

Ordo Franciscanus Secularis

VIEWPOINT



How you do anything is how you do everything

How you love anything is how you love everything

Viewpoint is the Newsletter of the Southern Region of the Order of Franciscans Secular (Edition 17.4)

News from the Region

On 16 September, Region assembled for the Election Meeting at Park Place, Wickham; well at least 17 members assembled together with Fr Jesmond Pawley *OFM Conv* and Sister Yvonne Edwards *FMDM* who is Spiritual Assistant to the Portsmouth and IoW Fraternity. The morning was given to a sharing of ideas on Fraternity and you should all have received a letter on the subject from Betsy Hart.

The afternoon involved the elections themselves with the following results:

Minister	Betsy Hart
Vice Minister	Simon Peck
Secretary	Edward Cuerden
Treasurer	Angela Pickford
Councillor	Jennie McManus

It was accepted by Region that the Executive could appoint up to 2 more council members.

More recently, local elections have been held for the Littlehampton and Worthing Fraternity. The results from these elections are:

Minister	Tony Moran
Vice Minister	Maureen Francis
Secretary	Barbara Southey
Treasurer	Pauline Williamson

God speed all elected officers in the Order to facilitate the Franciscan Way and enable their members to meet their vocations.

Hearty Congratulations to Colm O’Driscoll from Southampton, and a valued member of the Portsmouth and IoW Fraternity, who celebrated his Diamond Jubilee as a Professed Secular Franciscan earlier this year. Not many of us will achieve the same! God bless you Colm.

FRANCISCAN FORMATION There was a National gathering at Crewe over the weekend of 27-29 October to hear of the Revised Programme for Ongoing Formation and the New Bibliography

30 members from England and Wales gathered at the Oblate Centre. Simon Peck, Esme Vivian, and Maggie Larkin attended from Southern Region. We were very well cared for by the staff, especially the catering department; the food was superb.

The weekend was led by John Power, our National Formation Minister. We were also joined by Fr John Cavanagh *OFM Cap*, National Spiritual Director. The aim of the weekend was to present to us the new programme for ongoing formation, “Following Christ in the Footsteps of Francis of Assisi”, which has been written by John Power.

In a packed schedule of 6 lectures we were introduced to the material presented under 6 headings. They are:

The Essence of Franciscan Spirituality.

A Life of Penance and Daily Conversion

Prayer

Building the Kingdom of God on Earth

Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation

Life in Fraternity

Each of the 6 parts contains several short chapters, each with its own work sheet. John Power delivered each lecture in a lively and entertaining fashion and was extremely interesting. There was only one group discussion session and it might have been helpful to have had time to bring some of our experiences of formation in our Fraternities to be discussed in the group as a whole.

John also gave us a bibliography of Franciscan writings. This was extensive, running into 16 pages. He stressed that this material is to provide ongoing formation for Secular Franciscans. Formation should not stop once we are professed. A copy of this document was provided for each of the Secular Franciscans attending the course. The information is not at present on our web site.

John said that it would be useful, prior to a Fraternity meeting, to provide the subject in advance so that all would have read the passage to be studied. John outlined elements of a formation session. It should take place within a Fraternity meeting and should last at least an hour. He suggests that members might like to keep a personal Franciscan Journal. Methods of presentation such as art, music, power-point, film poetry and role play were suggested. The value of "Lectio Divina", and meditation for spiritual growth was stressed.

The monthly Fraternity meeting is really important. John stressed the importance of living in Fraternity. This would create a sense of fellowship and belonging, enabling fraternity members to really get to know and support each other in their Christian and Franciscan journey.

I have not had the time to read the entire document but on a brief read through this seems to be valuable study material. It covers a wide range of Franciscan formation and an understanding of our Franciscan Charism. ***Maggie Larkin ofs***

THIS YEAR'S LADYWELL RETREAT, led by Fr John Cavanagh, offered a multitude of thoughts and reflections. Here is just a small sample!

