

Ordo Franciscanus Secularis



VIEWPOINT

The Southern Region Newsletter 17.2

Jesus, I trust in You

News from around the Region

We have had three Fraternity elections recently. **Ladywell** held theirs in March and Charles Marriott continues as Minister with David Child Thomas as Vice, Charlotte McDowell as Secretary and Jennie McManus as Treasurer. **Portsmouth** held theirs in April when Simon Peck was elected for a second term as Minister. Esme Vivian was voted Vice Minister with Edward Cuerden as Secretary and Joe Charlton as Treasurer. **Bracknell** held theirs at the end of this month with Margaret Aburn continuing as Minister and Basia Rozycka as Vice Minister. Shaun Howard takes on the role of Secretary and Stan Aburn continues as Treasurer. In each case, the Fraternity has chosen to appoint its Minister of Formation. Please do pray for your Councils and help them, and yourselves, by playing your full part in Fraternity.

Littlehampton and Worthing celebrated the 13th of May by lighting 100 candles at the Alter of Our Lady of Fatima at St. Catherines of Alexander and the members prayed 5 decades of the rosary which was the same time as Pope Francis was making Francisco and Jesenta of Fatima saints.

Mike Telvin is a candidate in the **Ascot** Fraternity and he gives us an account of the Chapter of Mats held in Gibraltar in April.

Our Gibraltar Chapter retreat, April 2017

Day 1

We knew from the outset that we were in for a spiritually rewarding few days in Gibraltar by the great efforts made by the devil to prevent us from getting there!

First of all we missed our 07.00 am flight due to misinformation about the off-site parking location at Heathrow. Not a good start, but we were able to re-book on a later flight at 12.25 and had been able to contact Sue and Val to let them know. So we thought the day can only get better. **Wrong!**

The 12.25 flight was fine until we approached Gibraltar and then we encountered the infamously strong swirling crosswinds which caused such turbulence that the pilot had to abort his approach twice before finally being diverted to Malaga. (As an aside we were both surprised at how calm we felt during the aborted approaches, knowing that if God wanted us to get to the retreat we'd be quite safe). The landing at Malaga was bumpy but uneventful.

Malaga is not much fun when it's cold, windy and pouring with rain, but after much confusion we eventually boarded coaches to take us to Gibraltar, about a 90 minute drive.

At this stage we'd been on the go for about 15 hours and had no idea where the Retreat Centre was or who would meet us at the airport, but eagle-eyed Chris had spotted a lady wearing a Tau boarding the coach and we were able to link up with Roger Yelland and four others heading for the Centre.

Apart from torrential rain during most of the coach journey the devil had nothing left to throw at us and we arrived at Gibraltar airport at about 8.00 pm, the final irony being to see two planes land as we drove into the airport!!

We were now convinced that we were in for something special, but we still didn't realise HOW special. Unfortunately we knew that we had already missed the 'Introduction and Holy Mass' at 6.30 pm and the talk by Paula Pearce on 'Fraternity' at 7.30 pm, and the meal scheduled for 8.00 pm would be well underway.

At that point real live '**Fraternity**' appeared in the form of Xavier and his fellow Gibraltar Franciscans who gathered us up into their waiting cars and took us off to the retreat centre. Leaving our bags in the entrance hall we were shown into the dining room and the welcome was truly amazing – beaming smiles, applause and hugs all round as about 30 UK Franciscans and an equal number of Gibraltar Franciscans and their families engulfed us and just absorbed us into a wonderful 'fraternal' gathering.

Food began to arrive from all directions which was particularly welcome since we had not eaten for about 7 hrs, and we had a very relaxing evening with people we'd never met before but who already seemed like old friends. We eventually got to bed at about 11.30 in a very comfortable room in the Retreat Centre, very much looking forward to the next day.

Day 2

Saturday began as Friday had ended, with another wonderful meal, all provided for us by our Gibraltarian hosts led by Christine and Xavier. They not only kept us fed and watered from Friday until Monday but also provided us with transport to and from everything for the whole time.

After breakfast we were all transported by car(s) to a theatre in town called Ince's Hall for our first series of talks. We had heard from Sue and Val how the local Franciscans were a joyful lot who liked to sing and make music, and as we arrived at Ince's Hall a small group was on stage rehearsing for the introductory prayers and hymns, a mixture of traditional with rock gospel which got everybody in the mood.

