

Ordo Franciscanus Secularis



VIEWPOINT

The Southern Region Newsletter 16.4

To be a Franciscan is to live the Gospel

News from around the Region

Ladywell held their annual retreat earlier this month and this year it was led by Fr Jesmond Pawley, and a number of us from the Region attended as well as some from the TSSF. In fairness, Fr Jesmond stressed that he was not so much leading as taking part. The theme for the weekend was “*Taste and see that the Lord is good*”. The parable of the Prodigal Son was studied with the question, “What does it say to you?” It was soon clear that we all jump to conclusions because the parable is so well known, but is it? The weekend showed us all that each verse is central to the Evangelist’s message and that we must let the scripture speak to us. More of this later.

Portsmouth welcomed their new Spiritual Assistant in September. She is Sister Yvonne Edwards FMDM and she will assist the fraternity in its on-going formation. The fraternity has adopted, as formation material, the book, *Called to Make Present the Charism*, which is edited by Fr Benet Fonck OFM and is part of the SFO Resources Library. The book is based on the present rule. It was used for the first time in October and raised several issues for the group to share. The fraternity has set a schedule for the year ahead with different members of the fraternity leading each month.

In the Parish of Fareham, which is in the Portsmouth area, a course entitled “*Called and Gifted*” has started to assist people to discern their charisms. Esme and John Vivian are members of the parish and John tells how they are looking at how to consider and discern the gifts that God has given.

He writes, “*The course started with a two day meeting during which it was explained that the idea is to help Catholics succeed at a primary discipline of the Christian life, discerning, developing, and using their spiritual gifts or charisms. We are all given gifts but the question is whether we recognise them and, if we do, how, if at all, do we use them.*”

During the talks, many questions were asked about how we felt as Catholics in the way we follow Jesus. Like the first apostles, we may sometimes struggle to follow Jesus. We might be frightened and sometimes not sure where to start! Do we resist God by not allowing him into certain areas of our lives?

So where do we find the strength to follow our Lord as disciples? Just as it was for the early Christians the source is the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete. The Spirit awakens faith in us and communicates the life of God in us. "No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3)

The Holy Spirit enters our lives through the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist. When we are baptised, we are made temples and given the power to live and act under the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Confirmation brings the grace we received in Baptism to completion. In turn the Eucharist and gives us the strength to spread and defend the faith by word and actions as true witnesses of Christ.

Charisms are used in charity and service and in the love of God to build up the Church.

Charisms are not inherited from our parents but are given by the Holy Spirit when we receive the sacraments of initiation. They are supernaturally empowered and are focussed outward to enable Christians to bear results for the Kingdom of God above and beyond our normal human abilities. Charisms should be accepted with gratitude by the person who receives them and by all members of the church as well. They are a wonderfully rich grace for the apostolic vitality and for the holiness of the entire Body of Christ.

A list of Charisms was presented; Administration, Celibacy, Craftsmanship, Discernment of Spirits, Encouragement, Evangelism, Faith, Giving, Healing, Helps, Hospitality, Intercessory prayer, Knowledge, Leadership, Mercy, Missionary, Music, Pastoring, Service, Teaching, Voluntary Poverty, Wisdom and Writing. There are probably more that you could think of.

In the next stage in the course, trained people will help us discern what our charisms are, and how we use them." (Perhaps John will develop this theme in the next issue.)

Littlehampton Fraternity held their exhibition of 100 Nativity Scenes from around the world over the last weekend in November.

Angie Tyson, Minister to Littlehampton, asks your prayers please for her son who has a brain tumour which has started to grow again.

Basia Rozycka, Bracknell, has sent us a Royal Carol for Christmas Eve

Chorus *Our hearts are cheerful this Christmas Eve, Celebrating together because we believe,
That King Jesus has come, to set us free; Make us children of God; make us all royalty!*

Two thousand and sixteen years ago,
From heaven came Jesus to us, here below,
To make us whole; to set us free;
Make us children of God; give us new dignity!

Yet, the first to receive Him were beasts in a shed.
He was laid in a manger with straw for His head.
He did this to show He was humble and mild,
King Jesus, Son of God, became a small child!

Astonished, poor shepherds heard angels sing,
Telling them: 'go!', and what to bring.
'Take a lamb and hurry to a stable near,
The Star with lead you, there is nothing to fear!'

