

## Minister's welcome to Gibraltar Chapter, April 21, 2017.

(Slightly adapted version)

Since the first tentative suggestion of a national event in Gibraltar, I saw this visit as an opportunity to experience living fraternity. I was fortunate to be here once before and can honestly say that hospitality and fraternity made lasting deep impressions on me. Subsequently, I have found members from Gibraltar are generous in travelling to the mainland and further afield as they live fraternity.

For the rest of us, few in number, not living close to one another, it can be hard to have the same sense of fraternity, because we can only come together for monthly meetings and occasional other activities. Belonging to a local fraternity is different from family, work, parish, other commitments. It is perhaps easier to recognise it in the communal life the brothers and sisters of the other branches of the Franciscan family as they live together. However, all Franciscans share the realisation of St Francis that all creatures are brothers and sisters because they have one Creator/Father God. This was a particular gift for Francis and was very influential in his life. Hence fraternity should find a place in the lives of all called to follow the Franciscan way.

### **Two ideals for fraternity: (Adapted from Ciofs Formation Manual)**

1. Our local fraternities can be an expression of Church as we gather as brothers and sisters, bound by bonds of love generated by the Spirit and summoned by Christ. It is potentially a place where action of the Spirit blossoms and develops with all of its gifts of grace, charisms.
2. The development of authentic fraternal life is the fruit and result of a paschal process which takes each one through an exodus journey
  - From living just for oneself to living for others
  - From looking at things for our own sake, to living for others
  - From coveting to oblation, offering one's life as sacrifice
  - From self-centredness to self-giving

### **OFS Rule:**

Here are a few key phrases from our rule that remind me of what fraternity means for me as a member of ofs:

Encounter the living and active person of Christ in our brothers and sisters

Secular Franciscans accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ.

A sense of community will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on an equal basis with all people, especially the lowly.

They should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue.

The rule also gives us some tools:

Radical interior conversion

Prayer and contemplation

A spirit of detachment

Be messengers of perfect joy, bringing joy and hope to others

Be bearers of peace.

### **Some thoughts on how local fraternity can help us live the Rule.**

- Prayer
- Listening To God, in Scriptures and with the help of the sacraments and through the activities and teaching of our Church

Why? To get to know God intimately, to accept ourselves as made in the image of God, ultimately seeking communion with God. Rooted in God we can be more welcoming, attentive and charitable to those in our fraternity and the other groups to which we belong. This is what happened to Francis because he believed God loved him, accepted him. His response in accepting the mission and the charism revealed to him led Francis to a close relationship and communion with God.

- Listening to all those in our fraternity.

Fraternity is called to be authentic, just, attentive to and interested in others, which includes acknowledging difficulties and offering open dialogue, free from power or dominance, as well as offering a safe place to share experiences and be affirming.

Some fraternities may be able to take on a shared interest or activity but every fraternity can offer members mutual support and understanding, patience and compassion for the very different lives and activities of their members - by active listening, by fostering an atmosphere of love and trust, by giving a sense of belonging to a fraternity whose members have shared values, hopes and beliefs; by prayer, by celebrating life events and sharing painful times. Equally a fraternity has a responsibility to acknowledge and admonish if members have drifted away from of's principles.

### **The following Franciscan characteristics will promote a deeper experience of living fraternity**

Mercy, compassion, seeking to be reconciled with other members. Minority, being prepared to serve, recognition of the attitudes deep inside us that do not build up our neighbour; becoming less attached to possessions; treating others as we would like to be treated.

Perhaps we will be able to look at our own local fraternity in the light of these few thoughts and when we return after the experience of fraternity we will share being together for these few days during which I know you will come to see how this local fraternity is unique among the fraternities of ofsgb today.

I thank Gibraltar for the service they are giving in inviting us to be together here and for all the work they have lovingly put into every aspect of our stay.

My hope, rather my conviction, is that these few days, timely as we begin the Easter season, will refresh those of us who are fortunate to be here and so help us bring new life to our local fraternities.

Paula of's