We were joined in the hall by members of the Divine Mercy and other local Christian groups, so there were probably 100-150 people in the theatre for the morning session. There were banners in the main town inviting anyone who wanted to come and hear the talks by Steve Ray.

There were three talks during the day given by Steve Ray :

1. Scripture and tradition – including Steve (and wife Janet's) testimony
2. Upon this rock – Peter and the Primacy of Rome
3. Mary – the Real Girl – Immaculate Conception

These were the most informative, inspiring and emotive talks we have ever heard on Catholicism and why (and how) we should be proudly and demonstrably Catholic.

Steve Ray was raised as a devout Baptist in a close-knit family community where he was very involved in the Baptist Church and became a teacher of Bible Studies and lectured on a wide range of topics. His wife Janet came from a very similar background, and both viewed Catholics as heretics who worshiped statues, burned bibles, and attributed magical powers to a piece of bread. After studying many books to convince their best friend and latest convert that the early church was evangelical they both realised that the early Church and the one true Church was / is the Catholic Church. They became Catholics on Pentecost Sunday 1994 when they were in their early forties.

To hear the defence of our Catholic faith expressed so factually and sincerely by someone whose whole life had been devoted to opposing and ridiculing it was so powerful, and a lesson to us all that we should be doing more to actively profess it.

At the end of the day we gathered outside the Theatre and processed through the town to the Cathedral for Mass, saying the Rosary as we walked. After Mass, it was back to the Retreat Centre for supper and then bed.

An amazing day – now we knew why the devil had tried so hard to prevent us from being there!

Day 3 - Divine Mercy Sunday

Breakfast at the Retreat Centre then back to Ince's Hall for two more talks by Steve Ray:

1. 'The Holy Eucharist'
2. 'Swimming Upstream'

Another fascinating insight into how Catholicism is viewed by the 40,000 or so different Protestant and evangelical churches worldwide; how they actively target Catholics to convert, and how we can and should refute their arguments.

When Steve Ray asked his wife how she felt when she realised she had 'become' Catholic she said she was angry, angry at all her family, friends, and fellow evangelicals who had lied to her all those years, but MORE angry at Catholics because they knew all about the one true Church but never told her!

Holy Mass

We had been concerned that we would not be able to get to a Divine Mercy Service to round off the Novena begun on Good Friday, but with a Polish priest concelebrating we needn't have worried! His sermon included all the elements needed to complete the Novena and it was a lovely way to finish off the morning.

Later in the afternoon we watched a short film showing a recent trip to Ethiopia by four of our Franciscan hosts to install a fresh water system in a village they sponsor: a great example of following St Francis in a practical way.

In the evening we all went into town for a final meal out with our hosts in a local restaurant where we were able to reflect on the two days' retreat and how it will strengthen our Franciscan calling to profess our Catholic faith in the real world and lead by example.

Day 4

Began with 7.30 Mass in the Retreat Centre followed by a quick breakfast in order to get into town by 9.15 for a tour of the 'Convent' – a former Franciscan Friary since 1531 became the Governor's official residence in 1711. A fascinating feature of Gibraltar's rich history. Including some recently discovered Franciscan frescos dating from 1500.

We were then taken by coach on a tour of the Rock which ended up in the Nature Reserve (just above the Retreat Centre) where we saw the local apes, and St Michael's Cave. The cave is thought to have first been inhabited by Neolithic man and it is known to have been visited by the Romans. The Cathedral Cave is so big it was once thought to be bottomless and is now used as a theatre. During World War II the cave was to be used as a military hospital but fortunately was never needed.

There are some 30 miles of caves within the Rock

Following the tour we were returned to the town where the Ascot Fraternity contingent enjoyed a pleasant lunch in a restaurant close to the Cathedral, before visiting the Gibraltar Museum. This was a fascinating place with excavations within its grounds showing continued habitation of the area by a succession of cultures from Neanderthal man to the present day. In the evening we had an ad hoc meeting of the Ascot Fraternity contingent with supper in a nice Italian Restaurant to celebrate our last evening in Gibraltar and drink a toast to all back home.

Day 5

After breakfast most of the UK Franciscans managed to walk to the Shrine of Our Lady of Europe before making arrangements to get to the airport and return home.