Mary and Joseph were filled with delight,
They expected no one on this holy night!
But angel voices burst loud through the air,
And the shepherds had come, this night for to share!

Mary and Joseph's joy was complete,
When from the Far East came wise men three,
Bringing their gifts: frankincense, myrrh and gold,
They came from afar the child King to behold!

Look at us here – what do we see?
We are gathered together in fraternity,
Celebrating and feasting on this wondrous night,
Our hearts full of gratitude, joy, and delight!

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Taste and see that the Lord is good

What does that mean? To be a Franciscan is to live the Gospel. The Rule requires us to go from Gospel to Life and from Life to Gospel. To me that means living the Good News of the Word. If I am to relate to the Gospel then I need to let the Gospel relate to me. I need to let it speak to me. I shy away from any sense of interpretation because the Word has to be listened to. The evangelists wrote in order to convey the Message that is Jesus Christ and His Mission. Church has recognised the importance of these Gospels and we need to accept them as they are presented. So, let us take the time to allow the verses to speak to us. Stop after each verse and ask what is it saying to me now? We must allow the Word to speak to us rather than simply learn the words! Then we gain an increasingly meaningful message.

So, ask yourself, "Does the Word affect me?" It should, shouldn't it?

To taste is to experience, to engage, to become involved. If we ever take the Word for granted then we have stopped caring about our Calling. So let us engage with the Word in our Fraternities to enliven our ongoing formation. I know Fraternities do include scripture in their meetings. Let us all seek a way to make it buzz!

Parable of the Prodigal Son

Rather than give a blow by blow account of the retreat weekend I will offer the parable in the way in which it was reflected during the retreat.

A landowner had two sons. The younger son went to his father and asked outright for his share of the inheritance so that he could make his own way in the world. This was a staggering thing to do! The father

agreed to divide his property between to two sons. The younger son goes off to a different Country, a pagan country. As far as he is concerned, his father is now dead to him! But he is on a slippery slope; he follows the good life and squanders his money on a life of debauchery. So, he has deserted his Father, his Country, and his morals. His conscience pricks; he feels the need of some comforting support. But the country experiences a famine and life becomes very difficult. So he hires himself out to a pig farmer! How low can he get? He is going against the values he was brought up with; he has sold himself short! Can he get any lower in his life? He is hungry but he is not allowed even to eat the pig food; he has become worse off than the pigs, an animal he once considered totally unclean. He has hit rock-bottom. Isn't that the time one sees a bit of reality? He starts to come to his senses and decides he must undo the wrong he has committed. He goes back home, and his father is on the lookout! He spots him and rushes to meet him. The younger son acknowledges his sin against God and against his father. This is no selfish begging; this is confession. He is acknowledging that he is a sinner and that he has rendered himself liable for retribution. He is willing to be treated as a hired hand. The father, however, is so glad to see him return and offer repentance that he will not hear of his beloved son being anything but reinstated to his position as son. They will feast on the fattened calf.

The older son is out in the fields working and sees the commotion. On hearing that his younger brother has returned and been welcomed back he rushes to his father to remonstrate. He accuses the father of having had him "slave" for him without so much as a thank you! No mention here of the half share given him on his brother's departure.

Which brother is the hero of the story? How do understand the father's position in all of this? The younger son left and committed wrong. He deserted his father; indeed as far as he was concerned his father was dead to him. He left his homeland for a pagan country; he turned his back on the beliefs he had been brought up with; he squandered his money on worthless pursuits. Circumstances brought him back to his senses. He recognised his sinfulness and repented, and confessed to God and to his father. His status as son was reinstated as though nothing had happened.

The older son is angry with the father and with his brother. He accuses his brother of actions not included in the story; he goes "over the top". He accuses the father as having treated him like a slave yet his status as son was never put in doubt. How concerned was he about his father's sorrow at the younger son's departure? The older son has demeaned himself and hurled unjustified accusations against his father and brother! He is blinded to his father's care for him.

Consider this father for a moment. He is fattening a calf. Is this on the off-chance of a need for a celebration or is it in the hope of the younger son's return? He spots the boy returning; is it not the case that he is on the lookout for him? He never gave up on the lad. His love for his sons never waned. Yet only the one came to realise that.