The Human Condition – Thomas KEATING

Where are you? This is one of the great questions of all time. It is the focus of the first half of the spiritual journey. Biblical scholars and readers will remember that in Genesis 3 it is the question God asked when Adam and Eve had taken off for the woods after their disobedience. He called out to them and said, "Adam, where are you?" They were hiding in

the woods and God was looking for them. Adam said, "We heard your voice, and we were scared because we were naked". So God said, "How did you know you were naked?". This marvellous story of creation is not just about Adam and Eve. It is really about us. It is a revelation of where we are. The same question is addressed to every generation, time, and person. At every moment of our lives, God is asking us, "Where are you? Why are you hiding?" All the questions fundamental to human happiness arise when we ask ourselves this excruciating question. Where am I? Where am I in relation to God, to myself, and to others? These are the basic questions of human life. As soon as we answer honestly, we have begun the spiritual search for God, which is also the search for ourselves. God is asking us to face the reality of the human condition, to come out of the woods into the full light of intimacy with Him. That is the state of mind Adam and Eve had, according to the story, before their disobedience. As soon as they became aware of their separation from God, they headed for the woods. They had to hide from God because the loss of the intimacy and union that they had enjoyed with Him in Paradise was so painful. Sometimes it helps to turn to a story from another spiritual tradition; in juxtaposing the two stories, we might get a new insight. Here is a Sufi tale that is also about the human condition. A Sufi master had lost the key to his house and was looking for it in the grass outside. He got down on his knees and started running his fingers through every blade of grass. Along came 8 or 10 of his disciples. They said, "Master, what is wrong?" He said, "I have lost the key to my house." They said, "Can we help you find it?" He said, "I'd be delighted". So they all got down on their hands and knees and started running their fingers through the grass. As the sun grew hotter, one of the more intelligent disciples said, "Master, have you any idea where you might have lost the key?" The master replied, "Of course! I lost it in the house." To which they all exclaimed, "Then why are we looking for it out here?" He said, "Isn't it obvious? There is more light here." We have all lost the key to our house. We don't live there anymore; we don't experience the Divine indwelling. We don't live with the kind of intimacy with God that Adam and Eve reportedly enjoyed in the Garden of Eden, and the Sufi Master seems to have enjoyed before he lost his key. The house in the parable represents happiness, and happiness is intimacy with God, the experience of God's loving presence. Without that experience, nothing else quite works. With it, almost anything works. This is the human condition, to be without the true source of happiness, which is the experience of the presence of God, and to have lost the key to happiness which is the contemplative dimension of life, the path to the increasing assimilation and enjoyment of God's presence. What we experience is our desperate search for happiness which cannot possibly be found. The key is not in the grass; it was not lost outside ourselves. It was lost inside ourselves. That is where we need to look for it. The chief characteristic of the human condition is that everybody is looking for this key and nobody knows where to find it. The human condition is thus poignant in the extreme. If you want help as you look for the key in the wrong place, you get plenty of it, because everybody is looking for it in the wrong place too, where there is more light, pleasure, security, power, acceptance by others. We have a sense of solidarity in the search without any possibility of finding what we are looking for.

The Smaller Beatitudes

Blessed are those who can laugh at themselves, they will have no end of fun.

Blessed are those who can tell a mountain from a molehill, they will be saved a lot of bother.

Blessed are those who know how to relax without looking for excuses, they are on the way to becoming wise.

Happy are those who can appreciate a smile and forget a frown, they will walk on the sunny side of the street.

Happy are those who can be kind in understanding the attitudes of others, they may be taken for fools, but this is the price of charity.

Happy are you if you know when to hold your tongue and smile, the Gospel has begun to live in your heart.

Blessed are those who think before acting and pray before thinking, they will avoid many blunders.

Above all, blessed are those who recognise the Lord in all whom they meet, the light of truth shines in their lives. They have found true wisdom

Listen

To the fragile feelings, not to the clashing fury....

To the quiet sounds, not to the loud clamour....

To the steady heartbeat, not to the noisy confusion....

To the hidden voices, not to the obvious chatter....

To the deep harmonies, not to the surface discord....

Listen

To the outcast within you....

The only one whence healing and reconciliation come....

The only one who can bring salvation to the part of you that speaks loudest and thinks itself strongest.

