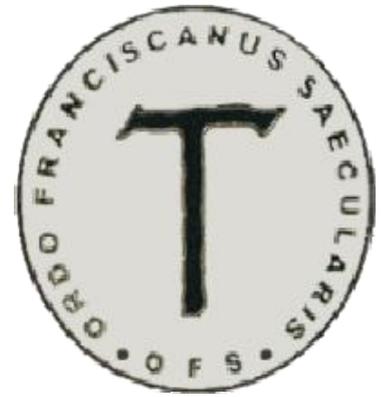




Regional Fraternity Patrons
St Jude the Apostle
St Rita of Casia
Pray for us



***East Anglian OFS
Regional Newsletter
Autumn 2013***

The Tau



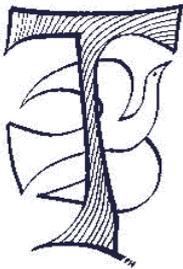
Building the Kingdom of God with Living Stones

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From Our Regional Minister Rob Hardie offs



"Who are God's servants but His minstrels who should comfort the human heart and lead it to spiritual joy? (*Mirror of Perfection*)

Wherein lies the joy that we can continuously tap into to comfort the human heart and lead it to spiritual joy? I think that this is one of the most profound questions of our belief and challenges everything in our make up, cutting to the core of our Christianity; as well leading us to be able to give the greatest of help to others, not flippant light-heartedness, but deep seated ("Perfect") Joy. St Francis' interrogation of Brother Leo on the road from Perugia to the Portiuncula, and the almost outrageous answers Francis gives to his own questions was one of the reasons I was attracted to the Franciscan charism 26 years ago (*How St Francis taught Brother Leo that Perfect Joy is only in the Cross. Little Flowers of St Francis*).

How can there be joy in hardship, worst of all in the abuse and suffering from the hands of others? But Francis is insistent, "if we endure all those evils and insults and blows *with joy and patience*, reflecting that we must bear the sufferings of the Blessed Christ patiently for love of Him, oh, Brother Leo, write: that is perfect joy!"

Was Francis really correct? Had he gone so much "over the top" that he had become irrational towards the end of his life? Even St Dominic who attended the First Chapter of Mats (tents were made by placing mats over sticks) in 1221, found Francis' words "imprudent" when Francis called all those gathered to (amongst other things) have patience in adversity, to be at peace with all men, to have contempt for worldly things and to even have no care concerning anything to eat or drink, but to concentrate on praying and praising God, leaving worldly worries to Christ who would take care of them! Dominic was soon overcome with remorse and begged St Francis' forgiveness when he saw people from all the neighbouring towns almost magically appear with mules, donkeys and wagons laden with food and wine, and then the knights and nobles humbly serve the friars as if they were the actual apostles themselves of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

All, like Dominic, must reconsider, be full of remorse and realise that Francis was totally correct and very much in touch with God. I was once told, many years ago, by an Australian theologian on the top of Mount Zrizevac in Med-

jugorje that no suffering is ever wasted and that suffering for Christ is very precious. Padre Pio (St Pio of Pietrelcina) who was instrumental in thousands of healings, always asked those who came to him, whether they could bear their illnesses, for, if they could, untold (and usually unseen) good would flow from them.

The Lord Himself says, "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me." (*Matt 16:24*). St Rose of Lima says that in a vision the Lord told her, "Let all know," He said, "that after sorrow, grace follows; let them understand that without the burden of affliction one cannot arrive at the heights of glory...Let them be on guard against error or deception; this is the only ladder by which paradise is reached; without the cross there is no road to Heaven." St Therese of Lisieux gets very near the crux of the paradox in practical terms, when in her *Histoire d'une Ame* to Mother Agnes she writes, "another time, I was in the laundry doing the washing in front of a sister who was throwing dirty water into my face every time she lifted the handkerchiefs to her bench; my first reaction was to draw back and wipe my face to show the sister who was sprinkling me that she would do me a favour to be more careful. But I immediately thought I would be very foolish to refuse these treasures which were being given to me so generously, and I took care not to show my struggle. I put forth all my efforts to desire receiving very much of this dirty water and was so successful that in the end I had really taken a liking to this kind of aspersion, and I promised myself to return another time to this nice place where one received so many treasures."

So, there, I believe, we have it. It is in our attitude and our trust (*cf St Faustina and "Jesus I trust in You"*) in the truth that moment by moment, every second of the day, God cares for us and wants only our good that we find the answer. He never lets us down if we really trust Him. If we concentrate on *praying and praising and thanking* Him in every situation, as Francis said, no matter how painful and unpleasant the situation is, then the joy of our redemption will return (or better still stay). The situation will change or our ability to cope with it will change. Our Lady knew that from then on the Lord would always feed the hungry with good things and souls would rejoice. The Lord lays this all out plainly in the Sermon on the Mount (*Matt Ch. 5*) Our sad "sophisticated" world fails to realise this fundamental truth of how His Presence changes the world, and is surprised to see trust doing a disappearing act. This joy, I am sure, not only helps and heals others, but also attracts them to real Christians to become real Christians too. Our Lady in Medjugorje (*25 Aug 13*) asks us to *want* to be a sign for others by our total *conversion* by dying to self, so that we may *be* prayer, peace and love for all.

A professor of psychology in the United States, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross described Five Stages of Grief, Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression then the final Stage of Acceptance, and in this final stage is profound peace. She was on the whole explaining what happens to patients who are told that they have an incurable illness, but the same process can be used for any unpleasant situation in life. The first four stages represent our stubbornness to accept that God is totally in

control, and does *everything* for our good when we love Him in return for His love to us (*Romans 8:24*). Our Father is a God of utter justice as well as every other perfect attribute in existence (as we see recorded in the life of Jesus). We are all totally forgiven in Jesus, the “Perfecter” of our faith, but in our prayer (which Francis mentioned before praise), we have to say how sorry we are that we fail and are so weak. The need for repentance is the very first thing Jesus is recorded as saying in St Mark’s Gospel (*Mk 1:14*). St Francis tells the people of Gubbio who were being eaten by the large and ferocious wolf, as well as the people of Greccio who were experiencing dreadful multiple disasters like hailstorms destroying their wheat fields and vineyards (as well as more people there being devoured by wolves), to “come back to the Lord and do fitting penance,” and “if each one of you will confess your sins, and bear worthy fruit of genuine repentance, I swear to you all these disasters will cease.” (*Celano Second Life 35-36*).

“The Kingdom of God *is* close at hand. Repent and believe the Good News” (*Mk 1:15*). I believe the Kingdom is here. I believe that God looks after us, but I have to live it, not just talk about it.

