

Midland Franciscan

Newsletter of the Midland Region of the Secular Franciscan Order GB

Summer 2017



Bed In Summer - Robert Louis Stevenson

In winter I get up at night
And dress by yellow candle-light.
In summer quite the other way,
I have to go to bed by day.

I have to go to bed and see
The birds still hopping on the tree,
Or hear the grown-up people's feet
Still going past me in the street.

And does it not seem hard to you,
When all the sky is clear and blue,
And I should like so much to play,
To have to go to bed by day?

Summer Evening. John Clare

The frog half fearful jumps across the path,
And little mouse that leaves its hole at eve
Nimbles with timid dread beneath the swath;
My rustling steps awhile their joys deceive,
Till past,—and then the cricket sings more strong,
And grasshoppers in merry moods still wear
The short night weary with their fretting song.
Up from behind the molehill jumps the hare,
Cheat of his chosen bed, and from the bank
The yellowhammer flutters in short fears
From off its nest hid in the grasses rank,
And drops again when no more noise it hears.
Thus nature's human link and endless thrall,
Proud man, still seems the enemy of all.

From the OFS Rule

United by their vocation as "brothers and sisters of penance" and motivated by the dynamic power of the gospel, let them [Secular Franciscans] conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the gospel calls "conversion." Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily.

On this road to renewal the sacrament of reconciliation is the privileged sign of the Father's mercy and the source of grace.

From the OFS General Constitutions

Article 8

1. The Secular Franciscans commit themselves by their profession to live the Gospel according to Franciscan spirituality in their secular condition.
2. They seek to deepen, in the light of faith, the values and choices of the evangelical life according to the Rule of the OFS:
 - *Rule 7* in a continually renewed journey of conversion and of formation;
 - *Rule 4,3* open to the challenges that come from society and from the Church's life situation, "going from Gospel to life and from life to Gospel;"
 - in the personal and communal dimensions of this journey.

Psalm 45(46)

God is for us a refuge and strength,
a helper close at hand, in time of distress,
so we shall not fear though the earth should rock,
though the mountains fall into the depths of the sea;
even though its waters rage and foam,
even though the mountains be shaken by its waves.

The Lord of hosts is with us:
the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

News and Reflections From Around the Region.

Clay Cross.

Thoughts for Summer 2017

Now I do hope this doesn't appear to be showing off, but great things are still happening to our merry group at Clay Cross.

Two months ago Terry Mortimer professed into the Order and we have three candidates that are being Admitted into the Fraternity in the next month. Sister Berta from Slovakia was Professed into the Order at Clay Cross as well! And I hope I get this right, but Sister Patricia is now Mother General for the whole of the UK's Nuns [who belong to her Order]. WOW!

We are not supposed to be proud, but we are animated by the positive progress that is being made amongst this world of doom and gloom. We can be cheerful when we try, and St. Francis is smiling kindly upon us.

Summer is a time of cheerfulness, warmer climate conditions so we venture outside and meet our neighbours again, well, at least those we are still talking to.

This time of year seems to be a period of moving on in life. We think of things we want to do to make things better before we batten down the hatches for Winter. Hopefully we can make extra progress in the growth and Spirit of all our Fraternities. We all have to go through the tough times to make the better times seem so good. Long may we put the effort in to achieve this aim of our Secular lives in the footsteps of God's chosen one.

Enjoy the sunshine that God has created for us to benefit from in so many ways, and bless, not curse, the rain that keeps it all vibrant and alive.

We are nothing without either. Adrian Goodall ofs

Rednal and Stourbridge.

Fraternity programme for the remainder of 2017 is as follows:

8 July 2017 (Stourbridge) "New Seeds of Contemplation": Solitude Is Not Separation.

12 August 2017 (Rednal) Informal Meeting

9 September 2017 (Stourbridge) "New Seeds of Contemplation": Integrity

7 October 2017 (Rednal) Transitus Celebration

11 November 2017 (Stourbridge) "New Seeds of Contemplation": The General Dance.

9 December 2017 (Rednal) Advent/Crib Service

As the majority of present members find it easier to get to Rednal than to Stourbridge, from January 2018 all fraternity meetings will be at Rednal.