In your inscape, as well as in the landscape of the wiser world, the voice of the poor and the oppressed has priority over the voice of the dominant.....

During the weekend, one of our sisters passed the following thought to me. It was said by the late Basil Hume OSB on the "secret of prayer".

Prayer is normally difficult and unrewarding. This is why so many people cease to pray. The secret is to start. The taste for it follows and does not normally start the process.

It helps to recognise from the beginning that it is a person whom we are trying to get to know and with whom we are attempting to get into contact.

Thank you Lord Jesus Christ for all the good things you have given me,

For all the pains and insults you have borne for me.

Oh most merciful Redeemer, Friend, and Brother,

May I know you more clearly,

Love you more dearly,

And follow you more nearly;

For ever and ever. Amen

St Richard of Chichester c1197-1253

OPENING THE DOOR: GREAT SUFFERING AND GREAT LOVE

By Richard Rohr, OFM

*“For love is as strong as death,
The flash of it is a flash of fire,
A flame of Yahweh Himself.”*
~ Song of Songs 8:6

“All humans born of women have a short life, and it is full of suffering.”
~ Book of Job 14:1

Two universal and prime paths of transformation have always been available to every human being God has created: great love and great suffering. Only love and suffering are strong enough to break down our usual ego defences, crush our dualistic thinking, and open us up to Mystery. In my experience they, like nothing else, exude the mysterious chemistry that can transmute us from a fear-based life into a love-based life. No surprise that the Christian icon of redemption is a man offering love from a crucified position.

Love is what we long for and we’re created for—in fact, love is what we *are* as an outpouring from God—but suffering often seems to be our opening to that need, that desire, and that identity. Love and suffering are the main portals that open up the mind space and the heart space, breaking us into breadth and depth and communion. When we are inside of great love, we have a much stronger possibility of surrendering our ego controls and opening up to the whole field of life.

Great love makes us willing to risk everything, holding nothing back. The feeling of fusion or acceptance by another, or with The Other, at least temporarily overcomes our terrible sense of aloneness, separateness, and fear. The ecstasy of this union allows us to let down our barriers and *see things inside of a new kind of wholeness and happiness for a while*. To sustain this wondrous long-term union, and to remain permanently “in love,” something else is needed—some level of mysticism, whether nature-based, consciousness-based, or God-based.

Great suffering opens us in a different way. Here, things usually happen *against our will*—which is what makes it suffering! Over time, we can learn to give up our defended state. *The situation is what it is*, although we will invariably go through the stages of denial, anger, bargaining, resignation, and (hopefully) on to acceptance. The suffering might feel wrong, terminal, absurd, unjust, impossible, physically painful, or just outside of our comfort zone. We must have a proper attitude toward suffering, because many things every day leave us out of control (even if it is just a long stoplight). Always remember that if we do not transform our pain, we will surely transmit it.

Of course, suffering can lead us in either of two directions. It can make us very bitter and shut us down, or it can make us wise, compassionate and utterly open: either because our heart has been softened, or perhaps because suffering makes us feel like we have nothing more to lose. It often takes us to the edge of our inner resources where we “fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31), even against our will. We must all pray for the grace of this second path of softening and opening. My personal opinion is that this is the

very meaning of the phrase “deliver us from evil” in the Our Father (Lord’s Prayer). We aren’t asking to avoid suffering. It is as if we pray, “When the big trials come, God, hold onto me, and don’t let me turn bitter or blaming”—an evil that leads to so many other evils. Struggling with our own shadow self, facing interior conflicts and moral failures, undergoing rejection, abandonment and humiliations, experiencing any abuse or limitation are all gateways into deeper consciousness and the flowering of the soul. These experiences give us a privileged window into the “naked now” of the present moment because seemingly impossible contradictions are staring us in the face. Weeping, forgiveness and acceptance are usually necessary to invite us into the contemplative mind! (Watch Paul do this from the depths of Romans 7:14 to the heights of his mystic poetry in most of Romans 8). In facing the contradiction that we ourselves are, we become living icons of both/and rather than yes/but. Once we can accept mercy, it is almost natural to hand it on to others (See the story of the unforgiving debtor in Matthew 18:23-35). We become conduits of what we ourselves have received. If we have never needed mercy, and do not face our own inherent contradictions, we can go from youth to old age dualistically locked inside of a mechanistic universe. That, in my opinion, is the “sin against the Holy Spirit.” It cannot be forgiven because there is a refusal to recognize that we even need mercy or forgiveness.