Over these last few months we have enjoyed, as a region, a really great Day of Recollection in Clacton at Our Lady of Light Church and Hall where a score or more of the local parishioners attended. Fr Austin McCormack gave us two encouraging talks (*see Hebrews 3:13*) telling us that the Lord Jesus came to set us free from fear and to “fully alive” in the honesty and joy of living (that the slightly zany Franciscan life helps us do). He also explained how St Francis found so much goodness in the world because he was always *looking for goodness* (*vis a vis* Brother Fire not hurting him when his eyes were cauterized). Fr Austin told us that we all have a special mission to show something of the presence of God in the world, and He is with us, Emanuel, waiting to be shown. Jesus was fully human and fully divine and invites us into the same state (this may partly explain how suffering and joy can go hand in hand)!

Also Michael Simmonds organized a superb evening at Holy Cross Church in Bedford on 15 July when Dario Fo’s play, “Francis the Holy Jester”, was performed for 2 hours continuously and single handedly by Mario Pirovano who lives in St Francis’ homeland, Umbria. He drew a crowd of approximately 60 from the local Catholic communities in Bedford. Well done Michael and the Bedford Fraternity (well done Clacton too)!

Our National Council is continuing to develop its “Priorities” of Membership, Communication, Evangelisation and Mission. We saw Evangelisation in action for those who are not OFS members (but largely Catholics) with the two events I have just mentioned. I still think that wearing the Tau is very effective, and evokes conversations (I try to initiate one if it has failed to evoke one!) in those who are probably not Catholics, or even Christians. I (usually) have a written explanation to hand out (but I do *not* do this well and there is much room for improvement!). Next September (2014) there is a celebration for the OFS on a National level on 19-21st, remembering the “Chapter of Mats” (above) to which

between three and five thousand friars attended. Every region has been asked to prepare a presentation of that region's history and development, as well as contribute to a demonstration on the Canticle of the Creatures. The theme that we have been given is "Sister Water" (what a lot we can do!!).

Finally we look forward to the profession of Jane Robinson and Chris Whitham at St Mary's Church, Woodbridge Road in Ipswich at the DOR on October 12th. We also continually welcome all those who have begun their Period of Enquiry and those who have entered the OFS and are now in their time of formation.

With Franciscan love

Rob ofS

Come and join the celebration - it's a Very Special Day!!
Regional Day of Recollection and Professions
at St Mary's Church, Woodbridge Road, Ipswich
on Saturday 12th October

Programme

10.30 Tea & Coffee

11.00 'The Search for the Real Francis' Fr Stephen Innes OFM Cap

12.15 Mass with the Rite of Profession for Jane and Chris

1.15 Bring and Share Lunch

2.15 Continuation of Fr Stephen's talk

3.15 Teas and Departure

NEWS FROM LOCAL FRATERNITIES

Bedford 'Gospel to Life' Fraternity

On 5th June, out of the blue, I received an email from Mario Pirovano, who lives in Gubbio, Umbria, where St. Francis tamed a terrifying wolf. The email read: "In early July...I will come back to Britain with a monologue 'Francis the Holy Jester' my fee: £250.00 plus food, accommodation and transport within Britain." We were required to choose one of two dates, find a suitable venue, advertise, print tickets and sell them for the show on 15th July, which we had in our local church of Holy Cross in Goldington. In the event we sold 68 tickets out of 200, at £5.00 each. We more than covered our costs, thanks to God, donating £20.00 to Holy Cross Church, as we were not charged for the use of the Church; and a surplus of £45.00 to our Fraternity, of which we have donated £25.00 to our local homeless centre and we made another donation to Mutemwa Leprosy Colony.

Jennie Podesta, who started coming to our meetings as a 'Guest' last July, as a result of our invitation cards, has now started as an Enquirer.

Three of our Fraternity attended the EAR Day of Recollection with Fr Austin Linus OFM at Clacton on Saturday 13th July 1913, thanks to Judy Caplin and her Fraternity.

Michael Simmonds ofs, Minister

Cambridge 'Our Lady of the Poor' Fraternity

Our Lady of the Poor Cambridge Fraternity continues active and its members have seen a time of joy. We have been studying the CIOFS 'Theology of the Body' dossiers; and also continued with the study of the Lives of the Saints as suggested for the Year of the Faith – it has been a good source of reflection on our lives to remember how much love and trust for Our Lord the saints showed during their lives. We have also started studying/revising the 'Writings of St Francis'. Chris Whitham continued his readings and preparation towards profession and has produced good material as feedback and the whole fraternity has been able to give him support on this direction. We had visitors attending our meetings and we feel honoured to say that our brother Michael Mortimer from Bedford Fraternity also came to a few meeting to give us his support.

We had our annual pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham in May. We attended the Day of Recollection in Clacton-on-Sea and it was so good to meet members of other fraternities in the region. Jaci brought two friends from Brazil to meet the Secular Franciscans present there on that day. We had fish and chips after our meeting....what a blessed day!

Daphne Bristow has recently brought the news about two of her initiatives in Newmarket: the birth of an organization to assist the unemployed and also the production of a small book to assist candidates and their parents on how to be better prepared for the Sacrament of Confirmation. We were all very impressed with the content of the book and agreed that it will be a great source of help for both the parents and the candidates. Well done for Daphne!

We are approaching the date of Chris's profession in October and our elections are due in November this year.

Jaci Matos Agarwala ofs, Minister

Clacton 'Our Lady of Light' Fraternity

The Fraternity was saddened by the death of two of our members this year: Margaret Gaughan, who had been our treasurer for a number of years until she became too ill to attend meetings in 2010, died on 17th May. Joan Turner died at the end of June, her last meeting with us was 19th May still acting as secretary for us. Joan and Margaret were founder members of Clacton Fraternity and made their Professions in 1987. Joan served as Minister, and then as Secretary. Both are greatly missed. We now continue to meet with just four members.

We were very pleased to host a Regional Day of Recollection on 13th July in St Charles Hall, with Mass in Our Lady of Light Parish Church. Fr. Austen Linus OFM gave an inspirational talk on Faith and being Franciscan.

Judy Caplin ofs, Minister

Ipswich 'Blessed John Duns Scotus' Fraternity

At our April Meeting we celebrated the 'Rite of Entry into the Period of Enquiry' for Claire Lamont Buxton. In May we welcomed Mary Lambert as a Visitor to our meetings, and in July we welcomed another Visitor David Morton. David is an ex-member of the Anglican Third Order of the Society of St Francis (TSSF) and was received into the Church, via the Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham, in March. We are delighted to be joined by Mary and David for our meetings; they and Claire can be assured of members' prayers for their continuing Franciscan journeys.

We have been preparing Jane Robinson for the Rite of Profession – which will be celebrated during the Regional Day of Recollection on Saturday 12th October (*Chris Whittam from the Cambridge Fraternity will also be professed at the same time*). Father Stephen Innes OFM Cap has agreed to give the talks during the Day and to celebrate the Profession Mass. We hope as many members from across the Region will help us celebrate this joyful event.

