

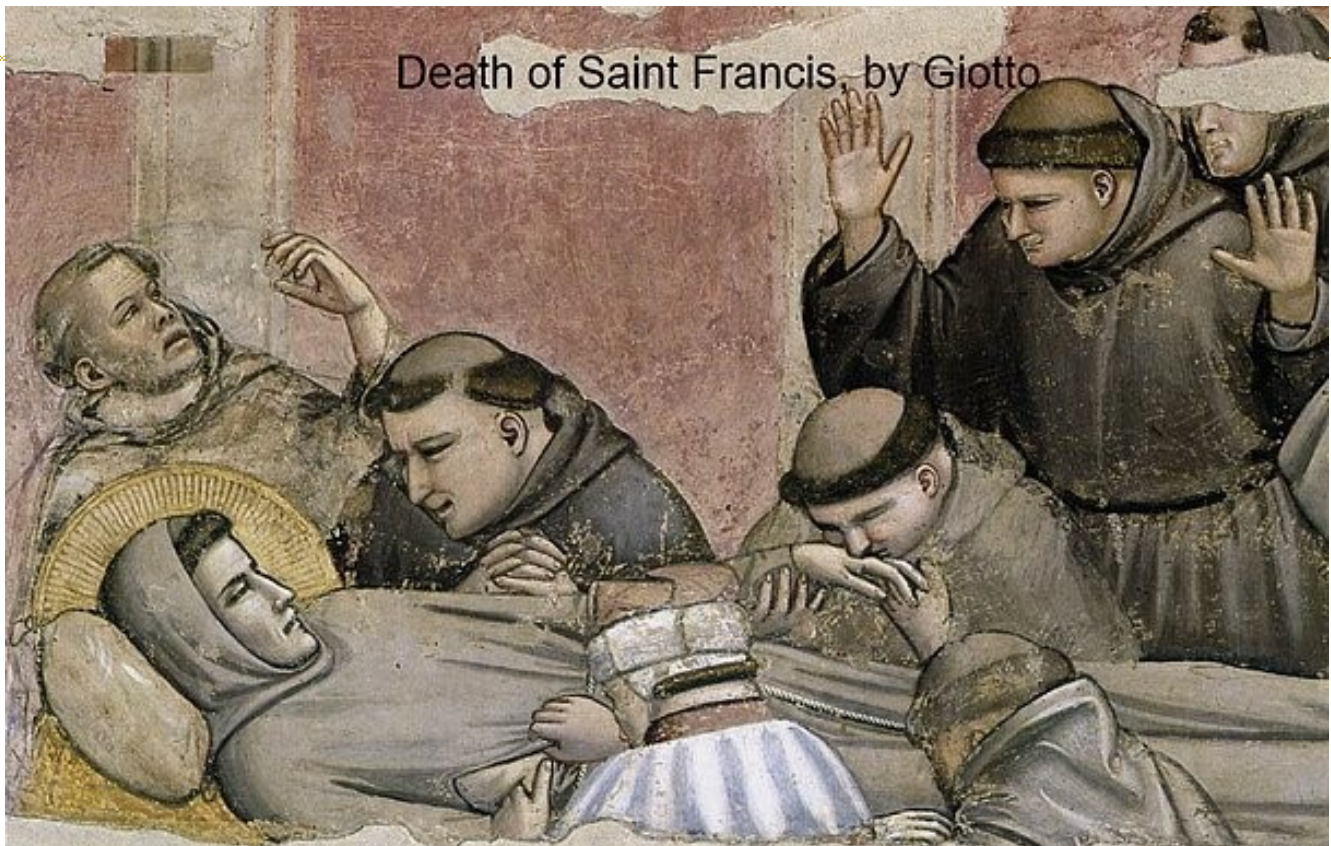
The Cord

Secular Franciscan Order
St Bonaventure Region
South East England UK

Issue 32 Transitus 2021

As we celebrate the Transitus, in spirit with our brothers and sisters all over the world, let's remind ourselves of the story....

“On the eve of his death, the saint, in imitation of his Divine Master, had bread brought to him and broken. This he distributed among those present, blessing Bernard of Quintaville, his first companion, Elias, his vicar, and all the others in order. “I have done my part,” he said next, “may Christ teach you to do yours.” Then wishing to give a last token of detachment and to show he no longer had anything in common with the world, Francis removed his poor habit and lay down on the bare ground, covered with a borrowed cloth, rejoicing that he was able to keep faith with his Lady Poverty to the end. After a while he asked to have read to him the Passion according to St. John, and then in faltering tones he himself intoned Psalm cxli. At the concluding verse, ‘Bring my soul out of prison’, Francis was led away from earth by ‘Sister Death’, in whose praise he had shortly before added a new strophe to his ‘Canticle of the Sun’.”



