do another act of penance. As Franciscans we are called to live a moderate way of life in keeping with our state of life. We know that in Australia we live in a very materialistic society. We all know so much food is wasted around the world while millions are starving. Maybe we should try to be more vigilant about the wastage of food, at least in our homes.

As we go through Lent, we all know that Easter is around the corner. Our crucified Lord is to be raised from the dead. He is victorious over evil and death. Jesus Christ is our God and all. He loves and calls us to Himself.

With the unfolding of the Royal Commission on sexual abuse, shameful and hideous cases of abuse committed by Catholic clergy and religious are being put in the spotlight. As a friar, I find these cases shocking and shameful. In this, I am sure that I speak for other friars and religious.

How can consecrated persons do these horrific acts to children? I have heard the answers and have been witness to endless discussions about this situation. As a friar, I feel ashamed that children and families have been harmed and often their faith destroyed by the wicked actions of fellow religious and clergy. This shame I try to offer as reparation to Our Lord for these horrors inflicted on the people of God. Also, the voice of Christ's Church and the preaching of the Gospel can lose credibility. People have lost their faith over these scandals. This is the time to turn more to Christ and pray for healing and forgiveness for the Church, for the victims and for the abusers, and to offer this shame in reparation for the horrible abuse of these innocent children and their families. May Saint Francis be a model for us to continue to love Christ and His Church.

Our previous Pope, Benedict, during his last visit to Fatima spoke about this iniquity within the Church in relationship to the warnings of the Blessed Virgin.

May Our Lady of Sorrows and Mother of us all comfort her poor children in this valley of tears and by Her intercession help the Church to be renewed by the purifying power of the Holy Spirit.

*PLEASE distribute this Monthly Spiritual Message
to all MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL OFS FRATERNITY and Spiritual assistants*