Our Ongoing Formation has comprised two elements - we continue to familiarise ourselves with the content of John Power's 'Initial Formation' sheets, most recently those on the 'History of the OFS', and also to reflect on the CIOFS 'Theology of the Body' monthly dossiers.

Four of us – Edwin Edwards, David Morton, Ann & David Gleave – represented the Fraternity at the Regional Day of Recollection hosted by the Clacton 'Our Lady of Light' Fraternity on 13th July. Grateful thanks to Judy and the other members of the Clacton Fraternity for their hospitality.

Fraternity members have publicised the OFS in their parishes by giving talks after Masses, writing articles for parish magazines, and placing posters on church notice boards.

David Gleave ofs, Minister

Prayer Intentions: Please remember the following sisters and brothers who are unwell in your prayers:

Elizabeth George ofs, Sister Helena Hudjuk ofs, Petronella Ibbett ofs, and Sarah Lane ofs (Bedford); Rosamund Kirby-Johnson ofs and Roy Herbert ofs (Bury St Edmunds); and Dennis Kindred ofs (Ipswich), and Allan Simpson ofs (March).

Blessed is the servant who would love his brother as much when he is sick and cannot be of assistance to him as he would when he is well and can be of help to him.

(St Francis Admonition 24)

FR AUSTIN LINUS McCORMACK OFM'S TALK "THE BELOVED OF ABBA" AT REGIONAL DAY OF RECOLLECTION, CLACTON-ON-SEA, ON 13th JULY 2013

As this is the Year of Faith I thought I might put that into context. Every Sunday we come together to say "I believe in God". In the Franciscan context that of course is not good enough. In a sense anyone can stand up and say "I believe in God", but can you say with equal conviction that "God believes in me"? That is St Francis' insight – not that "I believe in God", but "God believes in me". Can you say that without hesitation? For so many of us it is difficult to say this because we do not believe in ourselves.

Now there is in every one of us – in every human being – as the Letter to the Hebrews outlines, it says very simply – with us in mind God promised something more. The something more that is being talked about is not in terms of quantity. It is not that if you sign up, you get a *bigger dinner!!* It is not that! God promised a more profound experience, a deeper more intense experience of the presence of God.

St Francis understood Jesus' mission as simply 'God made flesh', Jesus Christ is sent to make the Father known, first of all, and his mission is also to give us something that he already possesses himself. Now when it comes to identity – who is Jesus Christ? That is the big question. Jesus Christ, many people would say – is God and man, which is very good theology. But if you were to ask Jesus Christ – and why not try – there is only one answer. I think he would say "I am the Beloved of Abba". You will recall two occasions in the Gospels: at the Baptism in the Jordan, God the Father says "This is my Son the Beloved", and then later at the Transfiguration "This is my Son the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to Him." And that is who He is – the Beloved of the Father.

Jesus never spent time going around preaching about God, telling us who God is. He makes God known in one particular way – by being his Father's Son. That is how he makes the Father known, by being himself. He tells us that what he has by nature, he has by grace. Not only is Jesus the Beloved of Abba, but you and me, all of us, are called to that same experience – to know God as Abba and ourselves as the beloved of Abba!! When I have said that before, people said to me "Is that all! Is that all there is?" Yes, that is all there is, that we are called to be the beloved of Abba. The question is – how do we answer that call?

St Bonaventure said, "We had a beginning – with God there was no beginning and no end". We have a beginning – I was born in 1931, before that people say I did not exist, I began to exist in 1931. But you know when we talk about God – there is no beginning of God, no ending of God – God is I am who am. Now this is where Bonaventure comes in – so who was God loving before I was born? God never began to love me, He always loved me. He always loved you – He never began to love you – God always loved you!! But you had a beginning, so did I. So who was God loving, before you were born? Bonaventure put it like

this – because there is no beginning and ending in God, we are forever in the heart of God.

God's desire to create you is simply that God has something of God He wants you to show to this world, that no one else can do. If you do not do it, it won't be done. That is why you exist, because God loves you for a purpose. He loves you in order to become something.

So I will ask the question again – who was God loving before I was born? St Bonaventure tells us, that because of that eternity – there is no beginning in God – the whole purpose of my life is to try and discover the face I had before I was born. Before I was born you might presume I did not exist – however in terms of God I did. So if I was not there who was God looking at? The whole purpose of my life – the gift of my life – is to discover the face I had before I was born. To become what God was looking at, because God was looking at a real personal presence able to make God present in this world. Not by pointing to God, not by talking about God, but by making God present by the way you are present.

Now what does that look like? That's the question and when it comes to it – try to discover the face I had before I was born. There is no blueprint there is nothing beforehand, simply the giftedness of life. Remember those lovely words of St Irenaeus, "Remember God is praised, not when you go to church, not when you say your prayers – God is praised when you are fully alive!". How do I become fully alive? This is where the difficulty comes in – where can I become fully alive without any kind of obstacle? Now if I mention just one word you will see exactly the situation we are in – that word is *'fear'*.

Fear deprives so many people of the enjoyment of their lives. In the majority of cases, it is not so much the fear of something; it is the fear of the fear! I am afraid because I don't want to be afraid. As the Gospel says, "He came to his people to set them free" – free from fear in order to be fully ourselves. I think a modern example of someone who is obviously free from fear is Pope Francis. He stands there unafraid. To the rest of the world it appears this is something he has taken on when he became Pope. I am sure that if you went to his old Diocese, they would say that is the way he has always been. That sense of, I am here to be fully alive, and he is not going to let any kind of fear spoil that. I think many people who see the priesthood and episcopacy as a glory trail to be Pope would be very disappointed with this man.

Now I mentioned this call we have – this invitation – this life that we have. St Francis, if you read any of his lives or prayers, there is one word that keeps cropping up every time you read something by him or about him that is – *good*. His prayers are full of that word. There is one prayer that includes: "You are good, all good, the highest good", and you might say – OK we get the message. But, for Francis of course 'goodness' was 'Godness', it is the same thing. 'Goodness' is God spelt differently, it has the same meaning. Why did St Francis see so much goodness in the world? Everywhere he went he praised God for goodness – why did he see so much goodness? First, because he went looking for it, and he found it! There is much more good in the world than the opposite,

and yet all that goodness in the world very rarely gets a mention in the press. It highlights the opposite, people's faults and failings, and sinfulness.

We should remember Jesus Christ said he came for sinners. He said the righteous or maybe the self righteous have no need of me. Take the implication of that – personal sinfulness, my sinfulness is my entitlement to Jesus Christ. He came for sinners – and I am one of them. So my sinfulness in one sense is my entitlement to Jesus Christ. That is why it is virtually blasphemy for me to go around to discover a person's sinfulness or to highlight it. That is what is happening in the press, finding out what people have done wrong and highlighting it. That is I say blasphemous, because my sinfulness is my entitlement to God.