Death of Saint Francis, by Giotto



Contemplation and care for creation by Pope Francis

When I give audiences in Saint Peters Square, I greet the three or four rows of sick people who are there. Particularly in the case of the children, I ask: "what does he or she have?" I would say about 40 percent of the time its 'unusual sickness' caused by some neglect of the environment: the irresponsible use of waste, the reckless deployment of pesticides that are continually being developed. All these things, among others, end up making people ill and making the future of the generations to come. (Let us Dream p32)

Everything is closely interrelated. (Laudato si 137)

Our common home, creation is not a mere "resource". Creatures have a value in and of themselves and each one reflects in its own way a ray of God's infinite goodness and wisdom.

OFS GB: SOUTH EAST REGION—NEWS

Hello everyone we hope you enjoy this Transitus edition of our newsletter.

First here is news in brief of what's been happening in our region:

Kathy Maskens our Regional Minister asked us to focus on several key issues over this coming year.

At our first physical meeting in over 18 months at Erith Kathy highlighted Communication and Formation as particular areas of focus.

Kathy explained that during lockdown when we were unable to see each other physically there was very little information coming from Region or National.

There are concerns also regarding the need for a more open system of two way communication. Fraternities should be more easily in touch internally with each other and also from a National and even global perspective.

It is acknowledged that for those members without use of technology these issues are more difficult. If anyone would like help with using any technology please do ask your regional minister as training is available.

Ashford have not been able to have any meetings during lockdown as their premises are closed.

Croydon had Fraternity Sundays and Formation Tuesdays throughout the Pandemic. This Sunday (26 September)we

look forward to Errol Quagraine moving up to Candidate! We have 1 Enquirer - Jude, and 3 Visitors: Lorraine (Jersey), Florema (Sweden) and Alfonso (local). Our elections will be in Spring 2022.

Hollington have managed to have monthly meetings using Zoom and have resumed physical meetings.

Generally, and understandably, everyone has found it difficult during lockdown but there is some good news in that Hollington had two professions in May: Mags and David Ivatts were professed and Tim Castle will be professed in Spring 2022.

Erith will be holding fraternity elections on 7 November.

South East Region Elections:

Minister: Kathy Maskens

Vice Minister: Mark Kennett

Treasurer: Cordelia Rice

Secretary: Salvina Bartholomeusz

SPECIAL THANKS AND PRAYER REQUEST

For our Brother in Christ and St Francis **Michael McCarthy** who has been regional secretary. Michael carried out his role with dedication and gentleness despite feeling unqualified in every way. A wonderful kind and warm person. Please pray for happy outcome for current medical investigations.

OFSGB South East England UK DIARY DATES for REGIONAL GATHERINGS 2022

ASHFORD

19 MARCH 2022

AYLESFORD

18 JUNE 2022

ERITH

8 OCTOBER 2022

Overview of the National Chapter meeting : 4 September 2021

Archives

The idea of keeping Archives is to try and build a history of the OFS. Archives are currently stored at the National Seat in Arkley, where the Archive team had been collating and filing relative documents. Since the lockdown in February 2020 this hasn't been possible but we are hoping to be able to start it up again soon.

Archives will be scanned or photographed and they hope to start a listening project where elderly members who wish to be interviewed will have their history recorded on tape for posterity.

Volunteers urgently needed to join the Archive team! Please tell your Regional Minister if you're interested.

Communication

It has been decided that there is a need for more effective communication between National, Regions and Fraternities. Therefore, a short update on the Chapter Meetings (like this one) will be published on the Web site and on OFS Facebook Accounts. Regions or Fraternities can then print and post the updates or include them in their newsletters for those members who do not have a computer or are not in the least bit computer literate.

Elections

We welcome Thelma & Philomena our new Regional Ministers for the South West & Wales and Southern region!

Elections were held in Southern, South East, South Wales and South West. Newly elected Ministers: Philomena (Southern) South East (Kathy) South Wales and South West (Thelma)

Practical Guidance has now been issued to Newly Elected Ministers and they will be issued with a list of Email addresses for National Council and Regional Ministers. Dianne will be responsible for this

Midlands Elective Chapter failed to have a quorum and Betsy helped the Region to develop an Action Plan to try again in February.

North West are having an Elective Chapter on October 9 (postponed since June) and have already indicated that they may be unable to have a quorum. If this happens then they too will be helped by Betsy

to develop their own Action Plan to retry in April 2022

London have indicated that they would like an extension until March when they too will hold their elective chapter and hopefully will be able to have a quorum.

Finance

Unfortunately there has been a decrease in the contributions from Regions so new guidance on Donation amounts will be discussed in December of this year. Therefore, it's impossible to forecast an accurate 3year budget due to the number of uncertainties.

Financial Accounts have been audited and approved.

Formation

There is a need for Formation training to be given to Formation Teams. At the next National Council a Training (hopefully face to face) to be delivered on a Region by Region basis will be discussed and dates allocated to individual Regions. Good Formation Training will give Confidence, Knowledge and Develop existing skills. It will give a basis for Understanding Statutes and the need for longer Formation to develop not just knowledge but discernment of a Vocation. Terry will lead this Team.