Final thoughts

- An extraordinary experience and a real insight for us into International Fraternity within the OFS
- A new realisation of the increasing threat to Catholicism worldwide – firstly from within, by our own inertia, and then not just from extremist Muslim groups but also from the thousands of Protestant and Evangelical Christian sects which specifically target the Catholic Church.
- A renewed commitment to actively profess our Catholic beliefs and to use the Franciscan model as a basis for spreading the Word by example

Chris and Mike, May 2017

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6 May was the date for this year's **Day of Renewal** which was held at St Francis Church in Ascot. Esmé Vivian from Portsmouth writes:

"First of all, I would like to thank Betsy very warmly for a beautifully organised day, not least in enabling me to attend by meeting me at Guildford Station and introducing me to members from Ascot, Bracknell, and Ladywell whom I had not met before; perfect joy.

At 10 am we had Mass followed by coffee. We started the meeting by lighting a candle and saying a prayer. Betsy then passed round a cartoon showing "Mr Blobby" in various positions and places in a tree, some right at the top, others climbing up, yet others resting peacefully, but most striking of all was one perched on a branch that was about to be cut off! It was our task to select the Mr Blobby that most reflected our own

position on the Franciscan tree. After listening carefully while each member related their own experiences, we listened to a poem that described each individual person as a gift.

There followed a question and answer session initiated by questions put to two appointed members, one of long standing and other a relatively recent profession. Members then joined in, describing developments and incidents in their own lives as Franciscans. This was interspersed with snippets of Franciscan History. We talked about our own experiences of pilgrimages to Assisi and realised that we were all, in our many different ways, on our own pilgrimage to Assisi.

A Bring and Share lunch followed which produced a variety of delicious eats. This gave us all the opportunity to relax, to get to know each other better, and to take a stroll in the lovely garden; it was a sunny, if a little chilly, day.

A time of contemplation followed when we could reflect on what we had heard during the morning. What was our mission as Franciscans? First, to care for each other, to die to ourselves not necessarily in a saintly way but in a normal and ordinary way in the world, as the name “secular” implies, but in a professed Order though without a specific programme facing whatever came our way with heartfelt gentleness and allowing ourselves to be changed in accordance with that experience.

Finally, we went in to the Chapel to commit ourselves again to our calling as members of the Order of Franciscans Secular. We finished with tea, and plenty left over from lunch. Finally there were reminders of the gathering at Wintershall on 12 August where the topic is “Called to be Presence in the World”, and the annual retreat at Ladywell from Friday 24 November to Sunday 26 November, this year led by Fr John Cavanagh OFM Cap.”

Ed. Please do make every effort to attend this gathering at Wintershall. It is open to everyone and anyone with a Franciscan heart. The past two years have been very fruitful and this year’s promises no less.

Furthermore, an important day for the Region – Saturday 16 September is the day for the Regional elections at Park Place, Wickham. This day is for you all and promises a full day of sharing and building the Franciscan life. The actual elections will be later in the afternoon and there will be a mass to celebrate the day.

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A VIEWPOINT

What is Prayer? The ready response is taken from the old catechism, namely the raising of the mind and heart to God. But, what does that mean?

Only the Son knows the Father and those to whom the Son makes the Father known! John’s Gospel relates that we are called to be children of God born not of the flesh but rather born of the Spirit. A relationship with God clearly depends on some understanding of the Trinity. So, how do we view the Trinity? To believe in God is to believe in the Trinity, one God - three Persons.

The Father and the Son are one; the love between them is pure; it is for its own sake. And that Spirit of love between them is the same Spirit that we are given. We have it. *Is it dormant or alive in me?* Raising the mind and heart to God is love. We know that God loves us but do I really believe it? *Do I sense that love? Do I really look for it?* So then, what is prayer? God knows what we want. He knows what we need. We do not need to tell Him!! But, we do need to realise what we need and really want ourselves. So vocal prayer is significant and important, but it must develop. We always need to be caught up in the Spirit, that wave of love. This demands submission, giving over control. Can we do that? Can we give ourselves totally into the

Spirit and be carried in the love that exists between the Father and His Son? Anything less than total submission will not work!

Prayer will start as words but with a generous heart and mind it will be carried by the Spirit and our hearts and minds will be opened further. The Spirit will be praying for us and we will gain the benefit. This is the sense of Being.

If I fall, will someone be there to catch me? Do I trust that there will be someone there to catch me? Until I do, the weeds continue to increase and block my path. Prayer is not easy; it takes practice, constant and unending practice.