In the new translation of the Mass we say, "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed". We know that comes from the Gospel – but who is worthy? Nobody can ever be worthy of that. It is saying the obvious - no one, whoever they are, is worthy of God, God is so holy. But God does not ask for worthiness, he does not ask me "to be clean, washed, and pressed" before I go to church. You know the expression "a Sunday face"? It means that as soon as you go to church the "Sunday face" goes on, and you look around at the people praying and wonder where God is. And the answer is – He is outside in the dustbin where I left my real face to put on my Sunday face! For God to love me as I am not, would be a lie; God is truth.

Now that raises a situation - in everyday living we each have our own foibles and virtues, our own ways of living. There are some people we don't like and some people we do like. There is nothing wrong in not liking somebody. That is why Jesus does not say "You must like each other." He says "You must love each other", which is something very different. Liking is a matter of chemistry – either you do or you don't. That's alright, the problem starts when you say – I don't like you, *and it is your fault*. That's where the problem starts. If we have to like everybody there would be no variety in the world.

My faith tells me that God made me and that God made you. The reason why God made me and you; is that each one of us has a special mission to show something of the presence of God, by how you are present in this world. Not by what we say or do, but who you are – you're very presence. I am sure that if you stop and reflect, I am sure you will experience that. That sense of when you have been to see somebody, or have met somebody, and come away saying - that was a good place to be, I must go back again and try to enjoy that again.

That is what I am talking about, that is what life is meant to be. We enrich each other by the way we are present to each other. Whereas not liking a person tends to be – no thank you.

Now if I reach the stage in life when I can not stand a person, just stop a moment and reflect. Let me ask you a question. God is nothing else but love, agreed? Therefore, God can only create lovely things, if God is nothing else but love. *Now comes the question* – if God created me, can you say without hesita-

tion that I am lovely?!! It is very sad that we find we even made that a negative! He thinks he is God's gift to creation – now that is a put down. *In fact he is and so is everybody else.* Along with that we get the excuse – after all I am only human. Do you see that as a negative? I tried my best, but after all I am only human. Err, shame – *the truth is I am less than human, sub-human!*

Why? Because, remember Jesus Christ come to save us, not as God – but as man, a fully alive man. He came to show us how human life could be lived fully, freely and totally, and gave us the means to live that way through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. So if I can say with hand on heart that I am only human, it means that there is no way I can be holier than I am now. To be a fully alive human being is to be a living image of Jesus Christ. What does that mean? It means what we see in Jesus Christ is first of all humanity – able to be one with his divinity.

Now, you read in the Book of Genesis – God gave us a mission – all of us, that mission was to name Creation for God. He asked us to name Creation for God, and that is the name it will be known by, we name Creation for God. We know what happened; we made a mess of things, and fear and embarrassment came in when our first parents had to hide when God was passing by, they were ashamed.

Now traditionally, and for many still in the Church, the notion of Creation is that God created a perfect world, and we spoilt it. First of all, God did not create a perfect world. The world was able to become perfect by the way it is lived in. God created the world to make us co-creators with him, so that we get the world we live in. The world is able to be made perfect by the way it is lived in, and He showed us how to live in the world. Why did God create in the first place? He creates because that is the way He communicates His love. It is the only way God communicates love – through creation.

This was Francis' understanding, even with regard to Sister Death. Many ask the question – how could Francis welcome death as a sister; his own beloved sister? His answer is very simple. If you read the Old Testament, you find it says there that no one can see the face of God and live. God is so overwhelming. Francis simply says, but if death allows me to see the face of God, then it is a positive thing. That is why in Francis you have that total embrace, apart from one instance in his life, of everything God had made.

You will remember the exception – it was the encounter with the leper, and in a sense this is a strange story! If I was invited by friends to supper one evening and they said to me, "Is there anything you can't eat?" And I replied, "I don't like fish", and I turn up and there is fish. My first reaction would be – some friends, they asked me, and now look what they have done. When Francis saw the leper, he was sick, his stomach turned, he just could not take it physically, and he experienced extreme nausea. Some might say, that if God was his friend he would not have led him among the lepers, because he knows he does not like them. That is precisely why God did lead him among the lepers, because that was the area of his life where he was not free – he was governed by fear. Francis says in

his Testament:

“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. And when I left them, what seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body.”

Now it was not a miracle in the sense of that the stench had gone or the sight had gone, they were exactly the same, nothing had changed. The revolting appearance and the stench were still there. But something had changed; God had shown Francis the difference between the leper and leprosy. No matter what the circumstances he now sees the priority of *the person*. That is one of the encouraging parts the Franciscan mission is meant to have. That wherever we go, wherever we are sent, wherever we find ourselves – it is the person we are looking at. In that sense everybody has a mission, everybody has a challenge.

I can remember several years ago in Woodford Friary, one of the friars was bed-ridden and had been so for about 8 years. We used to take communion to him after Mass each morning. I went to him this particular morning, and after giving him communion chatted to him. After a while he said to me, “Off you go, I must get ready for my mission.” He must have seen the surprise on my face, because he said, “You don’t think I have a mission. You think that I am here in bed to be looked after. How could I possibly have a mission?” I did not say anything, because in a sense he was right. But he said, “I can make life heaven or hell for those who look after me – that is my mission.” There is nobody without a mission, and the mission is that we feel welcomed wherever we are, whatever the circumstances, and make others feel welcomed.

We are told God does not make copies only originals, there are no copies. It means that each person has something of God to show that no one else can possibly show. It becomes visible not because I am told what it is, and go and do it. Not that – it is accepting the gift of life, discovering all those challenges to live well, and then goodness comes along. When you go about your life everyday, everywhere you find goodness, join in and celebrate and enjoy it. I had an example of that recently. I was going down a street and people were celebrating a wedding in a garden, they were happy and joyful, and they asked me to come and have a drink. I did not know them and they did not know me, but you see goodness communicates itself. Where you find goodness join in and celebrate it.

Wherever you find goodness damaged help to repair it. This is the telling one – wherever you find goodness missing, bring it with you. That is our mission. It is only by being motivated by goodness that the appreciation of God’s presence is felt, although it may come later. When you have enjoyed a celebration or something, particularly when it is spontaneous, it is only afterwards you say – that was a good place to be. The proper response to that is – thank you that was a nice place to be. It is worth remembering that 99.9% of Jesus’ ministry took place outside of ‘the church’, it involved the everyday experience of meeting and being with people motivated by sheer goodness – goodness is Godness.

Now when it comes to Creation – we need to have a look at the world itself. Did God back a *loser* when He asked us to bring Creation to perfection? With our record He must have done, if we consider the traditional understanding of Creation - that is God created and we spoilt it. To use an expression “we had to get a man in!” Some people regard Creation like that, *how sad*. Someone once said, “If you believe that, it is like seeing a pothole in the road and building the Taj Mahal to cover it up!” The remedy far outstretches the problem.