St. Paul reminds us that there must be no passing of premature judgement. (1 Corinthians 4:1-16.)

People must think of us as Christ's servants, stewards entrusted with the mysteries of God. What is expected of stewards is that each one should be found worthy of trust. Not that it makes the slightest difference to me whether you, or indeed any human tribunal, find me worthy or not. I will not even pass judgement on myself. True, my conscience does not reproach me at all, but that does not prove that I am acquitted: the Lord alone is my judge. There must be no passing of premature judgement. Leave that until the Lord comes; he will light up all that is hidden in the dark and reveal the secret intentions of all our hearts. Then will be the time for each one to have whatever praise is deserved, from God.

Now in everything I have said here I have taken Apollos and myself as an example (remember the maxim: 'Keep to what is written'); it is not for you, so full of your own importance, to go taking sides for one against another. In any case, has anybody given you some special right? What do you have that was not given to you? And if it was given, how can you boast as though it were not? Is it that you have everything you want – that you are rich already, in possession of your kingdom, with us left outside? Indeed I wish you were really kings, and we could be kings with you! But instead, it seems to me, God has put us apostles at the end of his parade, with those sentenced to death; it is true – we have been put on show in front of the whole universe, angels as well as people. Here we are, fools for the sake of Christ, while you are the learned ones in Christ; we have no power, but you are influential; you are celebrities, we are nobodies. To this day, we go without food and drink and clothes; we are beaten and have no homes; we work for our living with our own hands. When we are cursed, we answer with a blessing; when we are hounded, we put up with it; we are insulted and we answer politely. We are treated as the offal of the world, still to this day, the scum of the earth.

I am saying all this not just to make you ashamed but to bring you, as my dearest children, to your senses. You might have thousands of guardians in Christ, but not more than one father and it was I who begot you in Christ Jesus by preaching the Good News. That is why I beg you to copy me.

Pope Gregory the Great on Thomas the Apostle.

Dearly beloved, what do you see in these events? Do you really believe that it was by chance that this chosen disciple was absent, then came and heard, heard and doubted, doubted and touched, touched and believed? It was not by chance but in God's providence. In a marvellous way God's mercy arranged that the disbelieving disciple, in touching the wounds of his master's body, should heal our wounds of disbelief. The disbelief of Thomas has done more for our faith than the faith of the other disciples. As he touches Christ and is won over to belief, every doubt is cast aside and our faith is strengthened. So the disciple who doubted, then felt Christ's wounds, becomes a witness to the reality of the resurrection.

Among other gifts of graces that Francis had received from the bounteous Giver, he merited to abound, as by an especial prerogative all his own, in the riches of simplicity, through his love of sublimest Poverty. The holy man regarded Poverty as the familiar friend of the Son of God, and as one now rejected by the whole world, and was zealous to espouse her with such a constant affection as that not only did he leave father and mother for her sake, but he did even part with all that might have been his. For none was ever so greedy of gold as he of poverty, nor did any man ever guard treasure more anxiously than he this Gospel pearl. One thing more than aught else was displeasing in his eyes, to wit, if he beheld aught in the Brethren that was not wholly in accord with poverty. He himself, verily, from his entrance into the Religion until his death was content with, and counted himself rich with, a tunic, a cord, and breeches. Ofttimes with tears he would recall unto mind the poverty of Christ Jesus, and of His Mother, declaring Poverty to be the queen of virtues inasmuch as she shone forth thus excellently in the King of Kings and in the Queen His Mother.

From The Major Legend of the Life of St. Francis. St. Bonaventure.

From online version at <https://www.ecatholic2000.com/bonaventure/assisi/francis.shtml>

The Eucharist is the Lord's Passover.

From a treatise by Saint Gaudentius of Brescia, bishop (died 410AD).

One man has died for all, and now in every church in the mystery of bread and wine he heals those for whom he is offered in sacrifice, giving life to those who believe and holiness to those who consecrate the offering. This is the flesh of the Lamb; this is his blood. The bread that came down from heaven declared: *The bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.* It is significant, too, that his blood should be given to us in the form of wine, for his own words in the gospel, *I am the true vine,* imply clearly enough that whenever wine is offered as a representation of Christ's passion, it is offered as his blood. This means that it was of Christ that the blessed patriarch Jacob prophesied when he said: *He will wash his tunic in wine and his cloak in the blood of the grape.* The tunic was our flesh, which Christ was to put on like a garment and which he was to wash in his own blood.

