

# THE YOUNG FRANCISCAN

Winter Newsletter 2020  
Vol #11

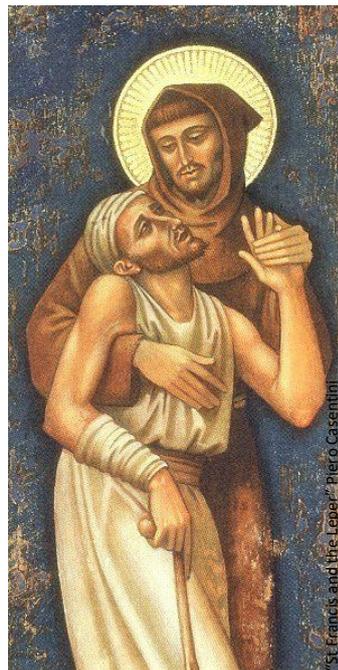
## Francis and the Leper

**During** this time of Coronavirus, people have become understandably frightened of coming in contact with an infected person. And who can blame them? It's only natural that no one wants to contract a potentially life-threatening virus, and then spread it on to others.

During the days of St Francis, there was also a common disease which frightened most people – leprosy. As a young man, Francis was terrified of lepers. His aversion to them was so strong that even the sight of a leper from a distance would sicken him to the core. He would run away from them at all costs.

Society had taken every measure to ensure the safety and protection of its citizens by forcing those infected into quarantine within the leper colonies outside of the city. However, it was a very different story for those who had been infected with the disease. Their forced isolation meant they had little or no contact with their family and loved ones. Society no longer saw them as humans, but rather as outcasts. Their physical sickness not only destroyed their bodies but also their hope for a normal lifestyle.

It seems however, that for Francis, the lepers were exactly the “tipping-point” for his conversion. He slowly began to recognise that it was precisely in the sick, suffering, and in poverty, that one experiences Jesus. It was through their suffering that Francis was able to see the true dignity of the person.



St. Francis and the Leper, Piero Casentini

For Francis, the most important step to complete conversion was the need to conquer his fear. So, it happened that one day, Francis unexpectedly came across a leper, full of boils, filth, and not to mention the foul smell. This time however, instead of running away, Francis went up to the leper and kissed him! At that moment Francis no longer saw a leper, but rather a man, worthy of love.

Francis later said that his aversion to lepers was due to his life of sin. As long as he lived in sin, he was not able to feel love and compassion towards those in most need of it. In his *Testament* of 1226, he said:

*“...when I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I showed mercy to them. And when I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body”.*

# Turning Bitterness into Sweetness

From *The Legend of the Three Companions*

One day while Francis was praying fervently to God, he received an answer: *"O Francis, if you want to know my will, you must hate and despise all that which until now your body has loved and desired to possess. Once you begin to do this, all that formerly seemed sweet and pleasant to you will become bitter and unbearable, and instead, the things that formerly made you shudder will bring you great sweetness and contentment."* Francis was divinely comforted and greatly encouraged by these words.

Then one day, as he was riding his horse near Assisi, he met a leper. He had always felt an overpowering horror of these sufferers, but making a great effort, he conquered his aversion, dismounted, and, in giving the leper a coin, kissed his hand. The leper then gave him the kiss of peace, after which Francis remounted his horse and rode on his way. From that day onwards he mortified himself increasingly until, through God's grace, he won a complete victory.

Some days later he took a large sum of money to the leper hospital, and gathering all the inmates together, he gave them alms, kissing each of their hands. Formerly he could neither touch or even look at lepers, but when he left them on that day, what before had been bitter, that is, to see and touch lepers, was turned into sweetness.

Indeed, his previous aversion to lepers had been so strong that, besides being incapable of looking at them, he would not even approach the places where they lived. And if by chance he happened to pass anywhere near their dwellings or to see one of the lepers, even though he was moved to give them an alms through some intermediate person, he would nevertheless turn his face away and hold his nose. But, strengthened by God's grace, he was enabled to obey the command and to love what he had hated and to abhor what he had hitherto wrongfully loved. In consequence of this he became such a friend to the lepers that, as he himself declared in his Testament, he lived with them and served them with loving eagerness.

May God continue to  
bless and strengthen  
all of our doctors, nurses  
and health workers  
who, in the image of St Francis,  
who showed love and compassion  
to the lepers,  
continue to administer God's love  
to the victims of Coronavirus.

## Another ending

One of the earliest biographers of St Francis, St Bonaventure, continued the story; *"Immediately mounting his horse, however, and turning all around, even though the plain stretched clear in all directions, he could not see the leper anywhere. He began therefore, filled with wonder and joy to sing praises to the Lord."* Bonaventure added that it was the crucified Christ who appeared to Francis that day as a leper.

# Embracing our “Leper”

Have you ever seen someone so repulsive that you simply didn't want to have anything to do with them? Perhaps they were dirty, smelly, unwashed, wore torn clothing, had marks on their body, lonely, sad, suffering. Does this type of person remind you of anyone? How about the crucified Jesus? Wasn't Jesus on the cross even more repulsive looking than this? According to the prophet Isaiah, Jesus on the cross was so disfigured that he no longer looked human. However, could any of us really ever stop loving Jesus simply because of the way he appeared on the cross?

