



Monthly Spiritual Message APRIL 2015

The Way of Perfect Joy

It was winter,¹ and they were on their way to the friary of Our Lady of the Angels when suddenly St Francis began to teach Brother Leo the Seraphic spirituality of Perfect Joy. When he had finished St Francis said: *“Above all the graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit, which Christ grants to His friends, is that of conquering our own selves and gladly, for the love of Christ, to endure sufferings, injuries and insults and difficulties, because we cannot glory in all the other gifts of God to us, since they are not ours but God’s, as the Apostle says, ‘What do you have that you do not have from God, and if you have had it from Him, why do you boast of it, as if you had it from yourself?’ (1Cor:4:7) But in the cross of trouble and affliction we can glory, as the Apostle says, ‘I do not want to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.’ “(Gal 6:14.)*

This teaching of St Francis reaches down deep into the human spirit. It deals directly with the human thirst for success and its constant need for self-assurance. In a teasing way, with an ironic sense of humour, St Francis forces Brother Leo to cry out in amazement, *“Father, I ask you, for the sake of God, to tell me where perfect joy is?”* As we have already seen above, St Francis’ conclusion is a clear teaching about the way of the cross, the way of self-sacrifice, the way of humility and coping with everything that is likely to go wrong – because we *“know Christ and him Crucified.” (I Cor 2:2)* To tell you the truth, unless you understand this teaching of St Francis about perfect joy you will never really grow in your understanding of Franciscan Spirituality and you will most probably not even know what being a Catholic is really all about.

You have to love Br Leo and his reaction, it is much like that of the great St Theresa of Avila, who when she was knocked off her donkey and fell into the mud, injuring her leg said: *“Lord, you couldn’t have picked a worse time for this to happen. Why would you let this happen?”* And the response in prayer that she heard was, *“That is how I treat my friends.”* Teresa answered, *“And that is why you have so few of them!”* So it is not hard to imagine Br Leo, after hearing this teaching from St Francis simply giving a great sigh and then getting on with trudging through the winter snow towards St Mary of the Angels. Franciscans like to joke that “sighing” is a sure sign that you have achieved perfect joy. Sighing requires that you take a deep breath and then breathe out again, which we joke is a sure sign of the Holy Spirit at work in you. This teaching on Perfect Joy is a crash course on the spirituality of the cross. *“If you want to be a follower of mine you must take up your cross and follow me” (Luke 9:23)*

¹ John 10:23. *“It was winter, and Jesus was in the Temple walking up and down in the Portico of Solomon.”* St John sets the scene for the fullness of revelation where Jesus says. *“The Father and I are one.”* John 10:30. With the statement, “It was winter.” St Francis is about to teach Br Leo the high spirituality of the Cross.

St Francis had already taken this teaching up in Admonition 5: NO ONE SHOULD BOAST IN HIMSELF BUT RATHER GLORY IN THE CROSS OF THE LORD.

...4. In what then can you glory? 5. For if you were so subtle and wise that you had all knowledge (cf. 1 Cor 13:2) and knew how to interpret all tongues (cf. 1 Cor 12:28) and could minutely investigate [the course of] the heavenly bodies, in all these things you could not glory, 6. for one demon knows more about the things of earth than all men together, even if there may have been someone who received from the Lord a special knowledge of the highest wisdom. 7. Likewise, even if you were more handsome and richer than everyone else and even if you performed wonders such as driving out demons, all these things would be an obstacle to you and none of them would belong to you nor could you glory in any of these things. 8. But in this we can glory: in our infirmities (cf. 2 Cor 12:5) and bearing daily the holy cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Lk 14:27; 9:23).

The true glory then of a Christian is bearing with suffering and having the capacity to forgive. As St Francis says in his Canticle of the Creatures:

*“Praise to you O Lord,
through those who give pardon for your love
and bear infirmity and tribulation.
Blessed are they who endure in peace, for by you,
Most High, they will be crowned.”*

The spirituality of dying to self, of living a penitential life, a life of ongoing conversion, of perfect joy is a serious theme in Franciscan Spirituality. St Francis sees Christian life as a process through which we become more and more Christ like through the grace of seraphic (burning, all consuming) love.

Fr John Cooper OFM Cap

National Spiritual Assistant (There are approximately 900 words in this message)

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

English Sources for the Story of Perfect Joy:

Marion A. Habig. (Editor) St Francis of Assisi Writings and Early Biographies, English Omnibus of Sources for the Life of St Francis. “The Little flowers of St Francis” Franciscan Herald Press Chicago, Illinois USA. Chapter 8. page 1318.

Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap. And Ignatius Brady O.F.M. Francis and Clare The Complete Works Classics of Western Spirituality, Paulist Press. New York 1982. page 165.

Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap., J. A. Wayne Hellmann, O.F.M. Conv.; William J. Short, O.F.M. (Editors). Francis of Assisi: Early Documents. Volume III., “The Prophet”. New City Press NY. *The Little Flowers of St Francis* Chapter 8. page 576.