Creator and Lord of all things, whatever their nature, he brought forth bread from the earth and changed it into his own body. Not only had he the power to do this, but he had promised it; and, as he had changed water into wine, he also changed wine into his own blood. *It is the Lord's passover,* Scripture tells us, that is, the Lord's passing. We are no longer to look upon the bread and wine as earthly substances. They have become heavenly, because Christ has passed into them and changed them into his body and blood. What you receive is the body of him who is the heavenly bread, and the blood of him who is the sacred vine; for when he offered his disciples the consecrated bread and wine, he said: *This is my body, this is my blood.* We have put our trust in him. I urge you to have faith in him; truth can never deceive.

When Christ told the crowds that they must eat his flesh and drink his blood, they were horrified and began to murmur among themselves: *This teaching is too hard; who can be expected to listen to it?* As I have already told you, thoughts such as these must be banished. The Lord himself used heavenly fire to drive them away by going on to declare: *It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is of no avail. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.*

“Contemplation is not the stuff of charlatans, telepathists, and magicians. Contemplation is about very basic, very real things. It is about seeing God in everyone, finding God everywhere, and responding to all of life as a message from God. Contemplation is not a road show of visions. It is not spiritual snake oil. It is not an exalted state of being. It is simply consciousness of the Ultimate in the immediate.”

“When I float in a sea of God, there is nothing not sacred. ‘Treat all things,’ - the buckets and the plants and the spades and the land - ‘as vessels of the altar’, the Rule of Benedict instructs. It is a profoundly contemplative statement.”

From. Sr. Joan Chittister OSB: “Illuminated Life—Monastic Wisdom for Seekers of Light”. Orbis Books

It was wittily and very aptly said by the man who first thought of it: “Every man's filth smells sweet to him.” Our eyes can see nothing behind us. A hundred times a day, when laughing at our neighbours, we are laughing at ourselves. We detest in others faults that are more glaring in us, and, with surprising impudence and thoughtlessness, express our surprise at them. Michel de Montaigne: *Essay On The Art Of Conversation.*

“I will chide no breather in the world but myself, against whom I know most faults. “ Orlando in “As You Like It” Act 3 Scene 2. William Shakespeare.

Or, in the words of Jesus in the Gospels: “take the log out of your own eye first before removing the speck from another's eye.”

Song of Songs 2:8-14,8:6-7

I hear my Beloved.
See how he comes
leaping on the mountains,
bounding over the hills.

My Beloved is like a gazelle,
like a young stag.
See where he stands
behind our wall.

He looks in at the window,
he peers through the lattice.
My Beloved lifts up his voice,
he says to me,
'Come then, my love,
my lovely one, come.
For see, winter is past,
the rains are over and gone.

The flowers appear on the earth.
The season of glad songs has come,
the cooing of the turtledove is heard
in our land.

The fig tree is forming its first figs
and the blossoming vines give out their fragrance.
Come then, my love,
my lovely one, come.

My dove, hiding in the clefts of the rock,
in the coverts of the cliff,
show me your face,
let me hear your voice;
for your voice is sweet
and your face is beautiful.'

Set me like a seal on your heart,
like a seal on your arm.
For love is strong as death,
jealousy as relentless as Sheol.

The flash of it is a flash of fire,
a flame of the Lord himself.
Love no floods can quench,
no torrents drown.

Were a man to offer all the wealth
of his house to buy love,
contempt is all he would purchase.

From a sermon by St Bede the Venerable

Mary proclaims the greatness of the Lord working in her soul

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour. With these words Mary first acknowledges the special gifts she has been given. Then she recalls God's universal favours, bestowed unceasingly on the human race.

When a man devotes all his thoughts to the praise and service of the Lord, he proclaims God's greatness. His observance of God's commands, moreover, shows that he has God's power and greatness always at heart. His spirit rejoices in God his saviour and delights in the mere recollection of his creator who gives him hope for eternal salvation.