To many, such an image may not seem like a blessing, but in the eyes of God, how blessed is the person who resembles Jesus at that moment when God showed his greatest act of love and mercy towards us. What a blessing it is to resemble Jesus on the cross! How could any of us not love someone who images the suffering Jesus? Isn't this even more reason to love them?

Today there are many people who resemble the suffering Jesus. Perhaps they are our modern day “lepers”. They are the ones that society labels according to their class, race, culture, lack of wealth, mental issues, or maybe because they are homeless, or due to their “shabby” appearance. We tend to define people

according to their “faults.” These people often scare us!

And at first, they scared Francis too. In his youth, when he was searching for joy and fulfilment in his life, he searched in what seemed the obvious places – money, parties, wild friends, and pleasures of all sorts. It took him many years before he realised his perfect joy could only be found through an intimate relationship with Jesus. Yet Jesus was hiding where Francis had least expected to find him – in the lepers – precisely what repulsed him the most!

God was calling Francis to go out of his comfort zone in order to find his perfect joy. God didn't call Francis to search for him in the rich, famous and powerful, but rather in the poor, rejected, suffering and unloved. And this is what he asks of us as well. The greatest desire of every human heart is to know and love God, even though many people do not realise this in their own lives. Many people will search for joy in places that may seem obvious, however, our truest joy – God – will often reveal himself to us in places where we would never expect to find him, such as in our own society's outcasts.

Are we ready to step out of our comfort zone and embrace the “lepers” in our own lives? Are we ready to encounter Jesus in the place where we least want to go?



## Secular Franciscan Order YOUTH RETREATS



Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the Youth Retreat Days scheduled for Perth, Sydney and Brisbane have been cancelled. We do intend to reschedule these events at a later date once it is considered safe to do so. You may continue to leave your details via the “register” link below and we will make contact once the retreats are able to be reschedule. Watch this space or more information.

Click here to register through our website: [bit.ly/ODYR2020](https://bit.ly/ODYR2020)

Email us at: [national@ofsaustralia.org.au](mailto:national@ofsaustralia.org.au)

# Secular Franciscan Saints



## John Bradburne 1921-1979

Born in England, John converted to the Catholic faith at the age of 26. In 1962 he arrived in Mutemwa, Zimbabwe. There he had three wishes, to serve the lepers, to die as a martyr, and to be buried in the habit of St Francis. In 1969 John was appointed warden at the Mutemwa Leprosy Settlement. There he lived in a simple tin hut, lacking water and basic sanitation. He slept on a grass mat, and owned very few possessions. In the filthy settlement there was no medication, clothes, and very little food for the hungry patients. John would wake up daily at 3am to feed, wash and bandage the patients. He would then carry them to holy Mass. He made every effort to prevent their exploitation and demand they be treated with dignity. John refused to put number tags around their necks, and he fought to not have their already small food supply reduced any further. His actions were met with hostility among the authorities who then sacked him. John continued to serve the lepers, however he was then abducted, tortured and shot in the back. At his funeral John was robed in the Franciscan habit.

## Bl Franz Jägerstätter 1907-1943

Born in Austria, as a young man Franz did not always live a pious life. He belonged to a gang whose members were arrested in 1934 for brawling. During these years he also fathered an illegitimate child. As he settled down, Franz later worked in the mines and also became a farmer. In 1936, he married Franziska, a devoutly Catholic woman who inspired him to grow closer to God. Together they had three daughters. In 1940 Franz joined the Third Order Franciscans where he devoted much of his life to reading the scriptures and serving in the church as a sacristan. In 1938 he publicly opposed Austria's involvement with Hitler's Third Reich, however the following year he was drafted into the Austrian army where he trained for seven months. In February 1943 he was conscripted into the army, however he refused to take the oath of loyalty to Hitler and was imprisoned, despite being urged by his priest and bishop not to refuse. During imprisonment he kept his faith alive by devoutly reading the scriptures. On August 9, 1943 Franz was beheaded by the Nazis.

## St Mariana de Jesus Paredes 1618-1645

Born in modern day Ecuador, it was said that the moment of Mariana's birth was announced by a most unusual phenomenon in the heavens. She was orphaned at a young age and went to live with her sister and husband. From her earliest age Mariana felt drawn to God and of heavenly things. She lived in a secluded section of the house where she was able to spend much of her time in prayer. She only ever left the house to attend Mass or to make an act of charity towards a neighbour. After joining the Third Order of St Francis she made the unusual choice to also take the three religious vows. Mariana possessed rare mystical gifts, it was said that by simply making a sign of the cross, or by sprinkling holy water on a person she was able to heal them of their sickness. She once also raised a dead woman back to life. It was also reported that Mariana fasted so severely that she would only eat a slice of bread every 8 or 10 days. Miraculously, the food which sustained her was the Eucharist, which she received daily.



Like us on  
**Facebook**

OFS Australia Website: [www.ofsaustralia.org.au](http://www.ofsaustralia.org.au)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/ofsaustralia](https://www.facebook.com/ofsaustralia)

Email: [national@ofsaustralia.org.au](mailto:national@ofsaustralia.org.au)

