

Ordo Franciscanus Secularis

# VIEWPOINT



The Southern Region's Newsletter 16.3

## News from around the Region

This year's Southern Region Franciscan Celebration was held on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> August at Holly Barn, Wintershall Estate, Bramley, Surrey

At Holly Barn, the story of `The Nativity` takes place each Christmas-time, with live actors, a real baby and numerous animals. The Barn is situated at the top of a hill in beautiful, rolling Surrey countryside.

Over forty people gathered here for the day, including members of the OFS, TSSF, FMDM, Assisi Pilgrims and visitors, all with `Franciscan hearts`. A `Reflection on the San Damiano Cross` was led by Fr Jesmond Pawley OFM Conv. There was a lively discussion, with Fr Jesmond helping us to appreciate why the Cross is so important to Franciscans, and to look more deeply at what the different areas of this beautiful painting appear to convey. He made suggestions as to the history of the Cross, together with thoughts on its age, where it was originally painted, and by whom.

The day ended with an inspiring liturgy arranged and led by Maggie Larkin which was held in the adjacent Chapel.



*Fr Jesmond and some of our visitors enjoying the sun and the scenery at Wintershall.*

-0-0-0-0-0-0-

## **The St Damiano Cross spoke to Francis of Assisi and it speaks to us**

Francis of Assisi meditated regularly on the cross in the church of St Damiano. We are told that the cross spoke to him. Just what does that mean? Thus was the opening of a fascinating talk and discussion on the St Damiano Cross, led by Fr Jesmond Pawley OFM Conv. who has researched the topic over many years.

The cross was painted on a cloth which was then stretched and nailed on to a wooden cross. The church at this time in Francis' life was in ruins. Hence, the cross was already of some age. The painted cross was not unique and, in keeping with the art of the time, it is wholly symbolic. In those early years of the thirteenth century people would have been familiar with such art and would have been used to "reading" the symbolisms. In our cosy and gadget filled twenty first century lives we have, perhaps, become rather dulled to such things.

So, what did Francis read in the cross? The colours of gold, red and black dominate. The central figure of Christ is totally dominant; Christ is the focus. The figure is not the crucified Christ but is the risen Christ, which was the regular form of the day. The crucified Christ on the cross is not introduced until the fourteenth century. The figure is alive, with eyes open, and is ornately clothed with a knotted priestly cord around the waste. He is clothed in white and gold and surrounded by gold, symbolic of heaven, and He is rising from the black, symbolic of death. Between the black and the gold the colour is the red of love. His head is inclined in the listening position and He is not speaking. He is listening. His body is certainly not artistically manly! Indeed, his stomach is clearly distended and the hips pronounced! Not male attributes but the depiction of a female, pregnant! Christ emerges from the black of death and gives life to all. Man and woman alike are made in the image of God; God has no gender. Furthermore, the chest is bold and strong, able to breathe life into us all.

The risen Christ is accompanied on His right hand side by the disciple whom He loved, John, correspondingly dressed in pink as the colour of particular love. To his right, Jesus' mother is clothed in regal purple and the white wimple, denoting the riches she has been given through saying "yes" to God. On the other side, we have Mary of Magdala, Mary, the mother of James, and the Centurion who had asked Jesus to cure his servant. These are the witnesses to the crucifixion. In miniature, we find the soldier who put the lance into Jesus, side to the left and to the right the soldier who offered Jesus a drink. Size of these figures is significant in that as you concentrate on them you lose sight of the figure of Christ! Yet, look at the blood trickling along Christ's right arm. If the soldier with the lance looks up it will land on him!

Above the main figure is a smaller figure of Christ ascended, dressed in the priest's stole of red as loving martyr, and holding the sceptre of His Kingship. Above that there is the hand of God in symbolic blessing.

From this imagery Francis saw his mission defined and his confidence in a loving saviour confirmed. Christ was all in all for Francis; hence it is the same for us. Just to the right of the main figure's legs is a little rooster! Francis had had his wake-up call. Do we hear ours?

Thank you so much Fr Jesmond for opening our eyes to what Francis saw before him. Let us pray that our eyes are opened wide to the life to which God is calling us.