So the question is – did God back a loser? People may think - you look around the world and there is so much bitterness and hatred, so much abuse, even in the Church, will the time ever come when Creation will achieve its purpose? St Francis taps us on the shoulder and tells us *it has already happened! Creation has already achieved its purpose.*

So when I ask the question – when God created, did He back a loser in asking us to bring Creation to perfection? The answer has to be – *Yes, unless God always intended to become part of Creation Himself.* The Incarnation is not an afterthought, sin is not the explanation of the Incarnation, sin is a sideshow. It was always God’s plan to become part of Creation – in the Incarnation – the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Once that happened, you had Creation complete, because in Jesus Christ we have something that is truly human and something that is truly divine in one person. Created and uncreated are totally one in Jesus Christ, Creation has achieved its purpose in the Incarnation. What has happened in Him has yet to happen in the rest of Creation – that is our mission. That’s why we speak in our Franciscan terms of our way of life being the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospel is not a book, not a document, the Gospel is Jesus Christ. So when we start to talk about our mission, what it is, that’s it, that was God’s purpose in creating.

Now we know we all come from God and the purpose of life is – that we can go back into God. Someone once said – if that’s the case why did we not stay there in the first place, and avoid all the hassle of everyday living? The answer is simple, God created you without your consent, for life to be full – what God desires is for you to go back *with your consent*. There is no forcing and no compelling. It is God’s desire that we go back with our consent, and the purpose of life is to become aware of what is happening so that I make that wholehearted – *Yes please, this is my life given to God!!* I came out from God without my consent; I go back to God *with my consent*.

Now here is something many people don’t seem to realise – if I say there is nothing outside of God, God is total reality, there is nothing out there outside of God. That’s fine, we can understand that. Heaven obviously is within God – and so is Hell. If there is nothing outside God, then wherever Hell is, it must be within God. So to use an expression – *what is the hell of it?!!* The only one ending for everyday life there is – is the one that is with God. Both Heaven and Hell have the same description – are the way we experience God’s love for ever. Now, the Heaven of it is obvious, to experience God’s love – it is a joyful celebration. Can you picture it - can you think of an experience of God’s love that could be Hell? If

I mention a spoilt child, in a sense of selfishness in a family which is loving, and the family is focused on loving, it is Hell living there. So it is not the fact that the family made the spoilt child's life hell, the family is a loving family. Do you see what I mean? When it comes to an experience of Hell, it is my attitude to God's love that makes it Hell. When I resent it, because it is not mine, not for me only, that kind of experience can not be a happy one.

At the time of Vatican II we said goodbye to Limbo. Limbo was invented as a product of bad theology. The theology St Augustine left us on this was nice and precise, clear cut and well defined. But we have a problem and that is, if Baptism is essential to get to God, what happens to the unbaptised infant? Instead of questioning the theology we created Limbo, where the souls that can not go to God are in a 'no-mans land'. To speak of God's love in that instant is horrific – so Limbo was forgotten.

What about Purgatory? For me one of the most comforting doctrines of the Church is the Doctrine of Purgatory. You can understand it from the old Catechism if you are prepared to unpack it. That Catechism said – a place where souls suffer for a time on account of their sins. Karl Rahner, the Jesuit theologian, likened Purgatory in this way. He said, have you ever consciously been aware of hurting somebody seriously, betraying love in some form, and you feel terrible at what you have done? And you know at the same time that person does not hold it against you, even though that person will always suffer, they do not hold it against you. What happens next, do you say sorry let's move on with life? I don't think so – my honest reaction is that it is not OK. I need to get away probably with a box of tissues and come back red-eyed and say – Thank you. Rahner says that is Purgatory.

When I get to the presence of God, I will discover that God has loved me always, exactly as I am and never stopped loving me. Look at my response – my life littered with infidelities – and God says it does not matter. I will say - you will say – *Oh Yes it does*, I need a bit of space, a bit of time, to suffer on account of my sins. To go away – and if they have tissues up there take them – and come back and say – Thank you. Purgatory is us, not God, it is not saying go away and be cleansed – that is hideous that kind of understanding. God takes us as we are – but will we become fully alive human beings? We can't simply allow ourselves to be taken as we are, without first doing something about it, without repenting the hurt that we caused, and saying "Thank you" I am ready to come.

Coming back to Creation, Blessed John Duns Scotus, a member of the Great Britain Province and who was responsible for proposing the Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, pointed out that the very centre of Creation is Jesus Christ. He is not an after thought or the 'repairman' coming to put things right. He is the one who is the fulfilment of Creation. Had there been no sin, presumably Christ would have come as Christ the Lord of Creation. But there is sin – now sin does not determine the fact of the Incarnation, but the manner of it. Instead of coming as Lord of Creation in a peaceful way, he had to come as a Redeemer. He was always coming, there is no way he was not coming, but we de-

termine the way through our sinfulness. That is what Scotus concluded.

I was talking to some people recently about a poster I had seen, showing a huge hand in the middle of the poster and at the bottom a tiny hand. I said to them remember God's hand is the tiny one – not the big one. How do we know that? How did God come into our world? As a helpless baby clinging to a human breast! God came into our world to give us someone to love, and as Pope Francis has been telling us God remains in our world. Wherever you find anyone, no matter whom or where, who needs love that is where God is waiting to be met. The only God we know is that helpless infant. Scripture tells us that the whole world is not big enough to contain the vastness and wonder of God, yet in that little babe in the crib there is God with nothing missing, That is the God we love – the only God we know, that helpless child clinging to the human breast.

Wherever there is anyone, no matter what the circumstances, needing help that is where we find God. As the Good Samaritan Gospel points out – when we pass by on the other side, we pass by God. The further we walk, the further we get from God. If I am living in a way, rejecting in any form, then God can not be with me, till I realise what I am doing. Perhaps there are circumstances in life in which the attitude of others, or someone, has meant that you can not be yourself, you can not be free? Also I can inflict that on myself, if I am discontent with who I am, and want to be other than who I am. In all these cases God loves me, God will never cease to love me, and God loves me exactly as I am. That is the crucial one – *exactly as I am*. If you don't love me exactly as I am, and cause me to change, you are pushing me away from God and I am doing it to you. I am also doing it to myself, if I am discontented with who I am, because God loves me exactly as I am. Exactly as I am – with the special something of God's love I have to show – that no one else in this whole world, ever in the past or future, can show *what you can show*. How sad if that remains hidden and doesn't get a chance!! The Franciscan aspect of this is to have an awareness of God's presence in who I am.

Someone I used to work with in the Samaritans, another of the volunteers, was a lady who suffered disfigurement from serious burns; she was one of the best volunteers. She came out of a room crying after talking to someone seeking help. During such situations we had to relate to the person we were talking to. The lady, she had been talking to, had had relationship problems and had said to her – what do you know about relationships you ugly old bat. I asked how she had dealt with this, she said I responded by saying – Yes, how sad. We must remember it is not what a person has, not what a person does, it is who a person is that is important. God said, "I am who I am" and we should allow ourselves and everybody else to be who they are. I ask this question – is there a person I can't get on with, can't stand, I can see nothing whatever of good in that person, what is the reason? God created that person out of love – and I can see nothing of Him – *I am the loser!!* Remember what St Francis said – when you are talking to a person you are talking to God.