So, as you taste you experience more and more. How would Francis of Assisi have viewed this parable? He found his vocation, in prison! As a young man he had enjoyed his father's money, perhaps even wasted it! He had gone after fame and status in war but fate had gone against him; he hit rock-bottom in prison. He turned back to his father in heaven. He put away his ideas of glory and grandeur. Francis was father to his friars, showing real compassion and care for them when they found the going tough. He showed real pity for brothers who had strayed. Francis answered to the question "Who are you"; "I am a sinner". He had

found that deep and real identity in, with, and through Christ. He knew what he was and he therefore knew what he needed.

Where do I stand in relation to the parable? Which son am I? Am I far off; am I ready to return? Do I judge; do I show pity? How often am I discouraged? Do I stop to listen to my father God? Francis always sought God's help; he allowed God to conform him. I am called; am I really letting God conform me, or have I taken myself off to "do my own thing"! Will I let God run to me? If I do then my conversion will begin. Do I fully realise that I am a sinner? Do I need the Pig Sty experience to shake me back into what is real? God is on the lookout for us.

What is sin?

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Franciscan Life Wheel – Two applications. Basia Rozycka

Our Franciscan Life is joined to Jesus. Incorporated into Christ and the Church at *Baptism*, at some point in our lives, we **INVITE** Jesus to reign at the **CENTRE** of our lives.

Later, answering God's call to become Franciscans, our Profession incorporates us into the Franciscan Order within the Church and Jesus continues to propel our **Franciscan Life Wheel**.

It has **HUB**, the **RIM** and **FOUR SPOKES**.

The **HUB** is our dependable driving force: J
Jesus Christ, *the same yesterday, today and forever* Heb 13:8



The **RIM** representing our **personal and individual** Franciscan Life Wheel is perfectly **round** with **no beginning or end**, since we were always in God's heart from the beginning of time and forever. However, it is obvious that we are not clones; some **RIMS** may be *thinner* than others, or *wider*, or made of *different* material; implying that not all wheels will revolve at the same speed!

What matters is that the **RIM** of our Franciscan Life Wheel receives both **impetus** and **direction** through **FOUR EQUAL SPOKES** connected to the **HUB**.

The **FOUR EQUAL SPOKES** connect our Franciscan life to Jesus in **two ways**:

- **VERTICALLY** in matters *spiritual*: **PRAYER** and **STUDY**
- **HORIZONTALLY** with things *temporal*: **FRATERNITY** and **SERVICE/MISSION**.

Enlivened by the Holy Spirit, all **FOUR SPOKES** must stay connected to the **HUB – to Jesus** - at all times. Without these specific spokes **connecting** the **RIM** to the **HUB**, there will be **no new life; no forward movement**: *The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you – they are full of the Spirit and life.* Jn 6:63 NIV

- To prevent the wheel from **buckling**, all FOUR spokes need to be **equally balanced**.
- To prevent the wheel from **collapsing**, all FOUR spokes are needed to carry the weight of our Life; if **one** spoke becomes rusty, fatigued or brittle, it will snap.
- To prevent the wheel from **toppling over**, our **Franciscan Life Wheel**, like our life, must **not** become **static** but must keep moving **forward**. **Stopping means toppling!**

But Franciscans, as we know, are never alone; we do not ride unicycles!

Which brings us to the Second Application – the Franciscan Fraternity Life Wheel.*

In this case, the SPOKES are **many**. They represent all the different Brothers and Sisters in our Fraternity. All the spokes are **equally** long. All are **connected** to the centre hub and the outer rim.

Note however, that **some** spokes may be new, some old; some soft and bendable, others dry and brittle. Some may be hard like steel, others like plastic or wood; others again shiny and gleaming, while some may be are rusty and corroded.

So, here lies the challenge. The young, strong, shiny spokes are in a hurry to move the wheel on. The old, brittle, weary spokes cannot move so fast. They can crack, snap and break.

With Jesus at the centre, the problem is resolved. He holds back the strong just enough to help and support the weak. He, nevertheless, encourages the old and frail to keep on moving. All are needed since each spoke is a channel through which the Holy Spirit teaches, guides, changes and encourages.

