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A SPIRITUAL MESSAGE FOR THE MONTH OF DECEMBER 2022

PAX ET BONUM

(Part 5)

"Gloria in excelsis Deo
et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis."¹

(Continued...)

Pope John Paul II² (1978 – 20013) Solidarity

In 1978 there were three popes. Pope Paul VI died on the 6th of August. Pope John Paul I was elected on the 28th of September and died after only 33 days in office. Finally, Pope John Paul II was elected on the 16th of October. His election was a great surprise to everyone because he was Polish. The only accurate prediction of this possibility was the book "The Shoes of the Fisherman," written in 1963³ and made into a movie in 1968 with Anthony Quinn acting as Pope Kiril Lakota from Ukraine.

Pope John Paul II brought the concept of "solidarity" to the papacy. It had been the catch word of the Catholic Union Movement in Poland. Solidarity is an awareness of shared interests, objectives, standards, and sympathies that help create a sense of unity in groups and society. Solidarity had been proclaimed as part of Catholic social doctrine but not heard worldwide. In Catholic Poland, it was taken seriously and acted on with surprising results. On the 18th of September 1993, the last Soviet communist troops left Poland. Solidarity had come of age and power with Saint Pope John Paul II.

In the Capuchin Franciscan Order, "Solidarity" was a topic in the Plenary Council of 1998. Two quotes show how important this was to our Capuchin understanding of fraternity: Firstly, "*Since our Order is a Brotherhood, solidarity flows from fraternity to fraternity, rather than from one individual to another.*" Secondly, "*Franciscan solidarity goes beyond law and justice. It flows from the generosity of fraternal love.*" So, solidarity became part of our Capuchin way of life.

However, the word "solidarity" does not occur specifically anywhere in the Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order. Solidarity is not even mentioned in the latest International Statutes of the OFS. It is only mentioned twice in a document called "Patrimony of the OFS" issued on the 11th of October 2016 by Minister General Tibor Kauser.⁴

Saint Pope John Paul II also, followed Saint Pope Paul VI and took up the concept of working towards a "Civilization of Love" on earth. He understood that this was the vision of the Second Vatican Council. For the Polish Pope, this longed for dream was the foundation of a humane world that had suffered a terrible devaluing of the human being especially in the concentration camps of the Second World War. Pope John Paul II knew from personal experience that only love could guarantee our dignity.⁵ So again, if we are to understand this vision for a better world, a world where PAX ET BONUM reigns, we must look more closely at this doctrine of love as further espoused by Pope John Paul II.

¹ The King James Version of Luke 2:14. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

² Let us not forget **Pope John Paul I (33 days in 1978)** In 1978 Pope John Paul I was elected. He was the first pope to have two names. The humility of this man was evident. He was the first pope to use the singular "I" rather than the royal "We" and he refused to be crowned with the triple tiara² beginning instead a "papal inauguration" where he received the papal pallium² as the symbol of his position as Bishop of Rome. He had a plan to encourage world peace and social justice. He wanted a better world. He was nicknamed "The Smiling Pope." Pope John Paul I died after only 33 days in office. He is soon to be beatified.

³ "The Shoes of the Fisherman" was written by the Australian novelist, Morris West. In this book he predicted that a Slavic Pope would come to the throne of Peter. He followed this up in another book "The Clowns of God" in which a successor pope resigns to live a life of seclusion. His books sold 60 million copies world wide and were printed in 27 languages. His niece lives at Leichhardt.

⁴ Its heading is **Introduction to the Financial Aspects of the OFS**. Ah, but who has read this document? You will not understand why we began the Secular Franciscan Order Mission of Australia unless you understand "Solidarity."

