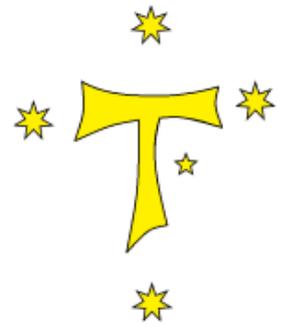


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Monthly Spiritual Message AUGUST 2015

Following the Yellow Brick Road

St Clare points out clearly that among all the gifts we have received and do daily receive from the mercy of God, we should “...express the deepest thanks [for] our vocation, ... the Son of God has been made for us the Way, which our Blessed Father Francis, ... has shown and taught us by word and example.”¹

Many of us Franciscans are seemingly unaware of the Gospel spirituality expressed so clearly in our Rule, and few of us would think of our Constitutions and Statutes as spiritual documents; rather, it would seem we tend to think of them as a “*whole lot of rules and regulations*”.

There is a tendency to prefer to live our Franciscan vocation according to a personal warm fuzzy feeling rather than the description given to us in the Rule and Constitutions. It is this reliance on “it feels right” that set in motion the whole Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther, the founder of the reformation, was accused of making, “... an extremely personal experience the centre of a new theory of salvation that was no longer in harmony with the one traditionally taught by the Church.”² This is a pretty severe statement and it is recorded here to remind us of an extreme attitude. When we define our Franciscan vocation by our own personal experience we are in danger of not really being objective, open and listening to others who may guide us.

Dear Dorothy, our legislation is for us the Yellow Brick Road. It defines how a ~~secular~~³ Franciscan is to live his or her life in fraternity - today. The Rule and Constitutions are an extraordinary achievement of a worldwide fraternal cooperation designed to bring order and clarity into the fraternal structure of the Secular Franciscan Order - in our time. Without them we would be in danger of losing our way and be governed by some fuzzy personal feeling.

It is the ministry of the National Minister to see that the Order is ordered by our legislation, not some fuzzy personal feeling. Often the insistence of the National Minister on following the Constitutions when others are following their own “it seems good to me” criteria causes difficulties. We need to be careful to read and follow our legislation rather than simply ignore it, because it seeks to give us guidelines as to how we are to live Gospel Fraternity.

While travelling the Yellow Brick Road we must be careful not to be a scarecrow without a brain. The Constitutions are not that difficult to read. On the other hand we need to avoid becoming a tin man without a heart. We certainly do need the courage of a lion if we are to live our legislation and we need to believe that the Wizard that lives in the Emerald city is not just a man after all and something much more than a magician.

¹ This statement is found at the very beginning of The Testament of St Clare Nos 1 & 2.

² New Catholic Encyclopaedia Volume VIII p. 1087. Having noted this reference, it is important to note the importance of the document called: Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church published on the 31st of October 1999. This is not an easy document to understand unless you have done a course on faith, grace, and sin.

³ Please note again that the Constitutions use a small s for Secular Franciscans making it a descriptive adjective and not a title. In a very real sense one should almost strike it out of the text so as to make a point that Seculars are Franciscans first and foremost.

All the legislation in the world however is not the first Rule of our lives. The first rule is the Gospel and the Gospel is the person Jesus Christ. The Lord himself brings this into focus for the Apostles by asking what seems like a simple question: *“Who do men say I am?”*⁴ Their answers vary and then Jesus brings their attention sharply into focus by asking a question which hangs there permanently, in every age, for every person, until the end of the world: *“Who do you say I am?”* This question will always be there in the deep down silence of reality for the universe to answer even if some day we do live out there among the stars.

It is surprising that St Bartholomew (Nathaniel) was not the first one to answer Jesus when he posed the question, because Nathaniel had already said what St Peter blurted out on behalf of all the others. When Jesus first met Nathaniel and surprised him by saying *“I saw you under the fig tree.”* Nathaniel had responded, *“Rabbi, You are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.”*⁵

St Peter’s profession of faith in John’s Gospel moves the question into a sacramental context. Jesus here has just been saying *“I am the bread of life.”* Many of the disciples had found this too much to believe and had left. Jesus asks the twelve, *“What about you, do you want to go away too?”* Peter answers for all the Apostles, *“Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe; we know that you are the Holy One of God.”*

St Francis tells us in his first admonition, *“...all those who saw the Lord Jesus according to his humanity and did not see and believe according to the Spirit and the Godhead that he is the true Son of God were condemned. And now in the same way, all those who see the sacrament of the Body of Christ, which is sanctified by the words of the Lord upon the altar at the hands of the priest in the form of bread and wine, and who do not see and believe according to the Spirit and the Godhead that it is truly the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ are condemned.”*

For St Francis there is a double revelation, incarnation and transubstantiation. Christ gives himself to us in human form and then under the sacramental form, in both cases he gives himself body, blood, soul and divinity. St Francis goes on to explain how this recognition comes about, *“...it is the Spirit of the Lord, Who lives in his faithful, Who receives the most holy Body and Blood of the Lord.”*

The Way, which St Clare speaks of, leads to the mystical Christ who comes to us in prayer and to the Sacramental Christ who is the fullness of our faith while we are on the journey. This is why St Clare holds fast to the Eucharist. It is the bread that strengthens us on our pilgrimage to heaven. It is food for the Way. It is Viaticum!

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National Spiritual Assistant

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

(There are approximately words in this message)

⁴ Gospel of Matthew 16:13-20; Luke 9:18-21; Mark 8:27-30 and John 6:67-70.

⁵ Gospel of John 1:45-51.