These words are often for all God's creations, but especially for the Mother of God. She alone was chosen, and she burned with spiritual love for the son she so joyously conceived. Above all other saints, she alone could truly rejoice in Jesus, her saviour, for she knew that he who was the source of eternal salvation would be born in time in her body, in one person both her own son and her Lord.

For the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. Mary attributes nothing to her own merits. She refers all her greatness to the gift of the one whose essence is power and whose nature is greatness, for he fills with greatness and strength the small and the weak who believe in him.

She did well to add: and holy is his name, to warn those who heard, and indeed all who would receive his words, that they must believe and call upon his name. For they too could share in everlasting holiness and true salvation according to the words of the prophet: and it will come to pass, that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. This is the name she spoke of earlier: and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour.

Therefore it is an excellent and fruitful custom of holy Church that we should sing Mary's hymn at the time of evening prayer. By meditating upon the incarnation, our devotion is kindled, and by remembering the example of God's Mother, we are encouraged to lead a life of virtue. Such virtues are best achieved in the evening. We are weary after the day's work and worn out by our distractions. The time for rest is near, and our minds are ready for contemplation.

Cuthbert's narration of the death of Bede

"I desire to see Christ"

On the Tuesday before Ascension, Bede began to suffer greater difficulties in breathing and his feet began to swell slightly. Nevertheless, he continued to teach us and dictate all day, and made jokes about his illness: "Learn quickly," he would say, "because I don't know how long I'll last: my Creator may take me very soon." But it seemed to us that he was perfectly conscious of his approaching end.

He spent all night in giving thanks to God. As dawn broke on the Wednesday, he ordered us to finish writing what we had started, and we did this until the third hour [mid-morning]. Afterwards we carried the relics of the saints in solemn procession, as it was the custom to do on that day. One of us stayed with him, and asked him: "Dear master, the book is almost complete, there is one chapter left to go – would it be difficult for you if I asked you to do more dictation?." "No," Bede replied, "it is easy. Take your pen and ink, and write quickly" – which he did.

At the ninth hour [mid-afternoon] he said to me "I have a few precious things in my cell: some pepper, some napkins, and some incense. Run quickly and call the priests of the monastery to me, so that I can give to them the few little gifts that God gave me." When they came he spoke to them in turn, giving advice to each one and begging him to say a Mass and pray for him; which they all willingly promised to do.

They were grief-stricken and wept, especially because he had said that he thought they would not see his face much more in this world. But at the same time it made them glad when he said "It is time – if it is my Maker's will – to return to him who made me, who shaped me out of nothing and gave me existence. I have lived a long time, and the righteous judge has provided well for me all my life: *now the time of my departure is at hand, for I long to dissolve and be with Christ*; indeed, my soul longs to see Christ its king in all his beauty." This is just one saying of his: he said many other things too, to our great benefit – and thus he spent his last day in gladness until the evening.

Then Wilbert (the boy who asked him for dictation) asked him again: "Dear master, there is still one sentence left to write." "Write it quickly," he answered. A little later the boy said "now it is completed" and Bede replied "you have spoken truly, *it is finished*. Hold up my head, because I love to sit facing my holy place, the place where I used to pray, and as I sit I can call upon my Father."

And so, on the floor of his cell, he sat and sang "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit"; and as he named the Spirit, the Breath of God, he breathed the last breath from his own body. With all the labour that he had given to the praise of God, there can be no doubt that he went into the joys of heaven that he had always longed for.

Aristotle says that happiness is about living well and doing well. It's about avoiding excess and devoting myself to the highest dimensions of life - moral, spiritual, cultural, and social. It means living with a clear conscience. It means living a rich spiritual life. It means immersing myself in the best of the arts, the best of sports, the best of people. Because these are the things that make me a whole person, a person of good heart and clear mind who lives to benefit others as well as myself.

Joan Chittister: Radical Spirit: 12 Ways to Live a Free and Authentic Life.