St Francis' Prayer Inspired by the Our Father

Our Father most holy:

Our Creator, Redeemer, Consoler, and Saviour

Who are in heaven:

In the angels and the saints,
enlightening them to know, for You, Lord, are Light;
inflaming them to love, for You, Lord, are love;
dwelling in them and filling them with happiness,
for You, Lord, are Supreme Good, the Eternal Good,
from Whom all good comes
without whom there is no good.

Holy be your name:

May knowledge of You become clearer in us
that we may know
the breadth of Your blessings,
the length of Your promises,
the height of Your majesty,
the depth of Your judgments.

Your kingdom come:

That You may rule in us through Your grace
and enable us *to come to Your kingdom*
where there is clear vision of You,
perfect love of You,
blessed companionship with You,
eternal enjoyment of You.

Your will be done on earth as in heaven:

That we may love You
with our whole heart by always thinking of You,
with our whole soul by always desiring You,
with our whole mind by always directing all our intentions to You,
and by seeking Your glory in everything,
with all our strength by exerting
all our energies and affections of body and soul
in the service of Your love and of nothing else;
and we may love our neighbour as ourselves
by drawing them all to Your love with our whole strength,
by rejoicing in the good of others as in our own,
by suffering with others as their misfortunes,
and by giving offence to no one.

Give us this day:

in remembrance, understanding, and reverence
of that love which our Lord Jesus Christ had for us
and of those things that He said and did and suffered for us.

our daily Bread:
Your own beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Forgive us our trespasses:
through Your ineffable mercy
through the power of the passion of Your beloved Son
and through the merits and intercession
of the ever blessed Virgin and all Your elect.

As we forgive those who trespass against us:
And what we do not completely forgive,
make us, Lord, forgive completely
that we may truly love our enemies because of You
and we may fervently intercede for them before You,
returning no one evil for evil
and we may strive to help everyone in You.

And lead us not into temptation:
hidden or obvious,
sudden or persistent

But deliver us from evil:
past,
present,
and to come.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever.
Amen.

Pope Francis: How to pray the Our Father

To pray the Our Father we have to have a heart at peace with our brothers. We don't pray "my Father," but "our Father," because "we are not an only child, none of us are". This was the focus of Pope Francis' homily at Mass on Thursday 20th June in Casa Santa Marta. The Pope emphasized that we believe in a God who is a Father, who is "very close" to us, who is not anonymous, not "a cosmic God."

Prayer is not magic, rather it is entrusting ourselves to the Father's embrace. Pope Francis centred his homily on the prayer of the Our Father taught by Jesus to His disciples. Jesus, he said, immediately gives us a piece of advice in prayer: "In praying, do not babble", do not make "worldly noises, vain noises". And he warned that "prayer is not a magical thing, there is no magic with prayer." Someone once told me that when he went to a "witch doctor" they said a lot of words to heal him. But that is "pagan." Pope Francis said. Jesus teaches us, "we should not turn to Him with so many words," because "He knows everything." He

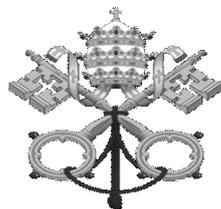
adds, the first word is "Father," this "is the key of prayer." "Without saying, without feeling, that word – he warned - you cannot pray"... "To whom do I pray? To the Almighty God? He is too far off. Ah, I can't hear Him. Neither did Jesus. To whom do I pray? To a cosmic God? That's quite normal these days, is it not? ... praying to the cosmic God, right? This polytheistic model that comes from a rather light culture ... You must pray to the Father! It is a strong word, 'Father'. You must pray to Him who generated you, who gave you life. Not to everyone: everyone is too anonymous. To you. To me. To the person who accompanies you on your journey: He knows all about your life. Everything: what is good and what is not so good. He knows everything. If we do not start the prayer with this word, not just with our lips but with our hearts, we cannot pray in a Christian language".

"Father," he reiterated, "is a strong word" but "opens the door". At the time of sacrifice, the Pope said, Isaac realized that "something was wrong" because "he was missing a sheep," but he trusted his father and "confided his worries to his father's heart". "Father" is the word that "the son" who left with his legacy "and then wanted to return home" thought of. And that father "sees him come and goes running" to him, "he threw himself in his arms", "to cover him with love." "Father, I have sinned:" this is, the Pope said, "the key of every prayer, to feel loved by a father":

"We have a Father. Very close to us, eh! Who embraces us ... All these worries, concerns that we have, let's leave them to the Father, He knows what we need. But, Father, what? My father? No: Our Father! Because I am not an only child, none of us are, and if I cannot be a brother, I can hardly become a child of the Father, because He is a Father to all. Mine, sure, but also of others, of my brothers. And if I am not at peace with my brothers, I cannot say 'Father' to Him."

This, he added, explains the fact that Jesus, after having taught us the Our Father, stresses that if we do not forgive others, neither will the Father forgive us our sins. "It's so hard to forgive others – said the Pope - it is really difficult, because we always have that regret inside." We think, "You did this to me, you wait '... and I'll repay him the favour".

"No, you cannot pray with enemies in your heart ... This is difficult, yes, it is difficult, not easy. 'Father, I cannot say Father, I cannot'. It's true, I understand. 'I cannot say our, because he did this to me and this ...' I cannot! 'They must go to hell, right? I will have nothing to do with them'. It's true, it is not easy. But Jesus has promised us the Holy Spirit: it is He who teaches us, from within, from the heart, how to say 'Father' and how to say 'our'. Today we ask the Holy Spirit to teach us to say 'Father' and to be able to say 'our', and thus make peace with all our enemies. "



SISTER FRANCISCA OSC'S TALK ON THE SAN DAMIANO CROSS – What is different about it? (History; theology; spirituality) AT THE POOR CLARE MONASTERY, ARKLEY, ON 28th APRIL 2013

The San Damiano Cross in a way is the foundation of what all of us are about, whether we are First Order, Second Order or Third Order. It was the Cross that spoke to St Francis and gave him his inspiration. The San Damiano Cross can give us a completely new way of looking at Jesus' passion, death and resurrection. It is not really a new way – it is really a very old way – it is how it was seen for the first thousand years in the Church. Because it is the Cross that spoke to Francis it can give us a completely new way of looking at the world around us.

What is different about the San Damiano Cross? What is it that makes it so special? There is a big story behind how the Cross got into a little church like San Damiano. First of all we need to realise, just how big it is. It is well over six feet in height, quite over whelming, larger than life sized. It is painted on cloth which has been glued to walnut wood. It is about 120cm (47ins) wide and 12cm (4¾ins) thick.

