

**A SELECTION OF TEXTS BY POPE ST. JOHN PAUL II AS A "PILGRIM" TO
LA VERNA PASTORAL VISIT TO LA VERNA AND CAMALDOLI 17th
September, 1993 ADDRESS TO THE FRIARS IN THE REFECTORY.**

1. "In this privileged place, where not only Franciscanism was born, but also Christianity was born again, Francis is a great rediscovery of truths, of divine realities; These two:

a. Creation –

In love with creation b. Redemption - in love with the Redeemer

2. The Pope, comparing the Saint of Assisi to St. Paul, affirmed that Francis is of the same spiritual race as the Apostle because, for him, as for Paul, the Crucified Christ was "everything." *Furthermore, he continues: "This is how it has remained over the centuries, through the generations. It's so current. Current... that it is current! It is a sermon for which one prays that it will not be in vain. Ne evacuetur Crux Christi!, that is the problem of our age: ... and if we hope that He will not be taken away, I hope also in great part thanks to this Poverello-the "poor man", to this Founder of yours."*

JOHN PAUL II HOMILY Friday, 17th September 1993 n. 4

The stigmata that Francis received in this place, La Verna, constitute a special sign. They are the intimate testimony of the truth of the *Poverello*. He presents himself to us as the one who in an authentic and profound way "boasted of the Cross of Christ". Not of "something else", only "of the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (cf. Gal 6:14). A sign of similarity by virtue of love. The Apostle Paul says it and Francis of Assisi repeats it: through the Cross of Christ and through the power of love, *"the world was crucified to me, as I was crucified to the world"* (Gal 6:14) No. 5 The stigmatization of La Verna thus represents that visible conformity to the image of Christ that makes Francis the example from which every Christian can be inspired on his journey of progressive approach to God the Creator and Redeemer.

In this regard, the words spoken by the *Poverello* at the end of his life are significant: *"I have done my part; May Christ teach you yours"* (St. Bonaventure, *Legenda maior*, XIV, 3). JOHN PAUL II ANGELUS LA VERNA (AREZZO) - FRIDAY, 17th SEPTEMBER 1993

The reality is that our time, wavering between conquests and defeats, torn between hope and despair, seeks the path of a new authenticity. St. Francis clearly offers the image of an authentic man, a successful man, who knew how to achieve peace with God, with himself, with others, with the cosmos. But what is the deep root of this personality, the real secret of its charm? There is no doubt about it: it is Christ's choice.

JOHN PAUL II "TO RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES" LA VERNA - FRIDAY, 17th SEPTEMBER 1993

The *Poverello's* prolonged stays on this mountain are eloquent testimony to his need for solitude. [...] The austere and magnificent Sanctuary in which we find ourselves remains

even today one of the almost tangible signs of Francis' contemplative soul and of the "lesson" he left to the whole of *Franciscanism* in this regard.

1 "*Nostalgia and need for You...*" echoes of a pilgrimage.

Meeting of Franciscan spirituality, Sanctuary of La Verna, 22- 27.08.1994, Bagno a Ripoli: Tip. Il Bandino, 1995, 15 (Quaderni di spiritualità francescana, 16). The other texts are available in the same volume and in L'Osservatore Romano. It reminds the many pilgrims and visitors of our own times, according to the felicitous expression of the *Lesser Legend*, how "*the true love of Christ*" transformed "*the lover into the perfect image of the Beloved*" (FF 1377). The fruitfulness of this Franciscan intuition has produced many fruits of holiness in the Church.