*(Apologies for the poor image of the cross; it proved impossible to get a better copy. I do recommend you get hold of an image and study it, meditate on it, and contemplate it, in colour if you can!)*

-O-O-O-O-O-O-

### **Simplicity, Beauty, Silence, and Closeness to God and Nature.**

Melissa joined her mother Val Pearce (Ascot Fraternity) on the pilgrimage to Assisi earlier this year. She would like to share her experience.

***"I am deeply thankful for being invited to join the recent Franciscan pilgrimage to Assisi in May, which has blessed me with a new appreciation of the spirituality and life of St Francis."***

A few words encapsulate my experience of this pilgrimage: ***Simplicity, Beauty, Silence, and Closeness to God and nature.***

Among the host of wonderful memories I have of the pilgrimage, there are three that stand out and seem to be illuminated with the Franciscan spirit.

Fonte Colombo in Greccio was our first 'station', and seeing the cave where St Francis finished writing his Rule made a profound impression on me. A simple cave formed out of the creamy-pink rock, adorned only with a wooden crucifix on an altar carved out of the same rock, it was saturated with a sense of deep peace and prayer. The small window looked out onto mountains densely-packed with trees, giving a tangible sense of closeness to God and nature. Outside, we paused to drink in the beauty of the landscape, and our silent contemplation felt like a communal act of worship.

The Sanctuary of St James at Poggio Bustone, another retreat of St Francis, gave us another taste of simplicity, beauty and silence. Often in historical churches (particularly in Italy), I find the overwhelming impression is of frescoes, marble, gold and Italian Renaissance "bling" – but here, among the few simple yet beautiful sculptures, wooden crosses and Tau-engraved candle holders I felt gently drawn to prayer, conscious of being in a sacred space. Outside,

the mountains clothed in mist spoke of the 'otherness' and mystery of the One who brought all things into being.

On Mt Subasio we entered the chilly depths of the woods at the Carceri and came to a small clearing with a simple altar and wooden benches that served as pews. As the sun dropped through the overhanging branches and the reading from Genesis penetrated our ears, I was filled with a sense of one-ness with Creation and the Creator in this Cathedral of nature. This, I felt, is how the Eucharist should be – with hearts and minds in harmony with our Creator.

The theme of simplicity was sharpened as Francis' embracing of poverty as a way of life was brought home to me when I saw his tiny 2m x 2m cell at the Sanctuary of St Francis, Greccio, and his habits on display such as the one at La Verna – literally hanging together by threads. The tiny monastic cell evoked comparisons with a prison cell, and the realisation that Francis lived in this by choice was a powerful one, testament to the force of his commitment and his authenticity.

As another pilgrim said, by the end of our journey together, I felt I now knew Francis. His simplicity of life, awareness of the beauty and fragility of our earth and call to contemplate the Divine resonate with me and inspire me to deepen these things in my own life, to stay close to Creation and the Creator, and to tread softly on the earth.

Melissa Pearce

-o-o-o-o-o-o-

## **Open the Door: Year of Mercy**

### **A Franciscan Secular's Look into what it means for us and how it will help.**

The Holy Father Pope Francis announced that 2015/16 would be a Year of Mercy and that using the Holy Door in our Cathedrals would help us become more merciful towards our fellow brothers and sisters and help our relationship to creation.

One day during the recent hot weather we sat on a beach enjoying the breezes and warmth watching the boats sailing on the Solent. A story had just broken about a boat full of migrants from Africa capsizing off Libya resulting in loss of life. We started to think about why these poor migrants fleeing from war zones and poverty were leaving Africa and other middle-east countries each desperate to start a new life. They were leaving similar beaches in vastly overcrowded boats with not much chance of success while we were sitting in our nice safe havens.

What relationship did the beach we sat on have to an open door?

In this year of Mercy what did we in the rich west have to offer these poor unfortunates from Africa and the Middle East?

Read Psalm 41 "Like the Deer Yearns" (taken from the Divine Office Morning Prayer)

**What should we as Franciscan Secular do?**

**Look at our Rule: page 22. 15/16**

*Let them individually and collectively be in the forefront in promoting justice by the testimony of their human lives and their courageous initiatives especially in the field of public life. Let them esteem work as a gift and as a sharing in the creation, redemption and service of the Christian community.*

**How does the Year of Mercy and the Open Door relate to refugees?**

Is the beach their Open Door?

