

**The Lord gave me brothers...**for the first time after the Covid-19 Pandemic, the brothers of the Holy Spirit Province, Canada, were able to come together this August at Mount St. Francis, Cochrane for the annual retreat. Br. Michale Perry, OFM, the former Minister General preached the retreat on “Heroes of Faith and their vocation journey” leading us through the experiences of Abraham & Sarah, Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Francis of Assisi. He highlighted the experience of St. Francis and how he became the icon of mercy which is an invitation for all of us to follow and live in our life. He also shared his own experience of encountering and serving the brothers of the Order. Brothers together for spiritual nourishment through retreat talks and liturgies, jubilees of religious life, one to one conversation and Gaudium, etc. marked the week. One of my formators often said “always enjoy the presence of a brother as you may not get the same brother to live with in your next community.” The presence of brothers who could not make for the retreat this year was missed. Being with the brothers is always great joy and learning for me because they are my family.

After the retreat I had some time to meet with my extended Franciscan family: Secular Franciscans of Alberta South (St. Mary’s Calgary, St. Padre Pio Calgary and Mary Queen of Peace Pincher Creek). I truly felt very much connected and fulfilled meeting my brothers and sisters of St. Francis of Assisi. It was a great joy connecting to brothers and sisters, listening to their vocation stories and how they bear witness to the Franciscan life in their own time and space. Brother Gerry Clyne and Ron Semenoff joined me for a long road journey of about six hours back and forth on the road from Cochrane to meet the fraternity of Mary Queen of Peace Pincher Creek. All along the road we not only admired the beauty of creation, mountains and unending ranches but enjoyed our time together, shared our Franciscan experience, listened to country music and sang along. The unending ranches also reminded me of my own story of being a cowboy, helping my father in farming and caring for the livestock before I joined the friars. Very nostalgic moments passing through mountains and ranches. Indeed, God’s creation is breathtaking...**Praise be to you my Lord for my brothers, sisters and entire creation.**

Brother Manoj, OFM