

# **Franciscan Spirituality Retreat**



**By the Franciscan Sisters of Allegany  
Franciscan Spirituality Committee**

## Franciscan Spirituality Retreat

Format can be for one day, two half days, or four evenings.

Part 1 Creation centered prayer

Part 2 Introduction to the life of Francis of Assisi

Part 3 Introduction to Franciscan Incarnational Spirituality according to St. Bonaventure

Part 4 Introduction to Franciscan Incarnational Spirituality according to John Duns Scotus

Part 5 Francis and Justice – using some stories about Francis and applying them to Justice issues today.

Closing Prayer

# FRANCISCAN SPIRITUALITY RETREAT

## AN INTRODUCTION TO FRANCIS AND JESUS

“The brothers who lived with [Francis] know that daily, constantly, talk of Jesus was on his lips . . . out of the fullness of the heart his mouth spoke. . . He was always with Jesus: Jesus in his heart, Jesus in his mouth, Jesus in his ears, Jesus in his eyes, Jesus in his hands, he bore Jesus always in his body.” Thomas of Celano

Jesus was Francis’ life and life’s work. He preached as Jesus preached – the Kingdom of God and God’s love for everyone. He lived as Jesus lives – poor, itinerant and with a following of men and women who wanted to join him.

As time went on, Francis became more and more like Jesus Christ until he became Christ. The stigmata was the external sign of what had already existed within.

One cannot speak of Francis without Jesus, for Jesus was in Francis’ heart, mouth, ears, eyes, hands, his whole body.

### **I. Conversion – how Jesus showed Francis the way.**

#### **A. Francis dream of knighthood thwarted**

1. Dream of glory
2. Voice: “Who could do more good for you, the servant or the Lord?”
3. Told to return to Assisi and wait.

#### **B. Gradual Conversion**

1. Francis gave generously to the poor who asked for alms for the sake of God, while working in his father’s shop.
2. Francis embraces the leper – “that which seemed bitter to me was changed to sweetness.”
3. Francis prayed before the cross in the ruins of the church of San Damiano
  - a. “Francis, go and repair My house. You see it is falling down.”
  - b. Francis begins to literally repair churches – San Damiano, the Portiuncula and others.

**Questions for reflection:**

**What are the ruins that need repair today?  
How can I respond?**

### C. Ongoing Conversion

1. Francis asks a priest to explain a gospel passage (Luke 10:1-12)
2. Francis' response: "This is what I want, this is what I seek, this is what I desire with all my heart."
3. Francis received his call; his vocation.
4. He took off his shoes, laid aside staff and money; wore no belt, but wore a rough tunic with a rope belt.
5. He began to attract followers

**Questions for Reflection: How has Jesus called me? How have I responded?**

## II What attracted people to follow him?

- A. His preaching
- B. His obvious love for God
- C. His kindness and understanding
- D. His humility and willingness to beg, to serve the lepers
- E. His vision of God in all creation
- F. His love and devotion to the Eucharist
- G. His willingness to put his life on the line for peace.

**Question for Reflection: What attracts me to Francis?**

## III Francis and his followers emulated Jesus

- A. Preached the love and forgiveness of God
- B. Served the poor and marginalized, especially the lepers
- C. Gained more and more followers and the movement spread throughout Europe.

**Question for reflection: Francis is attributed to have said: "Preach always, use words if necessary."  
How do my actions preach the gospel without words?**

## IV The Stigmata

- A. Vision at La Verna – two years before Francis died
  1. A seraph with six wings standing over him
  2. Celano: "his hands and feet seemed to be pierced through the middle by nails. . .with an oblong scar on his right side as though pierced by a lance"

- B. From the Legend of the Three Companions: “Until his death, the man of God, unwilling to reveal God’s sacrament, concealed it to the best of his ability, although he was unable to cover it completely since it became known to at least his intimate companions (Elias and Rufino).”
- C. Francis died October 4, 1226

**Question for Reflection:**      **How has God imprinted his mark on my life?**  
**How has it changed my life?**

## Incarnational Theology

Franciscan Spirituality is based on the lives of Francis and Clare, which are, of course, based on the Gospel.