**As Our Lord said in Matthew 25: 40-41;**

*In so far as you did this to the least of those brothers of mine you did it to me.*

Simon Peck (Portsmouth) found the following. It fits the bill perfectly.

*Praise be You, My Lord, through Sister Brokenness who reveals to us your healing and your wholeness. She is tender and fragile and invites us to share our poverty with one another.*

*Praise be You, My Lord, through Sister Forgiveness who reveals your unconditional love and tender mercy. She is gentle and asks for poverty of spirit as she seeks to be both freely given and freely received in fraternity.*

*Praise be You, My Lord, through Brother Conversion who reveals your radical Gospel call and the heart of the paschal mystery. He is violent and requires uprooting, letting go, emptying and comes to us through self-emptying fraternal experiences. He is a mirror of true Eucharist.*

*Praise be You, My Lord, through Sister Joy who reveals your fullness and the life of your Trinitarian love. She is carefree. She is loving. She is genuine. She is Beatitude. She is gift coming from you through sharing Your presence with one another.*

*Most High, all powerful and good Lord, Your's are brokenness, forgiveness, conversion and joy. We praise and bless You, Lord, and give You thanks for fraternity. All praise be yours, O Lord*

John Vivian (Portsmouth)

-o-o-o-o-o-o-

**Viewpoint**

**Fraternity Missions:** While it is clear that our prime aim as Franciscans is to become close to God through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ, it is easy to settle into the comfort of what is really a prayer group. Several of the members do tremendous work for the poor, and there are one or two fraternal missions towards a worthy end. But, do we as Fraternities always look towards a Mission, something in which we can all participate? Let us not become complacent in our Franciscanism. We need to put it into action, whether that be locally or abroad. Prayer works wonders and good works is most excellent prayer. Should our Fraternity adopt a Mission? Would it provide a new dimension to our formation?

**Elections:** Each of our Fraternities will have elections within the next twelve months, as will indeed the Region as a whole. When you need to write a name on that slip of paper, do you ever consider your own name? Gosh, how conceited, you say. I cannot vote for myself; others must do that. WHY? You might just be the best person for the role at the time.

We are professed into a way of life and therefore committed to building that way of life for ourselves and for our Franciscan brothers and sisters in our local Fraternity and in the wider Fraternities at higher levels. This is a serious commitment and we should not dare to approach it casually. We are committed to God's work and we must undertake it according to God's way. Therefore, elections to define the next three year's leadership and stewardship must be prepared for. We must all pray earnestly that the Holy Spirit will guide us in the way that fits God's way the best. We may not see perfection; we are all human. But, we must go into the elections with a will to serve as God wills. If we go in to the elections with any lesser view we have failed our profession. Leave any hang-ups at the door!

Now, this does not mean that everyone will be a Minister or an Officer of the council; not everyone has the appropriate talents. But we do all have the capacity to listen to the Holy Spirit and to play our part in the election of the best council available at the time. And then, after the elections, we have the grave responsibility to support that council wholeheartedly in the building up of the Fraternity in particular and the OFS in general.

So, if the Holy Spirit asks you to serve, can you hold your head up high and refuse? If our preparations are right; if our hearts and minds are right; if we are open to the will of God, there will not be any embarrassment. When you serve, in whatever capacity, God will go with you.

**Using "Viewpoint":** This newsletter gives everyone the opportunity to share a thought, an opinion, a problem. We are family and we are called into an Order. This means that we are called to help each other on the path to God. Please do use the newsletter; it is a simple but far-reaching means of communication. If you wish to remain anonymous, fine, but I can assure you that we all have questions and difficulties, but someone will have a point of view which will help.

What are the Fraternities using for their formation? Is it helping? What are members reading? Is it worthwhile? Take another look at Melissa's piece; we can all offer a thought or reaction to an episode in our lives. Remember the motto,

**"Use it or lose it!!"**

***Viewpoint is the Newsletter for the Southern Region of the Order of Franciscans Secular. It is published four times a year, at the end of February, May, August, and November. Copy should be submitted by the 20<sup>th</sup> of the month of publication.***

***Edward Cuerden***

[cuerden2ed@talktalk.net](mailto:cuerden2ed@talktalk.net)

**May the Lord bless you and keep you.**

**May the Lord let His face to shine on you and be gracious to you.**

**May the Lord look upon you kindly and give you peace.**

**May the Lord bless you.**

