



Fidelity to Franciscan Identity

Brother Masseo approached Brother Francis and said to him with complete sincerity, “Why after you? Why after you? Why does the whole world come running after you, Francis?” We are still asking the same question even later eight centuries. What is it about St. Francis that millions have found so inviting and so inspiring? We are very familiar with our Franciscan Identity (Spirituality). Let’s revisit and ponder on few of the foundations of Franciscan Identity, Spirituality so that we can better live our Franciscan Vocation.

Love for the Eucharist

Testament (6-11) states; “...the Lord gave me, and gives me still, such faith in priests who live according to the rite of the holy Roman Church because of their orders that, were they to persecute me, I would still want to have recourse to them....And I act in this way because, in this world, I see nothing physically of the most high Son of God except His most holy Body and Blood which they receive and they alone administer to others. I want to have these most holy mysteries honored and venerated above all things and I want to reserve them in precious places.”

St. Bonaventure writes, “Francis burned with love for the Sacrament of our Lord’s Body with all his heart, and was lost in wonder at the thought of such condescending love, such loving condescension.” The Eucharist, for Francis, was the foundation on which his faith life was built. In his “Letter to All Clerics,” Francis wrote that, “in this world there is nothing of the Most High himself that we can possess and contemplate with our eyes, except his Body and Blood.” For the poor man of Assisi, the Eucharist was both his compass and his journey’s end. For Francis, then, the Eucharist is the primary way in which he sees Christ’s continuing Incarnation in the world. It is the sign of the presence of Christ with the Church in his continuing salvific role.

The Spirit of Prayer and Devotion

The Catechism of the Catholic (No. 2725) states; “The spiritual battle of the Christian’s new life is inseparable from the battle of prayer.” Francis had discovered a God who loved him, despite his former way of life. Now, Francis wanted to respond to that love and be close to God. The only way this could happen, Francis knew, was through Prayer. Francis learned to pray through praying. As a young man very active in his social circle and learning the family trade as an aspiring cloth merchant, Francis had little time or inclination to silence and

interior recollection. These were skills that Francis had to learn through dogged perseverance. Francis began to spend long periods in solitude in the fields of Assisi. He would withdraw into isolated caves to be alone with God.

Thomas of Celano (2 Cel 95) writes; “He was not so much a man of prayer as prayer personified.” It is said that the friars would never dare interrupt Francis while he prayed. When he prayed, he was like a starving man who had been given a piece of bread. Through prayer Francis experienced great intimacy and union with God. For Francis, praying was a holistic act, and it was crucial to his life. He ‘was a prayer’ with spirit and soul, with body and flesh. The brothers are called to be mindful that, amid the good work they have committed to do for their sisters and brothers, “they do not extinguish the Spirit of holy prayer and devotion to which all temporal things must contribute” (RB 5:2).

Fraternity (the Communal life)

Testament (14) states; “And the Lord gave me brothers, no one showed me what I had to do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel.” Further we read in our Rule (RB 6:7); “Wherever the brothers may be and meet one another let them show that they are members of the same family.” And the General Constitutions (38-54) of the Order states; “The Order of Friars Minor, founded by St. Francis of Assisi, is a fraternity. The friars, as followers of St. Francis, are bound to lead a radically evangelical life, namely: to live in a spirit of prayer and devotion and in fraternal fellowship, caring for and loving each other reciprocally, so that our form of life clearly expresses what our faith says. We are sons of the heavenly Father and brothers of Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit ...”

A hallmark of the Franciscan Order is the communal life. Communion of life in Fraternity is an essential element of our vocation. Since the time the Lord gave brothers to Francis, we cannot consider ourselves authentic Friars Minor without there being a relationship of real communion with the other Friars. Communion of Life in Fraternity is also our primary form of evangelisation. Francis told his friars, “If a mother loves her child how much more should spiritual brothers and sisters love and help one another.”

Minority, Poverty and Solidarity

The very first chapter of the Rule (RB 1:1) states; “The rule and life of the Lesser Brothers is this: to observe the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by living in obedience, without anything of one’s own, and in chastity...” The communion of life in fraternity and the mission of the Friars is characterised and made specific through minority, poverty and solidarity. These are derived from the need to restore to the Lord all goods and they lead to availability and a freedom proper to those that opt for a life inspired by the word and example of the Lord.

Francis desired that nothing should get in the way of one’s ability to embrace and relate to others, just as Christ allowed nothing to get in the way of his embrace and relationship with others. Francis chose “Lady Poverty” as his bride. He regarded it a privilege to live as a poor man because God Himself chose to be born in the poverty of a stable. He believed that wealth and possessions could easily become a hindrance to one’s relationship with God.

We contemplate Christ our only Lord, we love Him and listen to His Word in the measure that we listen to, love and are in solidarity with the poor. The love of Christ spurs us to go out to meet the poor, to walk with them without staff, haversack, bread, money or spare tunic (LgP 33). The love of Christ leads us to the “lepers” of our times, to the poor, and calls us.

Care for Creation

In Genesis (1:28) we read; God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue (till) it; rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and every creature that crawls upon the earth.” Jews, Christians and all those who take this text to be authoritative affirm that guardianship of the goods of God’s creation is central to what it means to be “human.” We become co-creator and not the ‘boss’ over the creation. St. Francis' devotion to God was expressed through his love for all of God's creation. He cared for the poor and sick; he preached sermons to animals and praised all creatures as brothers and sisters under God. Francis recognized God’s work in creation, and loved it. He celebrated the beauty of God in creation, and loved God all the more for this gift. Francis’ relationship with creation is best understood within the broader context of his religious journey, including: Francis’ passionate love for Jesus Christ and his desire to follow him; contemplative prayer; ongoing conversion of life; and a spirituality of brotherhood with everyone and everything.

The Canticle of the Creatures celebrates his passionate and sensory love of creation. It conveys in Francis’ own voice his experience of creation. Francis reveled in the sun, gazed upon the stars, danced with the air, was drawn to the fire, marveled at water, and caressed the earth. The Canticle discloses Francis’ recognition of creation as an expression of God’s generous love, and that creation has inherent value, not because of its material or instrumental value to humans, but because it is created by God. Francis called all creatures, no matter how small, by the name of brother and sister; because he knew they had the same source as himself (St. Bonaventure, Major Life). “Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically...he shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace” (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si* - 10). The cry of the earth and the cries of the poor can no longer be ignored; a response is urgently required. As Franciscans, we are called to “co-operate as instruments of God for the care of creation” in every way possible. Francis’ care for creation is but one expression of his vocation, which was rooted in his passionate love of Jesus Christ. Francis was foremost a follower of Jesus, but in him, there was no tension between loving God and loving all creatures of God.

Let’s be convinced of our Vocation and be Faithful to our Franciscan Identity...

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