

Stay with us...for we have a room!

It has been my extreme joy to meet the Secular Franciscans of Saskatoon, Kelowna, Kamloops and Salmon Arm, recently. As I was planning my pastoral visits to these places, I made an open suggestion to respective ministers, saying it would be good for me if the Secular Franciscans could offer a place to lay my head in their homes, rather than me staying in a priest's rectory or in a hotel during my visits. I can't believe the response I received from my brothers and sisters of St. Francis, "Yes, we will be glad to have you stay with us, we have a room in the basement if it's fine with you." I said I will grab the offer. I am extremely touched by the openness and generosity of Secular Franciscans. Pastoral visits have helped me to make a personal connection with brothers and sisters. It has given me a sense of what your family is made up with. Glad to have spent time, stayed with your families and taken part of the lifestyle you live.

Not to compare my experience with that of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus who invited Jesus to stay with them; "Stay with us, Lord, for it is almost evening" (Lk 24:29). This was the humble invitation that the two disciples journeying to Emmaus on the evening of the day of the resurrection made to the stranger who had accompanied them on their journey. And we know the rest of the story...in the 'breaking of the bread' they recognized Jesus their Lord and Master. Imagine, if they did not invite Jesus to stay with them, what would they have missed?

I am glad to have made the suggestion or invited myself to stay in your home with your family. If I did not, then I would have missed the onetime opportunity to know you. God works in a mysterious way. Truly, we can encounter Him and His love in each other. I came to you as a stranger and you did not have any hesitation to open the door of your dwelling and share your food with me. This opportunity provided me to come to know you better than what I knew of you. I believe it's the same with you. It's not only about those families who hosted me but with other members in these fraternities who opened their hearts to make me feel one and at home among them. I believe it to be genuine and part of your vocation and you did not do that just for me. It is who you are by your calling, isn't it?

St. Francis of Assisi, like the two disciples, invited Jesus in the leper to stay with him and the leper became a member of his new family. There are many lepers in our midst that need to be invited and welcomed into our midst. I saw so much love and likeness that you have for St. Francis of Assisi. I am convinced that each of you, young or old, are trying your best to be a good follower of him. Reality can't be denied that vocations have declined, members are aging and no new blood to carry on the Franciscan charism in some of the fraternities. My only encouragement is, and always will be, 'do your part and leave the rest to God...do the best you can, but do your part...' Don't be discouraged by lack of vocations or by aging but live in hope and sustain your Franciscan vocation with faithfulness to 'observe the Holy Gospel of our Lord.' Let us be willing to open the room of our hearts for Jesus and His Gospel. And like the two disciples, let us invite Jesus to stay with us; stay in our life and in our home. When we have Jesus our Lord staying with us, we can make a difference around us. Come Lord Jesus and stay with us!

Friar Manoj