Great love has the potential to open the heart space and then the mind space. Great suffering has the potential to open the mind space and then the heart space. Eventually, both spaces need to be opened, and this allows for non-dual thinking. *People who have never loved or never suffered will normally try to control everything with an either-or attitude, or all-or-nothing thinking.* Not having experienced grace or mercy themselves, they divide the world into “deserving and undeserving.” This leaves them judgmental, demanding, unforgiving, and weak in empathy and sympathy.

Authentic love is of one piece. How we love anything is how we love everything. Jesus commands us to “Love our neighbours *as we love ourselves,*” and he connects the two great commandments of love of God and love of neighbour, saying they are “like” one another (Matthew 22:40). So often, we think this means to love our neighbour with the same amount of love—*as much as we love ourselves*—when it really means that it is the same Source and the same Love that allows me to love myself and others and God at the same time! *How you love is how you have accessed Love.*

We cannot sincerely love another or forgive another’s offenses inside of dualistic consciousness. We have done the people of God a great disservice by preaching the Gospel to them but not giving them the tools whereby they can obey that Gospel. As Jesus stated, “Cut off from the vine, you can do nothing” (John 15:5). The “vine and the branches” is one of the greatest Christian mystical images of the non-duality between God and the soul. In and with God, I can love everything and everyone—even my enemies. Alone and by myself, my will and intellect seldom allow me to love in difficult situations over time. Trying to obey the second commandment without the first usually does not work.

Finally, there is a straight line between love and suffering. If we love greatly, it is fairly certain we will soon suffer, because we have somehow given up control to another. Undoubtedly, this is why we are told to be faithful in our loves, because such long-term loyalty will always lead us to the necessary pruning (John 15:2) of the narcissistic self.

Until we love and until we suffer, we all try to figure out life and death with our minds, but afterwards a Larger Source opens up within us and we “think” and feel quite differently: “Until knowing the Love, which is beyond all knowledge” (Ephesians 3:19). Thus Jesus would naturally say something like, “This is my commandment, **you must** love one another” (John 13:34). Love, I believe, is the only way to initially and safely open the door of awareness and aliveness, and then suffering for that love keeps that door open and available for ever greater growth. They are the two great doors, and we dare not leave them closed.

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

A VIEWPOINT

John Duns Scotus, among others, was clear in his thinking that the incarnation was always in God’s plan. It was not a Plan B! He was absolutely clear that God’s love was unconditional and unshakable. That God required a “price” to be paid on our behalf was not logical in the path of such giving love, which would and does bring with it forgiveness. Whether we forgive ourselves or, indeed, others is another matter. The incarnation is God becoming, in all humility, one of us. His love is so profound that he comes to us in our terms. Jesus is the Christ in human flesh and He shows us directly how we should love God. With the birth of Jesus at Nazareth, salvation is at hand. The Easter message will follow automatically and so Christmas is the significant feast which cannot be overstated. This in no way lessens the importance of the Resurrection; it simply puts it into context. And, this in no way says that any other view of the incarnation and the passion and death of Jesus is wrong; the Franciscan Way is simply a different way of looking at it.

Jesus is born holy and so are we. The difference is that we soon become detached from that holiness and find it so difficult to get back on the track God always intended. God’s gift to us, among all the others he showers upon us, is to call us to the Franciscan Way. This Christmas let us begin again and give ourselves to God’s will. It is the present He dearly wishes from us.

***May the Lord bless you and keep you
May He set his face to shine upon you
May He give you His peace***

Have a Happy and Holy Christmas in the Franciscan Way

Edward

Viewpoint is published 4 times a year at the end of February, May, August, and November. Copy may be sent to me either by email to cuerden2ed@talktalk.net, or by “snail mail” to Edward Cuerden, 94 Mays Lane, Fareham, Hampshire PO14 2ED