⁵ Elzbieta Osewska and Barbara Simonic University of Ljubljana A Civilization of Love according to John Paul II August 2019. The Person and the Challenges The Journal of Theology Education Canon Law and Social Studies Inspired by Pope John Paul II 9(1):23 DOI:10.15633/pch.3359

For him, the possibility of a civilization of love was the foundation of a humane world inspired by love. For him, only love can guarantee the protection of our dignity. Therefore, the main aim of his pontifical program for the development of a civilization of love comes down to infusing life and human activity with the spirit of the gospel in every field of human existence – social, cultural, economic, and political – through the employment of social justice and love – the gospel life laid down for us on the cross so long ago. In this doctrine of love, there is no place for violence and exploitation of human beings but rather the absolute demand for the respect and dignity of each person.

The theological virtues of FAITH and LOVE can build a new world, but only if HOPE is aroused in the whole world. What is needed, then, is Faith, Hope, and Love, which have their roots in the gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news about life and love. Those who live for Jesus Christ can break the power of evil to help the world experience transformation in line with God's intentions and reach utter perfection of charity and compassion – the wholeness of spiritual and psychological integrity. However, we must remember that theological virtues cannot be attained by any human means other than prayer – because they are the gift of God.⁶ Hence prayer and contemplation remain the *better part* to be chosen over activity.⁷

It is not surprising that Pope John Paul II says that God is accurately defined as “love.” To this end he says, “God is the only reason why there is no doubt that a society of love will eventually prevail”⁸ despite the most dramatic instances even today of the culture of death at work in our modern world.

Pope Benedict XVI (2005 – 2013) God is beautiful!

There is no doubt that Pope Benedict is intellectually brilliant. His first encyclical was “*Deus caritas est*” (God is Love). In his explanation and summary of the encyclical, he stated: “*If friendship with God becomes for us something ever more important and decisive, then we will begin to love those whom God loves and who need us. God wants us to be friends of His friends, and we can be so if we are interiorly close to them.*” Thus, he said that prayer is “urgently needed... It is time to reaffirm the importance of prayer in the face of the activism and the growing secularism of many Christians engaged in charitable work.”

Are we not perhaps all afraid in some way? If we let Christ enter fully into our lives and open ourselves to Him, are we not afraid that He might take something away from us?... And once again, the Pope said: “*No! If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful, and great. No! Only in this friendship do we experience beauty and liberation... When we give ourselves to Him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open wide the doors to Christ – and you will find true life.*” Friendship with Jesus Christ is a frequent theme of his preaching, as is his repetition of Saint Bonaventure: “*God is Beautiful!*”

Pope Francis (2013 – to the present day)

The irony that the very first Jesuit Pope should call himself “Francis” after Saint Francis of Assisi should give us all pause at the amusement the Holy Spirit is capable of bringing to history. It is said that “the Brazilian Cardinal Cláudio Hummes had embraced the pope immediately after his election and whispered, “*Don't forget the poor,*” which had made the Pope think of Saint Francis of Assisi. Cardinal Bergoglio had previously expressed his admiration for Saint Francis, explaining that “*He brought to Christianity an idea of poverty against the luxury, pride, vanity of the civil and ecclesiastical powers of the time. He changed history.*” He has been faithful to the Franciscan vision.

His first significant letter *Evangelii gaudium* (*Joy to the World*), called for “a missionary and pastoral conversion” whereby the laity would fully share in the church's missionary task, as shown clearly in the Vatican II document on the role of the laity in the church. Then in his letter on the call of all to holiness, *Gaudete et exsultate*, Pope Francis describes holiness as “*an impulse to evangelize and to leave a mark in this world.*”

⁶ **Catechism of the Church. Article 7 II. The Theological Virtues. 1812** “The human virtues are rooted in the theological virtues, which adapt man's faculties for participation in the divine nature: for the theological virtues relate directly to God. They dispose Christians to live in a relationship with the Holy Trinity. They have the One and Triune God for their origin, motive, and object. **1813** The theological virtues are the foundation of Christian moral activity; they animate it and give it its special character. They inform and give life to all the moral virtues. They are infused by God into the souls of the faithful to make them capable of acting as his children and of meriting eternal life. They are the pledge of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the faculties of the human being. There are three theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity.”⁷

⁷ The words of Jesus to Saint Martha in Luke 10:42: “but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

⁸ Pope John Paul II

So, it was not surprising that Pope Francis' encyclical "*Laudato si*" (Praise be to you) on care for all of creation was promulgated in May 2015 two years after his inauguration as Pope. With this document, "The Blue Marble,"⁹ the planet Earth, itself became the focus of our attention in the new Millennium.