We don't know the details of its history, but we can piece a few things together. More than likely it was painted for the San Damiano Church to hang over the altar, because in the time of Francis and Clare the Blessed Sacrament was not reserved for adoration. This is the Cross that spoke to Francis asking him "to repair my church". It is the Cross before which St Clare prayed every day of her religious life. In 1257 a few years after Clare's death, the Poor Clares left the little Monastery of San Damiano and moved into San Giorgio within the town of Assisi, taking the Cross with them. It has been where it is now in the Basilica of Santa Chiara for nearly 800 hundred years. In Holy Week 1957 it was placed on public view for the first time over the new altar in the San Giorgio's Chapel in the Basilica.

If we go back to the very early days of the Church – for the first 300 or maybe 400 years – we would be rather surprised to find that there were no crucifixes, no representations of Jesus hanging on the Cross. The reason is that for the early Christians crucifixion was a terrible humiliation. It was a torture, the worse possible death you could inflict on anybody. There probably has not been a way of dying that has so much suffering as crucifixion. For the early Christians there was an instinctive revulsion about representing Jesus at that supreme moment of humiliation. So they did not represent the crucifixion in a realistic way before about the 5th Century.

The cross was still important, but they showed it in symbolic ways. The events of Jesus' death were often symbolised by a lamb, because of what it says in the Book of Revelation "I saw a lamb standing as if slain" (Rev 5:6). After Christianity was officially recognised in the early 4th Century, you get a cross with jewels on – it was something to be proud of!! Emperor Constantine had forbidden crucifixion, so gradually the cross was seen as a symbol of victory and something precious. The earliest crucifixes are triumphant images – Jesus is shown alive with

his eyes open. There is no trace of suffering, he is victorious over death. By about the 9th Century art began to show a dead Christ with closed eyes, and more emphasis was put on his suffering.

The San Damiano Cross is not like that – Jesus is not hanging in agony, he is standing in triumph. The theology behind this crucifix is that of the earliest generations of Christians. To understand why, we have to go back several centuries and we have to go on a journey to the Eastern part of the Church, where there was a very serious controversy, which developed into a battle and persecution – the iconoclast controversy. Iconoclasts were people who were intent on destroying holy pictures and images. They believed very strongly that it was impossible to represent God, Jesus, and the saints. They even went so far as to put people to death.

For the iconoclasts – the smashers of images – the only real religious images must be an exact likeness of what you are trying to portray, therefore the only permitted likeness of Jesus was the Eucharist. They reckoned that using icons, pictures, statues, images of any kind was a satanic misleading of Christians and a return to pagan practices. Many people underwent martyrdom for the sake of the holy icons. The iconoclastic smashers were suspicious of any religious art which represented God, and they demanded the destruction of all religious images in churches and in homes. This caused a great deal of trouble, and lasted about 120 years.

The Second Council of Nicaea (787) proclaimed that icons were to be kept in churches. But that was not the end of the matter, a new persecution broke out in 815 and continued to 843 when Empress Theodora brought a permanent end to the fighting.

So what were they really fighting about and what does all this have to do with our San Damiano Cross? Since Jesus became man and walked amongst us we know what God looks like. What do we have in the Gospel – he who sees me sees the Father. We can portray the humanity of Jesus, because this is how God has revealed himself to us. The icon smashers did not understand the reality of the Incarnation – God in Christ, became man in a human body. He suffered, died, rose victoriously, ascended and so redeemed us. We in our turn are born with a human body which will eventually die, but will be raised in glory. Because of the Incarnation and the Redemption, the physical world has become holy. God took a body and showed us physical matter could be redeemed. The whole of God's creation – material as well as spiritual – is to be redeemed. St John Damascene said, "The icon is a song of triumph and a revelation and an enduring monument to the victory of the saints". I think that is an excellent description of the San Damiano Cross. God in Christ became man in a human body, he suffered, died, rose victorious and ascended into heaven. If you want the whole Christian faith in a nutshell - it is there on the San Damiano Cross - the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Redemption, all in a beautiful icon.

The icon smashers lived in and around Asia Minor, they did not come to the West. It was so savage, so cruel, people being put to death for belief in the

sacredness of holy pictures. Many people left these areas and moved to the West, because it was not suffering in the same way. It is thought that the monk who produced the San Damiano Cross was from Syria. A refugee from the iconoclast wars who moved to Italy, where he settled with other exiles, and could paint in a style he knew would be accepted. There were many such exiled painters working in Italy during the 9th and 10th centuries. At least one of these painters came to live in or near Assisi and his work came to the little church of San Damiano. And that was where Francis prayed before the Cross in the early days of his conversion, when he walked alone or with a companion in the woods and mountains round about Assisi.

At the end of his life Francis tells us - the Lord gave me such faith in churches that I would pray with simplicity in this way: "We adore you Lord Jesus Christ in all Your churches throughout the whole world and we bless You because by Your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world" (Test 5). So if we understand an icon as the representation of the living God, then we can see that coming into its presence becomes a personal encounter with the sacred through the grace of the Holy Spirit. The San Damiano Cross or Icon is a personal encounter with the transfigured Christ. It expresses the whole Paschal mystery of Christ and invites us to take part in it, with a lively faith just as Francis did.

If we think about the way the Passion is recounted in St John's Gospel – in his serene majesty Christ chose the moment to lay down his life. He deliberately breathes forth his spirit. The Cross portrays the theology of John's Gospel. The central figure is Christ risen from the dead on Easter Sunday morning, clothed in a loin cloth, with a gold trimmed border, a kingly, priestly garment, unlike the ragged ones seen in the Western crucifixes. He is no longer hanging from nails, he is standing upright. His eyes are open again, he has passed through death. It is not denying death, we can see the nails and the blood, but he is beyond death – He is now risen!! His face radiates with a calm expression of peace, in the knowledge that the price of our redemption has been paid. On the arms of the Cross, behind the arms of Christ, there is a black rectangle symbolising the empty tomb. This is the crucified Christ coming out of the tomb triumphant on Easter Sunday morning. God's love is victorious over the blackness of death.

The central figure is Christ himself, partly because of size – in an icon the most important figure is bigger than all the others. That is not because the icon painter did not know anything about perspective. He is telling us a theological truth – Jesus is the most important person in this painting. That is why he is so much bigger than all the others figures. He is a figure of life, dominating the scene, giving life to all the others. He stands upright, he is not nailed, and the eyes of Jesus are open, he looks out on to the world which he has saved with love. The humanity of Christ veils the true glory of the Word who lives in the Godhead.