Since their deaths, theologians have developed a tradition which continues to be researched and developed today by a number of influential scholars.

This tradition is based in large part on the works of Bonaventure and John Duns Scotus, both of whom built on the works of others who went before them.

The plan I have for today is to give you a snapshot of their thinking and hopefully to whet your appetite for more.

As Franciscan women and men I believe we have an obligation to become imbued with the riches of this tradition and find ways to share it with the world in which we live.

Today's problems and issues are not that distinct from those of Francis' day - war, poverty, discrimination, religious differences – the list goes on and on.

Of course, I only have 45 minutes to give you this overview, and I presume for many of you it will not be new material.

I know that I grow in understanding each time I hear, or read or even speak of Franciscan spirituality and hope that this will also help you to do the same.

Let's start with the beliefs that were key for Bonaventure.

The primary attribute of God is Goodness.

God is self-emptying Good and overflowing Love – extravagant love!

According to Bonaventure, love is both mutual and expansive – needing one to give and one to receive, and open to being co-loved by another.

First person (manifestation of God) is fountain fullness.

#### Fountain image

God speaks God's Word in love, this Word fills and overflows again and again until that love returns by the power of God's Spirit and continues to spill out and overflow. There is always enough love – it never lessens!

The Trinity is an expression of a relational God whose inner life flows forth into creation and back through the Word in its human embodiment, Jesus of Nazareth.

The desire of God is to share love outside of Godself in a free and generous act.

Divine Mystery freely chooses to create and to become incarnate.

Creation is the first book of Divine Revelation, and Christ is the center of creation.

When I speak of Christ I am not speaking of the Jesus who became human and lived among us. Christ is not his last name!

Christ is the eternal Word of God, the beginning and the end.

Teilhard de Chardin speaks of Christ as the Alpha and the Omega, the point from which all creation came and the point to which all creation will return.

## John Duns Scotus

Scotus expands upon the teachings of Bonaventure, basing much of his understanding on the writings of the evangelist John. God is love!

Scotus further develops the image of the Trinity as a relational communion of love. The mystery of the Trinity is a mystery of love that is both necessary and free.

God as love, cannot not love, and as love, God freely chooses to love beyond Godself!

God creates in order to have co-lovers. Creation and Incarnation both rise out of the Divine desire to love and be loved – a desire that arises out of freedom, not need.

(For Scotus freedom is always ordered to a love relationship. )

Creation is ordered toward the Incarnation. They both reveal our Triune God as an artist of love.

Creation is ordered to the existence of beings who are free to love, to enter into a mutual relationship of love with God.

The goal of an artist – Jesus as the goal of creation

All of creation is ordered toward the Incarnation and Incarnation is ordered toward creation's participation in the divine communion of love.

“Jesus is the clue to the structure and meaning not only of humanity but of the entire universe.” (Zachary Hayes)

The primacy of Christ! Jesus is the image of the invisible God!

This brings us to the issue of why Jesus came.

According to Scotus, Jesus Christ reveals and actualizes the eternal divine intention to enter into a love relationship with creatures so they may enter into a loving relationship with God.

The Incarnation is not the result of sin!

Salvation is to share in the divine communion of love.

So where does that leave us with the Cross and resurrection?

From a Franciscan theological lens, we can speak of the Cross as a consequence of sin. The incarnation of the Word of God is not a consequence of anything except God's love.

In a wounded world incarnate love looks like the Cross!

And Resurrection reveals the primacy of love!

God's first intention was that human nature (and all of creation) be glorified by being united to the divine Word.

Francis himself told us that "everything in heaven and on earth has been reconciled with God through Christ."

Human beings were created after the image of Jesus Christ.

The body of the Incarnate Word, Jesus of Nazareth was the blueprint for the bodies of all human beings.

According to Scotus, the created order is endowed with an inner light that shines forth from within.

Each being within the created order already possesses an immanent dignity – a sanctity that is a gift from our loving Creator.

To summarize, the basic attitudes that are central to Franciscan spirituality are:

The Goodness of God

The Primacy of Christ

The Dignity of the Human Person.

These have to shape our way of life as Franciscan women and men.

These will make a difference in our church, and our world.