The national website for the Secular Franciscan Order in Great Britain: www.ofsgb.org

The Order's international website: www.ciofs.org

St. Paul to the Romans 8:5-27

The unspiritual are interested only in what is unspiritual, but the spiritual are interested in spiritual things. It is death to limit oneself to what is unspiritual; life and peace can only come with concern for the spiritual. That is because to limit oneself to what is unspiritual is to be at enmity with God: such a limitation never could and never does submit to God's law. People who are interested only in unspiritual things can never be pleasing to God. Your interests, however, are not in the unspiritual, but in the spiritual, since the Spirit of God has made his home in you. In fact, unless you possessed the Spirit of Christ you would not belong to him. Though your body may be dead it is because of sin, but if Christ is in you then your spirit is life itself because you have been justified; and if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, then he who raised Jesus from the dead will give life to your own mortal bodies through his Spirit living in you.

So then there is no necessity for us to obey our unspiritual selves or to live unspiritual lives. If you do live in that way, you are doomed to die; but if by the Spirit you put an end to the misdeeds of the body you will live.

Everyone moved by the Spirit is a son of God. The spirit you received is not the spirit of slaves bringing fear into your lives again; it is the spirit of sons, and it makes us cry out, 'Abba, Father!' The Spirit himself and our spirit bear united witness that we are children of God. And if we are children we are heirs as well: heirs of God and coheirs with Christ, sharing his sufferings so as to share his glory.

I think that what we suffer in this life can never be compared to the glory, as yet unrevealed, which is waiting for us. The whole creation is eagerly waiting for God to reveal his sons. It was not for any fault on the part of creation that it was made unable to attain its purpose, it was made so by God; but creation still retains the hope of being freed, like us, from its slavery to decadence, to enjoy the same freedom and glory as the children of God. From the beginning till now the entire creation, as we know, has been groaning in one great act of giving birth; and not only creation, but all of us who possess the first-fruits of the Spirit, we too groan inwardly as we wait for our bodies to be set free. For we must be content to hope that we shall be saved – our salvation is not in sight, we should not have to be hoping for it if it were – but, as I say, we must hope to be saved since we are not saved yet – it is something we must wait for with patience.

The Spirit too comes to help us in our weakness. For when we cannot choose words in order to pray properly, the Spirit himself expresses our plea in a way that could never be put into words, and God who knows everything in our hearts knows perfectly well what he means, and that the pleas of the saints expressed by the Spirit are according to the mind of God.

Calm is all nature as a resting wheel.

The kine are couched upon the dewy grass;
 The horse alone, seen dimly as I pass,
 Is cropping audibly his later meal:
 Dark is the ground; a slumber seems to steal
 O'er vale, and mountain, and the starless sky.
 Now, in this blank of things, a harmony,
 Home-felt, and home-created, comes to heal
 That grief for which the senses still supply
 Fresh food; for only then, when memory
 Is hushed, am I at rest. My Friends! restrain
 Those busy cares that would allay my pain;
 Oh! leave me to myself, nor let me feel
 The officious touch that makes me droop again.

William Wordsworth.

John Donne. Holy Sonnet 10

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
 Mighty and dreadful, for thou are not so;
 For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
 Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
 From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
 Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,
 And soonest our best men with thee do go,
 Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
 Thou'art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
 And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
 And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well
 And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
 One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
 And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

The Happiness of Father Happé. Cecily Wallace.

This book first appeared in 1938 and was reprinted in 2012. Its principal character is an elderly French Franciscan friar who is a notable scholar and author, with a series of important books published. Yet he is the most unprepossessing figure, with a somewhat poor command of English. He is sent to England, to the friary at a seaside town called Shingle Bay. The book records a series of encounters with various people in the area who at first are disposed to dismiss Fr Happé as a bumbling old fool until they realise that he is profoundly spiritual, humble, gentle, deeply learned and compassionate. His wisdom helps those he meets to better understand themselves and to develop more loving relationships with God and neighbour. The author scatters her pearls of wisdom with a telling yet light touch and with a most delicious sense of humour. My only complaint about this delightful book is that it isn't long enough. I should have been happy to read much, much more about Happé!

Seán Ward ofs.

To become human means to become "poor,"

to have nothing that one might brag about before God. To become human means to have no support and no power, save the enthusiasm and commitment of one's own heart. Becoming human involves proclaiming the poverty of the human spirit in the face of the total claims of a transcendent God. With the courageous acceptance of such poverty, the divine epic of our salvation began. Jesus held back nothing; he clung to nothing, and nothing served as a shield for him. Even his true origin did not shield him: "He.... did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself" (Phil. 2:6).

