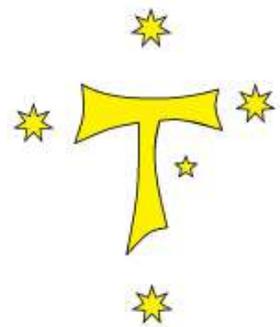


OFS – Conference of National Spiritual Assistants - Australia

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Monthly Spiritual Message SEPTEMBER 2015

Meditation on the Gospel as a Group

Each time the National Council meets, our agenda begins with a Group Meditation on the New Testament. It does not take a great deal of time. Once it took too long, because one person came in late, right in the middle of it, and the grace of the moment was interrupted. It should not begin or it should be put off until everyone is present. The Gospel is the key to everything.

What is Group Meditation? It has also been called Community Meditation or Shared Meditation, as opposed to Personal Meditation, which has been the constant practice of Catholic religious life for centuries.

In its simplest form Group Meditation¹ should begin with the Sign of the Cross, and an invocation of the Holy Spirit for inspiration. Group Meditation occurs when various people get together to listen to the Word of God and to express spontaneously before the others what the chosen text says to them. This response of each person may only be one word, a sentence or a simple explanation. It should be concluded with a prayer that collects the group inspiration or at least a prayer of thanksgiving to God for this moment.

In order for it to be effective and convincing, a number of things need to be taken into consideration:

1. Those who pray must be convinced and must remember that they carry great inner riches, memories and insights more precious than they can imagine; the Holy Spirit lives within them, and can speak through their mouth with ease and freedom.
2. It is to be expected that no emotional short circuit exists among those who pray. For if between two persons or members of the group there is strong disagreement, well known and public, this conflict will hinder the spontaneity of the group. The walls that separate one person from another also separate that person from God.
3. It is also indispensable that sincerity and truth exist; that is to say, that the one who speaks, in expressing themselves is not motivated by pride to utter original or brilliant things. They must at all times rectify their intentions, and express themselves as if they were alone before God. At all times during this Group Meditation, one question must be answered, "*What does the Lord want to say to me in this moment?*" The answer may spring up from within, but it might just as easily be spoken by someone else in the group and resonate within your own heart. So that the insight you seize upon may not be easily lost among the many things to be discussed during the meeting you should write it down for later personal reflection.

It is suggested that the text for Group Meditation should be prepared by the Formator of the group and it should be included, if possible in the Agenda sent out before the meeting so that members of the group may take it to personal meditation. In any case it should be presented in written form as well as read out at the meeting. The text may also be coupled with a reading from the Rule or the Constitutions. Even if

¹ Cf Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order Part II No 4. "b. a time for hearing the Word of God and sharing it;"

the Formator makes no other contribution to the meeting this will be a precious gift to the Fraternity, *a pearl of great price.*²

Group Meditation on the Gospel has its origins in both personal meditation and Gospel discussion. For instance the genius of Cardinal Cardijn the founder of the Young Christian Workers Movement was to take a process of personal meditation that had been around in the spiritual tradition of the Church since the beginning of religious life and to put it into a simple method of enquiry that could be shared by a group of young people sitting together and reflecting on a particular Gospel story. They were not to preach to each other, but rather share insights as they went through a process of enquiry. There were and still are three types of enquiry in YCW meetings: A Gospel Enquiry, a Personal Enquiry and a Social Enquiry. The Christian formation of the young person developed because essential to the process of **See, Judge and Act** is to learn to see as Christ sees, to judge as he judges, and to act as he does.

Today in the Church the new Evangelical Movements are also inspired and formed by the Gospel. The Gospel itself is their method of formation. This is why some groups even prefer to have their own Mass. They encourage each other to respond to the very scriptural texts of the Mass. The one question is always paramount, "*What does the Lord want to say to me in this moment?*" The challenge of the Holy Spirit is for them to articulate what is happening in their own hearts. It has nothing to do with preaching and all to do with the conviction of the Holy Spirit as felt within.

Any reading of the Rule, Constitutions and Statutes of the Secular Franciscan Order will reveal to you the importance of the Gospel for our Franciscan way of life.

The secular³ Franciscan, committed to following the example and teachings of Christ, must personally and assiduously study the Gospel and Sacred Scripture. The fraternity and its leaders⁴ should foster love for the word of the Gospel and help the brothers and sisters to know and understand it as proclaimed by the Church with the assistance of the Spirit. (Const.9:2)

Fr John Cooper OFM Cap
National Spiritual Assistant

PLEASE distribute this Monthly Spiritual Message
to all members of the National OFS fraternity and Spiritual Assistants.

(There are approximately 1000 words in this message)

² Matthew 13:45-46 and the warning Matthew 7:6 and Sirach 22:9-10.

³ Take note of the fact here that the word "secular" is not capitalised. It is an adjective not a noun; a description not a name. A secular Franciscan is first and foremost a Franciscan not a Secular. As such it would seem more appropriate when asked, Who are you? To say, "I am a Franciscan." The proper answer of a friar is: "I am a Friar Minor." Presently English speaking Capuchins are not sure if they should call themselves "Lesser Friar" or "Friar Lesser" in their translation of their new Constitutions. Such is the nature of English and the foolability of words.

⁴ What does "leaders" mean? The leaders of the fraternity, who are they?