These will help to satisfy the hungers that people are feeling in our society today.

So where does this take us?

Is any of this a new concept?

Does it unnerve us or resonate with the God who speaks to our hearts?

How can we share this life-giving, energizing understanding of God's love and God's place in our world?

That is our task – may we embrace it and live it!

Pat Klemm, OSF

August 2, 2014

## Francis and Justice

At this time let us consider the ways that Franciscan Spirituality calls us to live our lives from the perspective of Social Justice. We have already stated that a basic Franciscan contribution to an understanding of Social Justice stems from the insight that all people and all creatures are brothers and sisters. We also realize that social justice often requires that we view things in ways that might be different than we expected; our familiar attitudes may be challenged. A just vision can make us uncomfortable; we know that the teachings of Jesus were not about being comfortable. At times, therefore, we need to be made uncomfortable in our thinking in order to move closer to Christ's Gospel message.

Seeking the true good of others in society and in the whole world is extremely vital. If we truly love we cannot be indifferent to the sufferings and injustices of others. To the extent that anyone suffers from injustice, the lives of all others are diminished. Pope Benedict XVI in his Encyclical Letter, "God is Love," pointed out that we are called to love others, even those we do not like or even know. Social Justice is a part of the virtue of Love or Charity.

The world in which Francis lived was in turmoil! Neighbors were warring with each other on behalf of religion; lack of equality of peoples led to poverty and marginalization. Because Francis lived in a way that called others to pay attention we have benefited from a number of stories about his life. Some are official writings and others more imaginative and tell us how Francis thought and acted.

### **Francis and the Leper**

When Francis was lying on his deathbed, he began retelling about occasions that were of great importance to him. One of the stories retold was his experience of encountering the other in the leper. This clearly had been a transitional experience for him, something that marked a turning point in his living in the world. He said:

**"The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, thus to begin doing penance in this way: for when I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I showed mercy to them."**

Among all the awful miseries of this world Francis had a natural horror of lepers, and one day as he was riding his horse near Assisi he met a leper on the road. He felt terrified and revolted, but not wanting to transgress God's command and break the sacrament of His word, he dismounted from his horse and ran to kiss him. As the leper stretched out his hand, expecting something, he received both money and a kiss. Francis immediately mounted his horse and although the field was wide open, without any obstructions, when he looked around he could not see the leper anywhere.

Of all things in the world, lepers were those that Francis despised most. He, by virtue of the cultural norms and societal laws of the day, had every right to ignore and refuse to interact with the leper. Instead, he was compelled — despite his visceral disgust for the leper, to move beyond his place of comfort to dare to embrace the other. In the telling and interpretation of this event shows that Francis was like everybody in his society by ignoring, marginalizing and dismissing the outcasts left to survive

outside the city gates. This encounter with the leper represents Francis' acceptance of suffering humanity. And he was determined to minister to and with them again.

**from Dating God- Franciscan Spirituality for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, excerpts from blog of Daniel Horan, OFM**

### **Some justice parallels for us today:**

Francis continued to experience periods of conversion that eventually led to his embracing radical poverty. It demanded something of him, more than he might have realized early on in his conversion experience. What would ultimately culminate with the public rejection of his father began with the smaller breaks with a way of life, with a culture, with a worldview that separated people from one another and supported a system of willful ignorance in the face of the plight of others. He became absorbed with living in a manner that we know as, "The preferential option for the poor." Simply put, all members of society have an obligation to the poor and the vulnerable. "As followers of Christ, we are challenged to make a fundamental "option for the poor"--to speak for the voiceless, to defend the defenseless, to assess life styles, policies, and social institutions in terms of their impact on the poor."

