

## **Conference of National Spiritual Assistants**

### **Secular Franciscan Order**

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MONTHLY SPIRITUAL MESSAGE FOR THE MONTH OF MAY 2022

#### **MARY IN FRANCISCAN LIFE.**

Fr. Anthony Fox OFMConv.

The Month of May has been traditionally set aside for the honour of Mary our Mother. The fact that Mother's Day occurs in this month is no accident when we honour the Mother of All Mothers, the Immaculate Virgin Mary. As Franciscans it comes as no surprise that we too honour Mary in this Month under the title of Mary Queen of the Franciscan Order.

Thomas of Celano tells us in the Second Life of St. Francis, *"what is a very special source of joy is the fact that he chose her (Mary) as the Patroness of his order, and he entrusted to her shielding mantle his children whom he was to leave that she might guard and protect them unto the end."* In 1910 Pope St. Pius X who was a member of the Secular Franciscan Order proclaimed the members of the three Orders of St. Francis to add to the Litany of Loreto the invocation: "Queen of the Franciscan Order, pray for us!" And in 1950 Pope Pius XII granted to us a special feast, with a proper office and Mass, honouring Our Lady Queen of the Franciscan Order. The day chosen for this feast is December 15<sup>th</sup>.

We the sons and daughters of St. Francis through the centuries have always distinguished ourselves by our devotion to Mary and by our efforts to promote devotion to Mary among the People of God.

The OFS constitutions tells us, "Mary is the model of fruitful and faithful love for the entire ecclesial community. Secular Franciscans and their fraternities should seek to strive to live the experience of Francis, who made the Virgin Mary the guide of his activity. With her, like the disciples at Pentecost, should welcome the Spirit to create a community of love." (OFS Const Article 16. 1,.2)

To develop a true understanding of the love of Jesus Christ, the Son of God made Man, requires sincere devotion toward his Mother. Mary was with Him from the womb to the tomb. She responded to God's call. St. Francis recognized Mary's powerful and extraordinary relationship with her Son in light of our salvation. Francis implored his followers to love her as their self-effacing gentle queen and mother.

Mary's role to us as Franciscans is to lead us to her Son. She is not to overshadow Jesus or the work of the Holy Spirit in our Franciscan life. Jesus and Mary belong together. The mother

continuously points to her Son and brings us to him. Mary then holds an extraordinary yet subordinate role in our Franciscan life.

As Franciscans we live our Rule. The OFS Rule identifies Marian qualities that we can emulate namely: humble servant, open to Jesus' every word and call, complete self-giving, earnest and confident prayer.

In our lives as Christians and Secular Franciscans are we willing to say "Yes" to God's call, especially when the call comes from people we may not trust, or may not understand the mystery of the call? Are we willing to say "Yes" when the timing is not convenient for us? Are we willing to say "Yes" when others may not understand us or perhaps even mistreat or disrespect, or are even ignored? Do we say "Yes" even though we think our authority has been compromised or even ignored? Are we willing to say "Yes" even when we probably know that we may not receive any recognition for our efforts and work? Do we say "Yes" Lord, here I am - choose me?

Imitating this humble service is complete in the ordinary places of everyday life like Mary. The spirit of humble service needs both nourishment and expression to grow. In imitation of Mary humble service is a key word for the Franciscan. We do not seek to dominate even when we must advise and correct. Whatever we share is done to serve others and not to illustrate how smart or witty we are. We imitate Mary by humbly serving others without fanfare or direction.

Mary gives Franciscans a model to follow by how she embraced the changes in her life. We face many changes in our faith. Vatican II as well as many other recent events, have invited us to new perspectives in our faith. We are well aware of the declining numbers of men and women entering the priesthood and consecrated life. We know the closing and combining of parishes brings distress and apprehension to those effected. The sexual abuse scandals and the Royal Commission and loss of trust are serious issues to confront and work through in our lives. The violence we read or hear about in our world increases fear among us and sometimes the violence exists within our immediate neighbourhoods and community, sadly there are the victims of violence. New findings which bring new insights into Scripture are not always easy to accept. The rapid and invariable growth of technology brings us to crossroads in our faith. These and other events in our world challenge us. By studying and accepting Mary as a Model for embracing change, we find a safe harbour, "Star of the Sea", to reflect and to move through changes in our lives.

Francis was known for his great devotion, reverence and imitation of Mary. He acknowledged the unique position given her by God. Mary's Immaculate Conception makes her daughter of the Father, the virgin mother of the Son, and Spouse of the Holy Spirit.

Mary held within her, both physically and spiritually, the Word of God. One of the first examples of Mary that Francis tried to emulate was her hearing and obeying the will of God. The titles bestowed upon Mary reflect her role in the salvation of all of us. Those titles speak to our Franciscan spirituality. Some include, Mother of Sorrows, Queen of the Universe, Queen of Peace, Woman clothed with the Sun, Refuge of Sinners and Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

As humans we experience our share of sorrows. Mary did not allow her sorrow to conquer her when she witnessed her Son being ridiculed or his life threatened or his eventual public humiliation and death among throngs of people.

She understood her Father's Will would triumph and she accepted both the happiness and sadness when she first listened to God's voice. We can offer our torments and sufferings through the heart of Mary because she clearly remembers how it is to suffer.

We long for one universal Church. Through the close connection between God's abundance of love sending his Son and Mary's obedience, we understand that Christ is the King of all creation. Mary is the Queen of the Universe. Although our world sees these titles implying governing with great material wealth this is not the way of Mary and Jesus, both came to serve. Both the Son and the Mother intercede for us. We as Franciscans strive to serve Jesus through Mary. Both continue to serve through their virtues. Mary's mission is to unite all humankind with the Heart of Jesus.

Francis persistently turned to Mary for everlasting help. As Mary never turned away from her Son, but always turned toward Him, so did Francis seek Mary and Jesus. Can we do less? In this month of Mary may we deepen our devotion to Mary, and may we always invoke her as Mary, Queen of the Franciscan Order. Pray for us!

*Ad Jesum per Mariam!*  
To Jesus through Mary!