Poverty of Spirit - Johannes Baptist Metz.**Paulist Press**

This wonderfully wise exposition of what it means to be poor in spirit is available on Kindle for £3.30. Used print copies available from Amazon for around £1.30 plus postage.

All too easily, we live alienated from the truth of our Being. The threatening "nothingness" of our poor infinity and infinite poverty drives us hither and thither among the distractions of everyday cares. We run away from the "night," with its fear and trembling before the truth of our Being, into the bright lights of easily understood platitudes. St. Paul termed this as seeking the security of the "Law," a security that distorts the elusive mystery and open authenticity of our Being. The Bible calls "Pharisees" those who try to evade the depth of their innate poverty through clinging to the Law. They are "rich in spirit" and the most dangerous opponents of poverty, and hence of Jesus, because they vaunt their own brand of piety and seek to set up God as an opponent of poverty. **Poverty of Spirit - Johannes Baptist Metz.**

From the Acts of the martyrdom of Saint Justin and his companion saints.

“I have accepted the true doctrines of the Christians.”

The saints were seized and brought before the prefect of Rome, whose name was Rusticus. As they stood before the judgement seat, Rusticus the prefect said to Justin: “Above all, have faith in the gods and obey the emperors.” Justin said: “We cannot be accused or condemned for obeying the commands of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.”

Rusticus said: “What system of teaching do you profess?” Justin said: “I have tried to learn about every system, but I have accepted the true doctrines of the Christians, though these are not approved by those who are held fast by error.”

The prefect Rusticus said: “Are those doctrines approved by you, wretch that you are?” Justin said: “Yes, for I follow them with their correct teaching.”

The prefect Rusticus said: “What sort of teaching is that?” Justin said: “Worship the God of the Christians. We hold him to be from the beginning the one creator and maker of the whole creation, of things seen and things unseen. We worship also the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He was foretold by the prophets as the future herald of salvation for the human race and the teacher of distinguished disciples. For myself, since I am a human being, I consider that what I say is insignificant in comparison with his infinite godhead. I acknowledge the existence of a prophetic power, for the one I have just spoken of as the Son of God was the subject of prophecy. I know that the prophets were inspired from above when they spoke of his coming among men.”

Rusticus said: “You are a Christian, then?” Justin said: “Yes, I am a Christian.”

The prefect said to Justin: “You are called a learned man and think that you know what is true teaching. Listen: if you were scourged and beheaded, are you convinced that you would go up to heaven?” Justin said: “I hope that I shall enter God’s house if I suffer that way. For I know that God’s favour is stored up until the end of the whole world for all who have lived good lives.”

The prefect Rusticus said: “Do you have an idea that you will go up to heaven to receive some suitable rewards?” Justin said: “It is not an idea that I have; it is something I know well and hold to be most certain.”

The prefect Rusticus said: “Now let us come to the point at issue, which is necessary and urgent. Gather round then and with one accord offer sacrifice to the gods.” Justin said: “No one who is right thinking stoops from true worship to false worship.”

The prefect Rusticus said: “If you do not do as you are commanded you will be tortured without mercy.” Justin said: “We hope to suffer torment for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, and so be saved. For this will bring us salvation and confidence as we stand before the more terrible and universal judgement-seat of our Lord and Saviour.”

In the same way the other martyrs also said: “Do what you will. We are Christians; we do not offer sacrifice to idols.”

The prefect Rusticus pronounced sentence, saying: “Let those who have refused to sacrifice to the gods and to obey the command of the emperor be scourged and led away to suffer capital punishment according to the ruling of the laws.” Glorifying God, the holy martyrs went out to the accustomed place. They were beheaded, and so fulfilled their witness of martyrdom in confessing their faith in their Saviour.

Formation Matters

(Seán Ward offs—Regional Minister of Formation.)