**(U.S. Bishops in their 1986 pastoral letter on the economy "Economic Justice for All" taught the basis today for what we know as the : The Preferential Option for the Poor)**

### **The Wolf of Gubbio**

"The Wolf of Gubbio," one of the stories found in "The Little Flowers of St. Francis is a good example. Once when Francis was in the town of Gubbio, something unexpected happened. A large wolf on the outskirts of the city, rabid with hunger was devouring animals and terrorizing the people. Francis saw the great fear of the townspeople and had compassion on them. He decided to befriend the animal. This terrified the citizens; they implored him not to go near the wolf. But Francis went ahead and placed his hope in the Lord Jesus. He met the wolf coming toward him looking utterly vicious. He said: "Come to me, Brother Wolf. In the name of Christ, I order you not to hurt me or anyone." The wolf became calm; lowered its head and lay down. Then Francis said "Brother Wolf, you have done great harm in this town, committing horrible crimes by destroying God's creatures without any mercy. I know the evil you have done is because of your hunger. I want to make peace between you and the citizens of Gubbio so that you will no longer harm them and they will not allow you to go hungry. Following this Francis and Brother Wolf went to the center of the town where all the people had gathered. Francis explained the plan for bringing peace to both the people and the wolf. He made the citizens aware of their own contributions to the problems they faced and strongly urged them to return to the Lord and be reconciled with one another.

The citizens agreed to accept their part of the terms. Francis, turning to Brother Wolf said "Since you are willing to make and keep peace I promise you that the people of this town will give you food every day as long as you live." From that day onward the wolf and the people resided together in peace.

(Little Flowers of St. Francis of Assisi)

If today we were to analyze this challenge it might proceed like this:

Francis involved himself in a form of nonviolent intervention. It changed the perspectives of both parties. He revealed to the town that a spiritually-grounded openness to the other can help them view the “other” as wounded and sacred, not simply destructive. He revealed to the wolf that the decision not to match ferocity with ferocity is confounding and explained a different kind of power, one that unifies rather than threatens. Grounded in the power of the nonviolent God, Francis’s unilateral initiative broke the cycle of violence by affirming his oneness with the wolf (by calling him “Brother”), by truthfully naming the violence perpetrated by the wolf (his attacks on the town), by analyzing the root causes of the violence (hunger), by proposing an accord that would meet the needs of both parties and by bringing both parties to affirm this mutually beneficial pact. The town experienced peace for the next two years at which time the wolf died naturally and was mourned by the people.

**(Of Note: The town of Gubbio incorporated Francis’s peacemaking in its institutional memory. For example, in the 1970s Gubbio declared itself a “nuclear-free zone” and its city officials have been active in many campaigns for peace.**

Resource used: (Franciscan Nonviolence, Chapter 3, Nonviolent Intervention, Encounter, and the Third Way: St. Francis and the Wolf of Gubbio)

### **Francis and the Sultan**

The story of Francis and the Sultan is particularly applicable today in the way we look at world problems of war and violence. Francis traveled to Egypt thinking he would convert the Sultan Malik al-Kamil or become a martyr trying. Francis was received by the Sultan after being captured and beaten, and found him willing to listen to what he had to say. The Sultan was not interested in being converted but had a great deal of respect for the Holy Man of God and granted him safe passage out of the area. We can learn from this story that sharing deeply and respectfully with those who are very different from us may lead to less violence and possibly even resolution of differences.

### **Francis and the Hungry Brother**

There is one more story that speaks to Francis and his understanding of ways to live in solidarity with others. One evening during a period of severe fasting, a young brother woke the others crying out: “I am dying, dying of hunger.” Francis got up and called the others to gather for a meal. Francis was the first to eat, to put the hungry brother at ease, not shaming him for his weakness, but recognizing our common condition as human persons. Francis did not see himself or his vision for the order as cast in stone, or as the only approach to God.

Solidarity was the key for Francis approach to others . . .the solidarity we all share as sisters and brothers who are all created in God's image.

Solidarity is the key to acting justly in our world today. We are all sisters and brothers and the more we remember this, the more we will be able to act justly whether in terms of war, violence, economic differences, or religious differences. Francis stood up even to the church for the things he believed in, but his example for us lies mostly in the way he saw everything. Justice will flow from our core beliefs, and we will be able to look at any problem with new eyes when we see as Francis did. We cannot ignore the common good of all people and expect to resolve our differences.

**FSC Retreat Closing Prayer**

**Prayer Before the Crucifix**

**Most High,  
Glorious God,  
enlighten the darkness of my heart  
and give me  
true faith, certain hope,  
and perfect charity,  
sense and knowledge,  
Lord,  
that I might carry out  
your holy and true command.**