Beneath the arms of Christ we see those who were present at the crucifixion – on the left-side: Our Lady and St John the Apostle, and on the right-side: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and the Centurion. Underneath the feet of Our Lady is the Roman soldier, known as Longinus, with the lance that

pierced Jesus' side. On the other side beneath the Centurion is another figure, nobody is certain who he is. Some suggest that the figure represents the Jews who were at the crucifixion. Others suggest that it depicts the person who commissioned and paid for the painting. It is not a 'holy person' because he does not have a halo. Longinus and the Centurion do not have halos. Our Lady, St John, Mary Magdalene, and the Other Mary all have halos. So we are not sure who this figure is, he could represent each one of us. We were all in a sense present at the crucifixion, because Christ died for each one of us.



There is another little mystery – there is a little face looking over the Centurion's right shoulder. Now if this is to be connected to St John's Gospel,

this could be the Centurion who asked Jesus to heal his son (Jn4:46-54) and this could be the son. But there are more heads behind, as the passage in the Gospel ends "he himself believed, along with his family", maybe they are the rest of his family. Perhaps in the mind of the painter again this represents all of us. It is good to sit and look at the Cross meditating on who all these different people are, what role they played in Christ's Passion, and that we were all included there as well.

Under Christ's right arm there is Our Lady standing next to St John, she is looking at him and he is looking at her. Their eyes convey the words spoken by Christ to them from the Cross "Woman, behold your son!" then He said to the disciple "Behold, your mother!" (Jn 19:26-27).

Lots of people when they see this Cross for the first time remark that everybody seems happy, they are all smiling. This is true; even though Jesus' expression is solemn he is not suffering. A more familiar Western depiction of the crucifixion would show Jesus hanging from the nails, dead or dying and obviously in great suffering; and Our Lady, Mary Magdalene, and the Other Mary all grief stricken and absolutely overwhelmed with sorrow. The San Damiano Cross is very different; there the people are all happy. It is as though they are both witnessing the

crucifixion and the resurrection at the same time, and it is the joy of the resurrection that is reflected in their faces.

Under the arms of Jesus we can see the uncreated gold light of the resurrection; it is the light of the glory – the light of Heaven. We are looking through the suffering of Calvary to the glory of the resurrection on Easter Sunday morning. We are not denying the sufferings of Jesus, there are the marks of the nails on his hands, and the blood running down his arms. So his suffering is very real, but is seen as a passage to the light of glory. With Jesus we pass through the suffering of this life, through the darkness of the tomb to the glory of the light to come.

There is a great deal of communication going on, this is not a dead lifeless depiction of the crucifixion. The angels under the arms of Christ are talking to each other, sharing the glad news of the resurrection. Mary and John are talking to each other, Mary Magdalene and the Other Mary are also talking to each other, it seems to be a happy cheerful conversation. It is a very dynamic Cross, there is a lot of action and movement, it is not static. The angels in Heaven at the top of the Cross are talking, both to Jesus as he ascends and to each other. The way the heads incline towards each other, the direction of the eyes, the way the hands are gesturing, the expressions on the faces, all give life to this crucifixion. Next to Jesus' left shin is a cockerel or rooster reminding us of Peter's denial during Christ's Passion, and his subsequent conversion. It reminds us that if Peter could fail, any of us can fail. It is far more important that, like Peter, we can also repent and turn back again to the Lord. By this example we can give strength to our brothers and sisters.

At the very bottom of the Cross it is very worn, probably because out of devotion people kissed and touched it, in the traditional way of venerating an icon. However, it seems that there were several faces. Some commentators think they are Saints Damian, Rufinus, Michael, John the Baptist, Peter and Paul, the saints to whom the little churches in and around Assisi were dedicated. St Damian's is the church where the Cross was hanging, Rufinus was the patron saint of Assisi.

At the top of the Cross there is a medallion – in the language of icons this indicates that a person within such a shape belongs to Heaven. Here we see Christ ascending from this world up to Heaven. We see him bursting out of the circle up to Heaven, where his Father is waiting to receive him. We can see in the semi-circle above two fingers of the Father's hand. The Holy Spirit is called 'the finger of God's right hand'. So we have God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit – the Blessed Trinity and also the choirs of angels in Heaven. Christ is breaking out of the circle and is holding a golden cross which is his royal sceptre. His garments are gold a symbol of royalty and victory, and angels welcome him into Heaven. Underneath the medallion there is an inscription which translated reads "This is Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews",

This is a little about the theology of the Cross. What does it tell us about God, salvation and eternal life? Think of some of the really great hymns of the early Church, such as the *Panga Linqua*. It expresses in poetry the faith of the early Church in the saving death of Christ. Christ's wounds and the shedding of his

blood and his death are seen as something precious and glorious. It is a triumph to be celebrated and a cause for rejoicing, like the figures on the Cross are rejoicing, rather than of sorrow and sympathy over the physical details of Christ's suffering. On Good Friday in Orthodox churches the Cross is garlanded with flowers and it is more a celebration of the victory – Christ's triumph over death and the Devil. It is truly the triumph of the Cross, the Cross has become the instrument of glory by which Christ has defeated the Devil and redeemed us.

I think it is terribly important for us as Franciscans to realise that the San Damiano Cross, which is responsible for the foundation of our family in the Church, belongs to this earlier theology of the victory of the Cross. We have here not simply a suffering and agonising Christ – it is a Christ who is triumphant over sin and death. A Christ who has risen from the dead trampling on death by death - bestowing life on those in the tomb. Christ who will welcome us at the resurrection of the dead.

St Francis stands at the watershed of the theology of the crucifixion, and his reception of the stigmata stimulated a whole tradition of devotion to Christ's physical passion. Some of this has not been healthy, and we should not blame Francis for that. That theology is part of our inheritance as Franciscans. We have to balance it with the theology of the San Damiano Cross which is the theology of the early Church. We are a victorious people, because Christ has conquered. On the one hand we rejoice and venerate the Cross as his victory standard, still present among us as the memorial of his victory over sin and death. On the other hand we also recall the horror of how the Sinless One was slain. That is the paradox at the heart of the Good Friday Liturgy.

Although we call it 'Good Friday' sometimes we make it seem 'Bad Friday', if we put too much emphasis on the suffering of the awful death of Christ, the pain and torture. We have to balance that with the victory of the Cross and our redemption. If we listen very carefully to the liturgy of Good Friday, we find it really does preserve that earlier theology. This day is seen as a celebration of the lonely victory of Christ through the power of his death over the enemy. The Cross is unveiled as the victory standard, and is enthroned with light and we genuflect in front of it. This is the faith of the first thousand years of the Church, and through this particular Cross – which is so dear to us – we are completely in touch with it!!

Deep Mysteries - According to the great Franciscan theologian, Blessed John Duns Scotus, the first intention of God in creating was that Christ would be born. Rather than being a Divine after-thought in response to human sin and death, the Universe exists only because of Christ and its destiny is tied to Him. In this way the tradition retains the theological insight that in its unveiling the Universe will disclose, ever more clearly, the face of God.

He is the image of the unseen God and the first born of all creation, for in Him were created all things in heaven and earth. Col 1.25