Conference of National Spiritual Assistants

Secular Franciscan Order

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

Fr Joseph Truong Nguyen OFM Conv.
PO. Box 21, Kellyville
8 Greyfriars Pl, Kellyville, NSW 2155
guardian@franciscanfriarsaustralia.org

Fr Robert Stewart OFM Cap
PO Box 604 Leichhardt 2040ile
Phone: 0433 725 708
provincial@ capuchinfriars.org.au

A SPIRITUAL MESSAGE FOR THE MONTH OF NOVEMBER 2026

The Holy Spirit is the Minister General of the Franciscan Order

This extraordinary statement, of course, does not mean that we Franciscans have a monopoly on the Holy Spirit, but rather that we understand the Holy Spirit is the author and source of all religious life, from the Desert Fathers to the latest forms of religious commitment.

In the Franciscan source now called "*The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*", formerly known as "*The Second Legend of St Francis of Assisi*", Brother Thomas of Celano records this story about Saint Francis:

> 193. Whenever Saint Francis was being shaved, [1]
> he would always say to the one who shaved him:
> "*Be careful: don't give me a big tonsure!*
> *I want my simple brothers to have a share in my head!"*
> Really, he wanted the Order to be held in common by the poor and illiterate
> and not just by the learned and rich.
> *"With God,"* he would say, *"there is no respecting of persons,*
> *and the Holy Spirit, the general minister of the religion,*[2]
> *rests equally upon the poor and simple."*
> He really wanted to put these words in the *Rule*, [3]
> but the papal seal already given to the rule precluded it.

St Francis was especially concerned about the relationship in the Order between educated friars, priests and the simple lay brothers. In fact, in this statement Francis goes much further than the friars when he says: *"With God, there is no respecting of persons."* He instinctively knew that in a deep personal relationship with God, love and compassion matter more than knowledge and wealth.

At the very top of the San Damiano Cross is an image of the "*Finger of the living God*". In Luke 11:20, Jesus refers to the "*Finger of God*" through which he exercises power. It highlights that God needs no elaborate tools or struggle to accomplish his will; his minor gestures carry absolute power. In the parallel text in Matthew 12:18, this power is defined as the "*Spirit of God*". On the San Damiano cross, the whole iconic representation is under the power of the Holy Spirit as "*The Finger of the Living God*".[4]

---

[1] Tonsure was the practice of cutting or shaving some or all of the hair on the scalp as a sign of religious devotion or humility. The term originates from the Latin word *tonsura* and referred this practice in medieval Catholicism, abandoned by papal order in 1972.

[2] "*religion*": Specifically, the Franciscan Order.

[3] The definitive Franciscan Rule (known as the *Regula bullata*) was officially proclaimed and confirmed by Pope Honorius III on November 29, 1223. So, this incident must have occurred after that date.

[4] When we use the phrase "finger of God" as a metaphorical synonym or designation for the Holy Spirit, we should ask where the Holy Spirit always points. The San Damiano cross gives us the direct answer: The Holy Spirit always points to Jesus, who is for us the pattern of what it means to be perfectly human. In this sense, he is the Way and the Life of perfect love.

Jesus is quoted in the Gospel of John 6:63 as saying: *"It is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh has nothing to offer*." The meaning is clear. The Holy Spirit is the source of spiritual and eternal life. Human effort cannot earn salvation. "*The flesh*" means human nature and physical power cannot save us or generate spiritual power on their own.

Unlike human virtues acquired by effort, the theological virtues of **Faith**,[5] **Hope**,[6] and **Love** [7]are spiritual gifts God directly infuses into the soul at Baptism, enabling Christians to live in a personal relationship with the Holy Trinity. They animate and give life to all moral virtues and serve as the foundation of Christian activity. Faith, Hope and Love are not commodities which we can purchase with our own resources. We cannot generate them on our own. We need to understand these gifts and pray that the Holy Spirit activates them in our lives and develops them to their full potential. They pledge the Holy Spirit's presence and action in the human being's faculties.

This may be difficult to understand from the perspective of infant baptism since an infant is not aware that these gifts have been given, yet they are still at work in the soul, and they not only support our personal relationship with God but also help us live with one another as brothers and sisters, in fraternal life and friendship. The Sacrament of Confirmation strengthens the gifts of Faith, Hope, and Love, as we also receive the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit.[8]

Essential to angelic and human life, **freedom** lets us choose the way that leads to life or death. In his "Exhortation to the Faithful"[9] Saint Francis sets before us the two ways encapsulated in Psalm 1 that sum up all Scripture: the way that leads to life.[10] and the way that leads to death.[11] In a word, the will to **love**, or its true opposite: not hate, but indifference or **apathy**.

St. Jerome stated clearly: "*Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ!*" This is particularly true of the Gospels. Jesus himself tells us that the Holy Spirit will help us. The phrase "*the Holy Spirit will teach you*" comes from John 14:26 in the Bible, where Jesus promises his disciples that the Father will send the Holy Spirit as a Helper, Counsellor, and Advocate. The Holy Spirit's work is to transform us into the image of Christ. This is what he wants for us, and it is the reason why everything is summed up for Secular Franciscans in the statement: "*Gospel to life; and life to the gospel*." This is the formation method of the Secular Franciscan Order and, ultimately, the life of the Secular Franciscan.

p.p. Capuchin Spiritual Assistant

---

[5] **Faith** is the virtue enabling us to believe in God and His revelations. It is both a free human act and a divine gift, requiring expression and action through charity. Believers are called to profess, witness, and spread the faith.

[6] **Hope** is the desire for the Kingdom of heaven and eternal life, trusting in Christ's promises and the grace of the Holy Spirit rather than human strength. It prevents discouragement, anchors the soul, and guards against selfishness.

[7] **Charity** is loving God above all and neighbours as oneself, fulfilling Jesus's new commandment (John 15:12). It binds all virtues together in "perfect harmony" (Colossians 3:14) and remains forever in heaven after faith and hope pass away.

[8] Confirmation completes the Sacraments of Initiation and gives us the gifts of Wisdom; Understanding; Knowledge; Counsel; Fortitude; Piety; Fear of the Lord.

[9] Now at the beginning of the Secular Franciscan Rule and therefore presented by the Holy directly to the members of the Secular Franciscan Order. This Exhortation is one of the first things St Francis ever wrote. Its first section is a masterpiece in relational mystical spirituality.

[10] The Way of Life: *"bears fruit in season and its leaves never wither, and every project succeeds."*

[11] The Way of Death: *"the path of the wicked is doomed."*