

# *Conference of National Spiritual Assistants*

## **Secular Franciscan Order**

**Fr Anthony Fox, OFM Conv.**  
PO Box 21 Kellyville NSW 2155  
Mobile Phone: 0400 404 129  
Email: tony3171@yahoo.com

**Fr Joseph McKay OFM**  
21 Adele St Kedron Qld 4031  
Mobile Phone: 0412 076 913  
Email: jmckay@franciscans.org.au

**Fr John Cooper OFM Cap**  
198 Bay Tce Wynnum Qld 4178  
Mobile Phone: 0412 162 946  
Email: johncap@ozemail.com.au

---

### **A SPIRITUAL MESSAGE FOR THE MONTH OF MARCH 2022.**

#### **Discovering Christ** (Part 3)

The following concerns then are important to the Secular Franciscan: 1. Discovering Christ in all our brothers and sisters. 2. Discovering “*Christ suffering*” especially in the outcasts, poor; sick and dying. 3. Discovering Christ in the gospel, as the model of our formation and pattern of our life. 4. Discovering the central role of Mary Immaculate in making the Word of God, Jesus Christ, our brother in the flesh and thereby lifting our vision of fraternity to a universal and holy height. 5. Discovering Christ in the Eucharist; Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity.

The question is: **What is the most precious relationship in your life?** You can answer “GOD!” and say it LOUDLY or softly as you wish – either way it is true. What then is the most precious gift you can give anyone? - and please don’t say “My life” - that belongs to God. The most precious thing you can give is: “Your love” because love comes out of the very depth of your freedom to choose! Love comes out of who you really are as a unique individual. Even God, respects your freedom. That is why God gets so excited about “love.” It astonishes Him. It rings the universe like a bell, in a harmonic rhapsody!

Why do you think he hides from you? It is because he respects your freedom! He waits in the depths of infinite humility so as not to put in jeopardy your freedom. His very absence is the guarantee of your freedom; without this absence there can be no freedom, because face to face, you would be enslaved by Love. So, there is something astounding here. On your behalf, St Peter writes:

“Though you have not seen him, you love Him;  
and even though you do not see Him now,  
you believe in Him  
and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,  
for you are receiving the end result of your faith,  
the salvation of your souls.”

The apostles, it seems, were no better off than we are. They saw Jesus of Nazareth, the man from Galilee, but did not understand – not at first. They thought they had found a prophet, the messiah, the King of Israel. His miracles helped their awareness of who He really was grow, but at first they were blind, deaf and dumb.

In working miracles, Jesus was also healing them, opening their eyes, their ears and their minds and hearts. Just as he can heal us if we sit in contemplation with the blind, the deaf and the dumb, and cry out, “*Son of David, have pity on me!*” This is what reading the gospel is all about, the discovery of just who Jesus is. Saint John says this so clearly,

“That which was from the beginning,  
which we have heard,  
which we have seen with our eyes,  
which we have looked at  
and our hands have touched –  
this we proclaim to you concerning the Word of life.”

As you are reading, meditating and contemplating a gospel story ask yourself “How I can be **in** this story?” That is the very reason why Saint Bonaventure wrote his treatise called, “The Tree of Life.” He wanted to teach the friars, and indeed, all Franciscans how to get inside the gospel stories: This is what he does with the gospel story of Christ’s death on the cross:

“O my God, good Jesus,  
although I am in every way without merit and unworthy,  
grant me, who did not merit to be present at these events in the body,

that I may ponder them faithfully in my mind  
and experience towards you,  
my God crucified and put to death for me,  
that feeling of compassion  
which your innocent mother and the penitent Magdalen experienced  
at the very hour of your passion.<sup>1</sup>

See then the horror and the wonder of it: the Lord of Lords, chosen from the very beginning to be the “*first born [King] of all creation*” the pattern of our existence, the kindness and love of our God, nevertheless has come “*to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*”<sup>2</sup> Yet not content with dying for us, Jesus pre-empted his death on the cross, by gifting us the healing remedy of his Holy Body and Blood as a medicine, a *Viaticum*<sup>3</sup> for us on our journey home to him. In Eucharist we receive that which is the deepest down thing our heart desires. For this you can be sure of, this you can give your life for, the truth hidden even in the worst of us is, “the desire for happiness.”<sup>4</sup> Without Christ, amidst all the good things in this world, the desire for happiness may lead us astray, but in Christ we are reconciled with God.

All this is not new to you. I have made three Spiritual messages all leading to the same thing. You know this already. It summed up in the Secular Franciscan Rule:

“The rule and life of the Secular Franciscans is this:  
to observe the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ  
by following the example of Saint Francis of Assisi,  
who made Christ the inspiration and the centre of his life with God, and people.  
Christ, the gift of the Father’s love,  
He is the way to him,  
the truth into which the Holy Spirit leads us,  
and the life which he has come to give abundantly.  
Secular Franciscans should devote themselves especially  
to careful reading of the gospel,  
going from gospel to life and life to the gospel.”<sup>5</sup>

This then is the Secular Franciscan method of formation, “*going from gospel to life and life to the gospel.*” It is the very essence of the secular Franciscan Way of Life. As Saint Clare, says, “*for this we give thanks.*”

“Secular Franciscans, therefore, should seek to encounter  
the living and active person of Christ  
in their brothers and sisters,  
in Sacred Scripture,  
in the Church and in liturgical activity.  
The faith of Saint Francis, who often said  
“*I see nothing bodily of the Most High Son of God in this world  
except his most holy body and blood,*”  
should be the inspiration and pattern of their Eucharistic life.”<sup>6</sup>

Let the gospel then have first place in our fraternity and eucharist be its heart and soul. St Jerome, who translated the gospel from Greek to Latin, speaks to us with his stern voice:

“*Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ*”<sup>7</sup>

Fr John Cooper OFM Cap  
National Spiritual Assistant.

PLEASE, DISTRIBUTE THIS MESSAGE TO YOUR FRATERNITY INCLUDING ISOLATED MEMBERS

---

1 St Bonaventure “Tree of Life” Eighth Fruit No 32

2 Colossians 1:15-20.

3 Viaticum is the term used – in the Catholic Church – for the Eucharist, administered, to a person who is dying.

4 All of the philosophy, all the theology, of the great St Thomas Aquinas is distilled into this: “The deepest desire of the human heart is the desire for happiness.”

5 OFS Rule No 4

6 OFS Rule No 5

7 This is perhaps the most famous quote of Saint Jerome (342 – 420) who translated the Sacred Scriptures from Greek into Latin..