Together, the **Franciscan Fraternity Life Wheel** moves forward as a single unit and everyone has the opportunity to experience change, growth, and new life!

In this way, the Holy Spirit unites our local Fraternity, as indeed, our worldwide Franciscan Family - our many wheels – into a formidable **vehicle of Good News!**

We all MOVE as Jesus guides us; we all DO THINGS in His strength. Moreover, as our **Franciscan Life Wheel** travels onwards, the **weight** of our **individual** and **Fraternity RIMS** leaves behind a **definite TRACK** - **inviting others to follow**.

What matters is that, whether individual Franciscans or Fraternity, we all need to care and keep all parts of the wheel **'well oiled'**. Only then can we be sure that our forward direction will reach its final goal, and at last, pass from this earthly life of travail to the Glorious Life in Jesus in Heaven!

Brothers and Sisters, let us then joyfully progress **in His name and for His Glory!**

[Adapted from a picture prophesy I heard at an International Charismatic Conference in Johannesburg in 1978]

What do we actually profess as Secular Franciscans?

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A VIEWPOINT

If we take the scriptures for granted how much are we missing? It is not for nothing that we are exhorted to include the scriptures in our fraternal meetings. After all, the Rule is explicit on the need to relate life to Gospel and Gospel to life. That, of course, is the very essence of our vocation, that we allow God to conform us in, with, and through His Son to His will, as Son and Daughter. Gospel is more than words; it is the Word who was made flesh and lived among us, and has given everything for us.

A couple of weeks ago I was talking to a Padre Pio prayer group about the OFS, and attempting to answer their questions. There seemed to be a sense from some of the group that we were different! We are ordinary. Just like Francis himself, we are sinners and we need assistance. God understands and calls us to the OFS so that we can gain that assistance. Do we always appreciate this; that our brothers and sisters OFS are in need of assistance, from US!

Peter Kimm, obituary below, balked at the “rules” and walked away. Are we all in tune with the Order? Are there things you would like to air within the family, ideas on which you would like others’ opinion?

As your fraternal elections draw near, pray for the gift of discernment. Pray that God will give you the grace and the strength to serve when called. And pray that you never be tempted to “leave it to someone else”!

Having been called, are you now ready to be sent to serve?

Obituary Captain Peter Kimm died on 23 October this year. Peter Kimm was a Naval gunnery officer and held several key appointments between 1954 and 1961. He commanded the frigate Loch Fyne in the Middle East 1961-3 and the destroyer Agincourt 1966-7. In 1967-72 he was head of Soviet analysis working for the Director Naval Intelligence. This work was so secret that he never discussed it but he later recalled that the work absolutely suited his metier. He was, in fact, given the OBE for his contribution. Before retirement he helped to found the British maritime League, becoming its first director with the task of promoting maritime interests and reminding people, industry, and parliament of the importance of the sea to the Country.

He had become a Catholic in 1951 and in 1975 became a member of the Third Order of St Francis, as it was then known. He was thus a member of the Portsmouth fraternity. Part of his work as a “Tertiary” was to visit Portsmouth prison where an inmate expressed interest in joining the Order. He was refused on the grounds that he would not be able to attend regular meetings. Peter Kimm denounced this ruling as “utterly mad” and left the Order, although he continued to follow the Rule. Peter was clearly a man of conviction and passion for anything he undertook. May he rest in peace.

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And as a fitting end, here is a thought on Francis of Assisi picked up by Laurie Swann from Littlehampton.

After eight centuries, St Francis continues to be extraordinarily present. What is the secret of St Francis' modernity? It lies in the many aspects of his faith, spirituality and, above all, in the way he communicated. He was direct, enthusiastic, free. With his eyes he penetrated human souls; with his words he touched hearts; with his hands he caressed wounds. He met people in a direct and personal way.

Today, our communicating is becoming increasingly artificial. Virtual friendships can be made and unmade at the click of a computer mouse, and our gazes only meet the image of our friend on the screen. St Francis met people directly, in an authentically human way. Herein lies his modernity!

**May the Lord bless you this Christmas,
May He set His face to shine upon you and your families,
May He give you all His peace.**

Edward Cuerden

A Joyous and Loving Christmas to one and all



What does Christmas 2016 mean to us?

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Comments, articles, and above all News are always welcome.