It is said that Saint Francis, in his Canticle of Creatures, summed up his cosmic vision of spirituality. Brother Sun represents God the Father. The Moon, Christ, and all the stars, the Saints. Fire, Water, and Wind are symbols of the Holy Spirit, and the Earth is the Blessed Virgin Mary who gives birth to Christ, the medicinal healing grace of all creation. With that, Saint Francis thought he had summed up everything.

However, in the days of his dying, as winter was fast approaching, the Bishop of Assisi, Guido, and the Podesta (Mayor of Assisi) got into a terrible fight over which one of them was to have precedence at the funeral of the dying saint. The people of Assisi, shocked that Bishop Guido had excommunicated the mayor, came to the friars with the scandalous situation, not knowing what to do. The friars then told Saint Francis what had happened. It would seem that Saint Francis turned to God in prayer and considered the place of human beings in his cosmic order of things. Then he added a new verse to his great Canticle:

**“PRAISED BE YOU, MY LORD,
THROUGH THOSE WHO GIVE PARDON FOR YOUR LOVE,
AND BEAR INFIRMITY AND TRIBULATION.
BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO ENDURE IN PEACE
FOR BY YOU, MOST HIGH, SHALL THEY BE CROWNED.”¹⁰**

Then Saint Francis sent the brothers out to sing this Canticle with its new verse before the Palace of the bishop and the residence of the mayor and then throughout Assisi. Both angry men were reconciled that very day, and Bishop Guido, as a penance for his bad behavior, left Assisi for the Shrine of Saint Michael at Gargano in Apulia, Italy.¹¹ This verse contains one of the hard teachings of St Francis, but there can be no hope of Pax et Bonum unless we learn its lesson. Saint Francis teaches that the most remarkable grace human beings have is to be able to pardon others and to bear infirmity and tribulation in peace. This grace is the crowning achievement of human beings. In this is found the Perfect Joy of Saint Francis. In this is found the future of humankind on Earth; in this is Pax et Bonum.

It is not surprising that Pope Francis followed up his encyclical "*Lodato si*" on the 4th of October 2020 with the encyclical *Fratelli tutti* on fraternity and social friendship, using St. Francis' own words to describe our universal brotherhood and sisterhood. There is no doubt that Pope Francis is committed to the church making our planet a safer place to live.

The challenge for us Franciscans is balancing our spiritual and secular life. It is called the "The Franciscan Dilemma." The question, "*How much time do I spend in prayer and how much do I spend in action?*" remains a difficult task. Perhaps it is not so much a dilemma when we remember that "*The Franciscan rises to heaven on two wings, Contemplation and Fraternity.*"¹²

Pope John Paul II called us an "Alleluia people" – a people full of HOPE! St Francis seeing the Christ Child appear in the Christmas crib at Greccio, understood what PAX ET BONUM meant and was singing his song again:

*“So great the good I have in sight
That every pain I count delight!”¹³*

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⁹ On the 7th of December 1972 the Apollo 17 crew took a picture of Earth from beyond the planet. It was called "the Blue Marble." NASA later chose 12 photos to make a composite image because cloud cover did not allow for a clear picture of the whole planet with one picture.

¹⁰ This quote of St Francis from the Canticle of the creatures can be found immediately, every time you open the Secular Franciscan Order of Australia webpage. There can be no PAX ET BONUM with out it.

¹¹ After begging Saint Francis' forgiveness for his behavior, Guido only left Assisi with the promise that he would see Saint Francis again. However, Saint Francis died while Bishop Guido was on pilgrimage. Everyone wondered why Saint Francis had not kept his promise until Guido returned and said Saint Francis had appeared to him saying, "Father, I am going to heaven!"

¹² Sayings of Friar C4.

¹³ This is the song Saint Francis sang before the Crib, Cross and Altar.