

FAREWELL

This is my last Regional Spiritual Assistant monthly message. As of March 1. Fr. Manoj Xalxo took over from me. He is an amazing young Friar! I hope he will be able to introduce himself next month. But for this month I asked him if I could write this last message as a way of saying goodbye and creating some closure. According to my computer this, is the 48th Regional message I have sent you. I hope that they have provided some spiritual nourishment. Thanks for all your positive feed-back. It has always been a support to me.

Looking back on my messages I have covered a wide and varied array of themes. I have spoken much on Franciscan Spirituality and we have looked at such themes as the Franciscan understanding of Christology, the Trinity and “poverty” among many other related topics. I also wrote on the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. This was of particular interest to me as I have Protestant roots. And, as a good Protestant, I wrote on many Biblical passages. To keep this connected to you, I chose Scripture passages that you were familiar with that came from Morning and Evening Prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours.

I often wrote on a personal level – writing from my own experience. These articles tended to elicit the greatest response. And among these, judging from your response, my messages during my sabbatical were of particular interest. I wrote from various places. Message 21 (Sept. 2015), for instance, I wrote on my last day at St. Michael’s Retreats (Lumsden SK) in my empty room as I was already packed to leave. This was a sad day, as the Friars were moving after so many years. I did my novitiate there and ended up being the last Guardian. Message 22 (Oct. 2015) was from a bus while at the first inter-provincial meeting between the friars in the west and the east which finally led to the creation of one Tran-Canadian Franciscan Province (Prov. of the Holy Spirit). Message 24 (Dec. 2015) was from Ottawa at my first Christmas at home in decades. And I wrote messages 26 to 29 from Oakland, CA (Feb.2016 – May 2016) where I was enrolled in a sabbatical program for Religious from all around the world. Perhaps the most interesting message from that time, was the one where I wrote about my Easter experience in the famous poverty stricken area in San Francisco – called the “Tenderloin” (28). Message 30, (June, 2016) was shortly after I had completed the Camino de Santiago de Compostela. What an experience that was – walking over 775 kms in 30 days!

And speaking of traveling, looking through all these messages again, I have, in a sense, taken you with me on a pilgrimage through many topics and experiences. Apart from the fact that being Regional Spiritual Assistant required some travel, I can say “It’s been quite the journey”. But I have traveled with friends – you, beloved Seculars.

But you are not done with me so quickly! I will still remain local S.A. for three Fraternities and I will still teach the on-line course. I hope to always be connected to the OFS.

A few days ago, after visiting my wonderful friends of Mary Queen of Peace fraternity in Pincher Creek, I took off to Lethbridge (about an hour from Pincher). I needed some peace and solitude. I spend two blissful days at Martha Retreat Centre there. Although the weather was extremely cold, I went for a long walk in the river valley parks to which the retreat centre has immediate access. Surely as you know by now, walking in nature is always restorative for me. It was in this context that I came across a poem at the retreat centre by a Saskatchewan poet Clara Armstrong (1895-1983) called God Dwells in Beauty. It captured for me my sense of God’s presence in creation as well my present some-what “burnt out” state. I would like to end this last letter to you with a few lines from it. After Clara skillfully describes the beauty of a wet, rainy night she concludes:

“The magic beauty of this midnight hour
Enfolds me with a peace I thought had fled,
The moist breeze, fragrant as an open flower,
Whispers of hope that short while since seemed dead:
Gone is my selfish grief, my doubts and fear,
I rest content – I feel God’s presence here.

See some of you at the Chapter of Elections in Calgary!
“Pax et Bonum!” - Br. Gerry Clyne OFM