Perhaps we struggle to avoid sin in the effort to be right with God; is it not the case that we meet God through the risen Christ through our own sin! As we realise and recognise our sin we feel the power of the love of God. We are sinners; what else can we be as mere humans? That increasing recognition of our sin takes us increasingly in to a dark place! We fall. We must be confident that God is there to catch us and to lift us up as His child. So we begin to grow in and through the love of God. We realise our place in the Trinity. Life becomes more and more of a prayer as our minds and hearts open to God. Trinity loses its mystery as the Spirit of Christ prays through us for us! The burden lifts!

I know many of you read Richard Rohr's works. The following popped up the other day as a reflection. It is a well-trodden Franciscan theme.

“Franciscan alternative orthodoxy emphasizes incarnation instead of redemption. For the Franciscans, Christmas is more significant than Easter! Christmas is already Easter! Since God became a human being, then it’s good to be human, and we’re already “saved.” Franciscans never believed in the sacrificial atonement theory because it wasn’t necessary. Christ was Plan A, not Plan B. Atonement implies that God had a plan, we messed it up, and then God had to come back in to mop-up our mistakes.

Franciscan John Duns Scotus (c. 1266-1308) said the plan from the beginning was to reveal Godself as Christ. Jesus didn’t come as a remedy for sin—as if God would need blood before God could love what God created. The idea that God, who is love, would demand the sacrifice of his beloved Son in order to be able to love what God created is the conundrum that reveals how unsatisfying that quid pro quo logic really is.

Franciscans believe that *Jesus did not come to change the mind of God about humanity*. It didn’t need changing: God has organically, inherently loved what God created from the moment God created. ***Jesus came to change the mind of humanity about God.*** This sets everything on an utterly positive foundation. Rather than being an ogre, God is Love. Rather than being sinners in the hands of an angry God, we are inherently and forever loved by God, no matter what we do or don’t do. This is such *an* essential and foundational element in healthy Christianity. We need to realize that the Church in the thirteenth century was broad-minded enough to accept this alternative orthodoxy as a minority position.”

And another

“Jesus and Saint Francis had a genius for not eliminating or punishing the so-called negative side of the world, but incorporating and using it. Francis, simply imitating Jesus, goes to the edge of town and to the bottom of society; he kisses the leper, loves the poor, and wears patches on the outside of his habit so everyone will know that this is what he’s like on the inside. Francis doesn’t hide from his shadow side, but weeps over it and welcomes it as his teacher.

The history of almost every religion begins with one massive misperception, making a fatal distinction between the sacred and the profane. Low-level religions put all their emphasis on creating sacred places,

sacred time, and sacred actions. While I fully appreciate the need for this, unfortunately, it leaves the majority of life “un-sacred.”

Your task is to find the good, the true, and the beautiful in everything, even, and most especially, in the problematic. The bad is never strong enough to counteract the good. You can most easily learn this through some form of contemplative practice. Within contemplation you must learn to trust your Vital Center over all the passing jerks and snags of emotions and obsessive thinking. Once you know you have such a strong and loving soul, or the Indwelling Spirit, you are no longer pulled to and fro with every passing feeling. You have achieved a peace that nothing else can give you, and that no one can take from you (John 14:27). Divine Incarnation took the form of an Indwelling Presence in every human soul and surely in all creatures in some rudimentary way. Ironically, our human freedom gives us the ability to refuse to jump on board our own life. Angels, animals, trees, water, and yes, bread and wine seem to fully accept and enjoy their wondrous fate. Only humans resist and deny their core identities, which can cause great havoc, and thus must be somehow boundaried and contained. But the only way we ourselves can refuse to jump onto the train of life is by any negative game of exclusion or unlove—even of ourselves. When we read the Gospel texts carefully, we see that the only people Jesus seems to “exclude” are those who exclude others. Exclusion might be described as the core sin. Don’t waste any time rejecting, excluding, eliminating, or punishing anyone or anything else. Everything belongs, including you.”

May the Lord bless you and keep you and give you His peace. Amen

Edward

Viewpoint is issued 4 times a year, at the end of February, May, August, and November. Copy should be sent to me by the 20th of the month of issue, preferably by email please cuerden2ed@talktalk.net. It is your newsletter to use as you see fit. Perhaps we can begin to use it as a TWO WAY means of communication with comment and follow-up on previous content.