Radical Spirit: 12 Ways to Live a Free and Authentic Life. Joan Chittister OSB (2017)

There are some striking similarities, in the letter and the spirit, between the Rule of St. Benedict and the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order. In *Radical Spirit*, Sr. Joan explores and explains Chapter 7 of the OSB Rule, which deals with the 12 Steps of Humility:

1. recognize that God is God ; 2. know that God's will is best for you; 3. seek direction from wisdom figures ; 4. endure the pains of development and do not give up ; 5. acknowledge faults and strip away the masks; 6. be content with less than the best; 7. let go of a false sense of self; 8. preserve tradition and learn from the community; 9. listen; 10. never ridicule anyone or anything; 11. speak kindly; 12 be serene, stay calm.

Sr. Joan explores and explains each step in some detail, relating, some of the struggles she had, as a young postulant, novice and in the early days as a professed member of the Order, to learn and understand and appreciate the wisdom of the Rule. As Franciscans I suppose that we, too may struggle to understand the wisdom of our Rule and General Constitutions (especially if we do not take time out to return now and then to the study of them!) . As she grew older, Sr Joan says that she came to value the wisdom of the OSB Rule and this book is the fruit of many years of reflection.

A short extract from the book :

“The Rule gives us three criteria by which to assess our likelihood of ever being truly happy. Not simply satisfied, that is, but genuinely contented with life. Happy. First, if you have not attached your sense of self to having the best of everything, you won’t be crushed when you see someone with things that cost more than yours. You’ll be happy to simply have what you truly need to function. Like a decent car that can get you across town, maybe. Or a small yard to plant a few flowers, maybe. Or a good dog to keep you company in that small apartment and a good book to read. Second, if you don’t need to be the center of attention, you will be happy just to be part of a group of good people who do good things together. The thirst for attention is a toxic brew. If it comes—in athletics, in government, in public activities—you will be scrutinized to the point of depression. And if it doesn’t, you’ll be depressed, too. Third, if you don’t expect a constant deluge of privilege and pre-eminence, then not experiencing those things will not disturb you. You will be just as pleased with general admission tickets as you’d be in the box seats. After all, it’s the same show.”

Our OFS Rule states:

Trusting the Father, Christ chose for Himself and His mother a poor and humble life, even though He valued created things attentively and lovingly. Let the Secular Franciscans seek a proper spirit of detachment from temporal goods by simplifying their own material needs. Let them be mindful that according to the gospel they are stewards of the goods received for the benefit of God's children. Thus, in the spirit of the Beatitudes, and as pilgrims and strangers on their way to the home of the Father, they should strive to purify their hearts from every tendency and yearning for possession and power.

Talking about Step 6 of Humility, be content with less than the best, Sr Joan writes: *“This step of humility isn’t really about whether we should have things or not...It’s about the treatment we come to expect from the world around us that makes the difference between humility and narcissism, between simplicity of life and overbearing self-importance.”*

Our Rule implies this too. The desire for possessions and power feed our sense of self-importance and stoke the fires of our resentment that we are not getting a fair deal, attitudes that are too, too prevalent in the world today.

In “As You Like It”, William Shakespeare has Corin the old shepherd say:

“Sir, I am a true labourer. I earn that I eat, get that I wear, owe no man hate, envy no man’s happiness, glad of other men’s good, content with my harm (bad fortune), and the greatest of my pride is to see my ewes graze and my lambs suck”.

This concept of “enough-ness” is perennial wisdom, indeed. Would that we could all embrace it. How much better the world would be.

Formation Matters— continued

The Canticle of Brother Sun. Francis of Assisi.

Most High, all powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory, the honour,
and all blessing.

To You alone, Most High, do they belong,
and no man is worthy to mention Your name.

Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures,
especially through my lord Brother Sun,
who brings the day; and you give light through him.
And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendour!
Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.

Praise be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon
and the stars, in heaven you formed them
clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene,
and every kind of weather through which
You give sustenance to Your creatures.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,
which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom you light the night and he is beautiful
and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains us and governs us and who produces
varied fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.

Praised be You, my Lord,
through those who give pardon for Your love,
and bear infirmity and tribulation.

Blessed are those who endure in peace
for by You, Most High, they shall be crowned.

Praised be You, my Lord,
through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whom no living man can escape.

