

### **A call to descend in order to ascend...**

Recently, while talking about Franciscan Spirituality to grade 12 of Vancouver College, it again struck me profoundly that St. Francis of Assisi gave away all earthly riches his father offered and accepted the poverty of Christ in order to attain heavenly riches. He gave up his earthly father and household to live the Holy Gospel of our Lord. He gave up his earthly ambition of becoming a knight to become Poverello of Assisi. He descended in every way and form; went down the hill of Assisi to live with the lepers and clean their wounds. Francis knew that he needed to descend only then he could ascend one day to heavenly glory.

In this season of Easter, I invite you and myself to work on at least one area of life where you need to descend in order to ascend to heavenly glory. I am sure all of us have something to work on, some areas of our life that are not in tune with God's ways. Be humble and willing to seek help if you need to. Maybe your family or fraternity can offer you that help and can be an instrument leading you to heavenly glory. Every day of our life requires us to give away whatever is a block to receiving heavenly glory.

### **Lord, make me an instrument of your peace...**

The ongoing war and conflicts in our wounded world speak a lot towards where the world is moving. Can you imagine what it is to live in the Holy Land now in the midst of conflicts and crises? Many people are leaving the Holy Land because of these rising tensions. Recently, Br. Massimo Fusarelli, Minister General of the OFM, appealed to his fellow Franciscans to stay put in the Holy Land despite rising tensions and threats to physical safety due to the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. He said choosing to stay despite increased military escalation in the region does not mean being "shut up in our convents," but rather entails "staying with the people, and then remaining as intercessors."

St. Francis of Assisi did not expect to bring peace into the world by simply withdrawing and praying for the world (which he did periodically); but, rather, by directly engaging the world where the world was. Just as the Word became incarnate and came down into the world – in all its ugliness and sin – so did Francis get involved in the complexities and difficulties of the world. We are familiar with the story of St. Francis and the Sultan. With faith in God and Gospel, Francis crossed over the enemy line with the message of love. He shows us that through sincere dialogue conversion can take place, friendship can be achieved, and peace can be restored. Again, when attempting to negotiate peace, Francis did not hope for merely an end to the struggle and violence, but something more concrete. In every aspect of life, he was attempting to bring peace that comes from an active spiritual experience, a changed soul, the peace that does not come from the world, but from God through Jesus Christ. Francis knew that peace can only come from the intimate relationship with God, other and entire creation. So, for Francis, peace was not simply the absence of war or tension, but was a concrete experience and expression of living the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Now is the time, let us not only pray the 'prayer of peace' but be the 'peace builders' wherever we live.

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