

**Dear brothers and sisters, wish you a happy feast of St. Francis of Assisi.**

Celebrating St. Francis is an invitation for us all to live in the spirit of St. Francis. As we celebrate our Seraphic father and brother, we not only remember him and his spirituality as a legacy to be followed, we are invited to renew our vocation and commitment to Human, Christian and Franciscan life. From the moment of his birth till he embraced sister death, Francis always moved upward (heaven) in his life journey; towards God, the other (creation) and self. In order to do that he first did go through inner conversion of self, knowing who he was before God. And once he knew his true self, that moment became his onward journey towards Gospel conversion all through life. Celebrating Francis invites and challenges us to this Gospel conversion in every step of our life. St. Francis lived his life to the fullest keeping his loving relationship with God, the other and himself. This year I did my pastoral visit to many of the Secular Franciscans fraternities. I made a clear choice that I want to know my brothers and sisters, and I wanted to make a personal connection to strengthen my relationship as a brother to my Secular Franciscan family. I have learned a lot through my visits to you all. Visits have not only strengthened my Human, Christian and Franciscan vocation but also have challenged me for the Gospel conversion in every day of my life.

The Participants of the 16th General Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops have gathered for the ‘Synod on Synodality.’ For sure, I believe all eyes are on them, expecting for something different and new to happen. Speculations and expectations are high to meet the signs of the time. Who knows what the Holy Spirit is going to surprise with? Got to be prepared to welcome and be open to the surprises. We can also look at it as a time for the Gospel conversion, it is a call to get to the essence of the Gospel, get back to the root and to being truly a body of Christ. Jesus said to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary at the empty tomb “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me” (Mt. 28:10). Do I go to the first moment of my faith, my encounter with the Lord and hold it dear or feel like giving away when life is shaken by worldly trends? Maybe Jesus is telling us right now as He told his disciples, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Mt. 16:24). What do I need to deny, what are the daily crosses that weigh me down and whom am I following? The first converts (early Christian community) “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). Do I follow the example of my first brothers and sisters of faith?

Franciscans commonly speak and stress on ‘returning to the root, returning to the rule’. St. Francis as a member of the church remained with the church in its difficult and challenging times. He was challenged by the heresies within the church but he firmly remained with the church to repair/rebuild. That was his calling from the crucifix; “Francis, “Go and repair my house, which, as you see, is falling into ruins.” Does the celebration of the feast of St. Francis help me to do this? What areas of my life do I need to repair/rebuild? And how can I be a builder of a good fraternity and wider brotherhood/sisterhood around me? May St. Francis of Assisi inspire, intercede and assist us in living our vocation and God’s mission.

***Happy Feast and God bless.***

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