Woe to those who die in mortal sin.
Blessed are those whom death will
find in Your most holy will,
for the second death shall do them no harm.

Praise and bless my Lord,
and give Him thanks
and serve Him with great humility. AMEN

Will I see My Dog *in* Heaven? Jack Winz OFM

“no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart
conceived, what God has prepared for those who love
him” . (I Cor 2:9).

As St. Paul tells us, we cannot even begin to under-
stand what God has prepared for us. Jesus in the
gospels is just as circumspect.

But that shouldn’t prevent us from exploring the
Scriptures and the sayings of the saints to help us to
form some ideas about heaven.

Jack Winz’s book does just that. He calmly and
sensibly examines the evidence about God’s love for
creation and draws some modest hope-filled
conclusions. Accordingly, his enquiry is set in the
context of the broader question, “Does God intend
the whole created world to share in God’s saving
plan?” This is familiar Franciscan territory. Jack Winz
examines this question by thinking about the meaning
of the creation story in Genesis, Noah’s Ark, the na-
ture psalms, the Incarnation and resurrection of Jesus,
Jesus’ own use of nature symbols in his teaching, St.
Francis’ Canticle of the Creatures and the significance
of his calling all creatures brother or sister, the animal
symbols in the Book of Revelation and yearning of
creation to be free.

In the introduction he relates a story about a young boy
whose dog had died. He asked the Franciscan pastor at
the local church if he would see his dog in heaven. The
reply was an unequivocal “yes, you will see your dog in
heaven—if that is what it takes to make you happy”.

Psalm 148:7-10

Praise the LORD from the earth,
you sea monsters and all deeps,
⁸ fire and hail, snow and frost,
stormy wind fulfilling his command!

⁹ Mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars!

¹⁰ Wild animals and all cattle,
creeping things and flying birds!



Franciscan Lectio Divina

We shall not be printing any more Lectio Divina texts in Midland Franciscan. We invite you to choose Scriptural texts for yourselves and, if you wish, use the format below to help you to reflect on them. How much time is spent on each section is a matter for you to decide.

Opening Prayer

First reading of the text – **Lectio** – Being open to the word of God in silence, like Mary, ponder what these words might mean.

Second reading of the text - **Meditatio** – Again in silence, ponder the question: What might God be saying to you personally in this text?

Third reading of the text - **Collatio** – *if you are reflecting on the text in a group you may, if you wish, share your thoughts about what the text means to you with members of the group.*

Fourth reading of the text - **Oratio** - Prayer of the heart. If you wish to, you are now invited to express aloud or in silence any heart-felt prayer arising from your reflections.

Fifth reading of the text.

Fifth Reading of the text—**Contemplatio** – Be still and know that I am God.

Yielding to God’s presence in a spirit of openness, allow yourself to be drawn into the stillness where words give way to silence. Rest in God’s presence.

Actio - *how will you act on the teaching?*



Scripture Stop.

The LORD Answers Job (Job 38:4-30)

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy? “Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb?— when I made the clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band, and prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors, and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stopped?’ “Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place, so that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth, and the wicked be shaken out of it? It is changed like clay under the seal, and it is dyed like a garment. Light is withheld from the wicked, and their uplifted arm is broken.

“Have you entered into the springs of the sea, or walked in the recesses of the deep? Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness? Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth? Declare, if you know all this. “Where is the way to the dwelling of light, and where is the place of darkness, that you may take it to its territory and that you may discern the paths to its home? Surely you know, for you were born then, and the number of your days is great!

“Have you entered the storehouses of the snow, or have you seen the storehouses of the hail, which I have reserved for the time of trouble, for the day of battle and war? ²⁴What is the way to the place where the light is distributed, or where the east wind is scattered upon the earth? “Who has cut a channel for the torrents of rain, and a way for the thunderbolt, to bring rain on a land where no one lives, on the desert, which is empty of human life, to satisfy the waste and desolate land, and to make the ground put forth grass? “Has the rain a father, or who has begotten the drops of dew? From whose womb did the ice come forth, and who has given birth to the hoarfrost of heaven? The waters become hard like stone, and the face of the deep is frozen. From whose womb did the ice come forth, and who has given birth to the hoarfrost of heaven?