Dear sons and daughters of Francis, because of your special vocation which sums up and harmonizes concealment in the hermitage and apostolic commitment, it is up to you to point out to our contemporaries, in an attitude of universal fraternity, the satisfying response to these expectations [of authentic experience of God.] May your communities, dear brothers and sisters, become more and more, in the wake of a centuries-old tradition, radiant centres of this living spirituality

ADDRESS OF POPE BENEDICT XVI AT LA VERNA VISIT TO THE SANCTUARY OF LA VERNA (cancelled due to bad weather). 13th May 2012

The glorious Cross of Christ sums up the sufferings of the world, but above all it is a tangible sign of love, a measure of God's goodness towards man. In this place we too are called to recover the supernatural dimension of life, to lift our eyes from what is contingent, to return to entrust ourselves completely to the Lord, with a free heart and in perfect joy, contemplating the Crucified One so that he may wound us with his love. "*Almighty, Almighty, Good Lord, Yours are the praises, the glory and the honour et omne benedictione*" (Canticle of Brother Sun: FF, 263). Only by allowing oneself to be illumined by the light of God's love can man and the whole of nature be redeemed, beauty can finally reflect the splendour of Christ's face, as the moon reflects the sun. Flowing from the glorious Cross, the Blood of the Crucified One once again gives life to the withered bones of the Adam in us, so that each one may rediscover the joy of setting out towards holiness, of ascending upwards, towards God. From this blessed place, I join in the prayer of all the Franciscans of the earth: "***We adore You, O Christ, and we bless You here and in all the churches that are in the world, because with Your holy Cross You have redeemed the world***". Enraptured by the love of Christ! One does not go up to La Verna without being guided by the prayer of St. Francis of the *Absorbeat*, which reads: "*Tear away, O Lord, the ardent and sweet power of Your love my mind from all things that are under heaven, so that I may die for Your love's sake, just as You deigned to die for my love's sake*" (Prayer "*absorbeat*", 1: FF, 277).

Contemplation of the Crucified One is the work of the mind, but it cannot soar high without the support, without the power of love. In this same place, St. Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, a distinguished son of St. Francis, designed his *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, showing us

the way to follow in order to set out towards the peaks where we can meet God. This great Doctor of the Church communicates to us his own experience, inviting us to prayer. First of all, our minds must be turned to the Lord's Passion, because it is the sacrifice of the Cross that blots out our sin, a lack that can only be filled by God's love: "*I exhort the reader;*" he writes, "*first of all to the groaning of prayer for the crucified Christ, whose blood cleanses the stains of our sins*" (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, Prol. 4). But, in order to be effective, our prayer needs tears, that is, interior involvement, our love that responds to God's love. And then there is the need for that admiration, which St Bonaventure sees in the humbleness and humility of the Gospel, capable of amazement before the saving work of Christ. And humility is the door to every virtue. In fact, it is not with the intellectual pride of self-contained research that it is possible to reach God, but with humility, according to a famous expression of Saint Bonaventure: "[Man] should not think that reading without anointing, speculation without devotion, research without admiration, consideration without exultation, industry without piety, knowledge without charity is enough for him, intelligence without humility, study without divine grace, the mirror without divinely inspired wisdom" (*ibid.*). Contemplation of the Crucified One is extraordinarily effective, because it makes us pass from the order of things thought to lived experience, from hoped-for salvation to the blessed homeland. St. Bonaventure says: "*He who looks attentively at [the Crucified One] ... he accomplishes with him the Passover; that is, the passage*" (*ibid.*, VII, 2). This is the heart of the experience of La Verna, of the experience that the *Poverello* of Assisi had here. On this Sacred Mountain, Saint Francis lives in himself the profound unity between *sequela*, *imitatio* and *conformatio Christi*. So, he also tells us that it is not enough to declare oneself a Christian in order to be a Christian, nor even to try to do the works of good. It is necessary to conform oneself to Jesus, with a slow, progressive commitment to the transformation of one's being, in the image of the Lord, so that, by Divine grace, every member of His Body, which is the Church, may show the necessary likeness to the Head, Christ the Lord; and even on this journey we start - as the medieval masters teach us in the wake of the great St. Augustine - from self-knowledge, from the humility to look sincerely into the depths of oneself. Bring the love of Christ! How many pilgrims have climbed and are going up this Sacred Mount to contemplate the Love of God crucified and to allow themselves to be enraptured by Him. How many pilgrims have gone up in search of God, which is the true reason why the Church exists: to act as a bridge between God and man. It is here they also meet you, sons and daughters of Saint Francis. Always remember that consecrated life has the specific task of bearing witness, by word and example of a life according to the evangelical counsels, to the fascinating story of love between God and humanity that runs through history.