Handbook

Feedback has been sought on the content of a new Handbook and what the Handbook represents to members. A Zoom meeting has been set up for 13 September with members who wish to be involved in the development of a new handbook. Kathy will chair this meeting and Dianne will minute.

If you or someone you know from your Fraternity would like to join this meeting please tell your Regional Minister who will contact Kathy directly so she can include you!

Next National Council Meeting

This will take place via Zoom on 2 October 2021 at 10am.

Pope Francis Catechesis September 2020

This value and this ray of divine light must be discovered and, in order to discover it, we need to be silent, we need to listen, and we need to contemplate.

Contemplation also heals the soul....without contemplation, it is easy to fall prey to an unbalanced and arrogant anthropocentrism, the “I” at the centre of everything, which gives excessive importance to our role as human beings, positioning us as absolute rulers of all other creatures.

For human beings to destroy the biological diversity of God’s creation; for human beings to degrade the integrity of the earth by causing changes in its climate, by stripping the earth of its natural forests or destroying its air, and its life—these are sins. For to commit a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God. (Laudato Si 8)

In the heart of this world, the Lord of Life, who loves us so much, is always present. He does not abandon us, he does not leave us alone, for God has united himself definitively to our earth, and this love constantly impels us to find new ways forward. (LS245)

Pope Francis on Contemplation (part of Catechesis September 2020)

Contemplation, which leads us to an attitude of care, is not a question of looking at nature from the outside, as if we were not immersed in it. But we are inside nature, we are part of nature. Rather, it is done from within recognising us as part of creation, and nor mere spectators of an amorphous reality that is only to be exploited. Those who contemplate in this way experience wonder not only at what they see but also because they feel they are an integral part of this beauty; but they also feel called to guard it and protect it.

Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise. (Laudato Si 12)

There is one thing we must not forget: those who cannot contemplate nature and creation, cannot contemplate people in their true wealth. And those who live to exploit nature end up exploiting people and treating them like slaves. This is a universal law. If you cannot contemplate nature, it will be very difficult for you to contemplate people, the beauty of people, your brother, your sister.

Saint Francis’ response to the world around him was so much more than intellectual appreciation for economic calculus, for to him each and every creature was a sister united to him by

bonds of affection. That is why he felt called to care for all that exists. If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs... the poverty and austerity of Saint Francis were no mere veneer of asceticism, but something much more radical: a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled (Laudato Si 11).

Contemplating so as to care, contemplating to protect, to protect ourselves, creation, our children and our grandchildren and to protect the future. Contemplating to care for and protect, and to leave a legacy to the future generations...and this must not be delegated to others: this is the task of every human being. Each one of us must be a “guardian of the common home” capable of praising God for his creatures and protecting them.

In Jesus, there is no difference between contemplation and action



COVID 19 and Vaccinations

Pope Francis speaks during an in-flight press conference from Slovakia, 15 September 2021 / Vatican Media



Discussing COVID-19 vaccines during an in-flight press conference on Wednesday, Pope Francis said that “even in the College of Cardinals there are some deniers.”

The Pope was responding to a question posed by a journalist at the end of his four-day visit to Slovakia and Hungary on 15 September.

The reporter noted that the initial requirement that only fully vaccinated people could take part in papal visit events caused controversy in Slovakia.

He recalled that the Pope had described receiving the COVID-19 vaccine as an [“act of love”](#) and asked how it was possible for Christians with contrasting views to be united on the issue?

The Pope said: “Humanity has a history of friendship with vaccines. As children, we got them for measles, for other things, for polio. All the children were vaccinated and no one said anything.” Then this [opposition] happened. This was perhaps due to the virulence, the uncertainty not only about the pandemic, but also about the different vaccines, and also the reputation of some vaccines which are nothing more than distilled water. This created fear in people. Then others who say that it is a danger because with the vaccine you are infected. So many arguments that have created this division.”

He continued: “Even in the College of Cardinals there are some deniers and one of these, poor guy, is hospitalized with the virus.”

The Pope may have been referring to Cardinal Raymond Burke, who was placed on a ventilator in August after testing positive for the coronavirus. The 73-year-old American cardinal is not the only cardinal to have contracted COVID-19.

Cardinal Philippe Ouedraogo of Burkina Faso and Cardinal Angelo De Donatis, vicar general of the Diocese of Rome, both tested positive and recovered from COVID-19 in March 2020.

Cardinal Gualtiero Bassetti, president of the Italian bishops’ conference, [was hospitalised](#) with the virus in November 2020. Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich of Luxembourg tested positive in January, as did Honduran Cardinal Óscar Rodríguez Maradiaga in February.

After he was taken off the ventilator and moved from the ICU to a hospital room, Cardinal Burke gave thanks that God had brought him to a “point of healing and recovery.”

Known for his outspoken defence of traditional Catholicism, Burke is the former leader of the Archdiocese of St. Louis and the Diocese of La Crosse in his home state of Wisconsin.

He served as Prefect of the Apostolic Signatura from 2008 to 2014. Pope Francis appointed him as a member of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura in 2017.

LifeSiteNews reported in May 2020 that Burke affirmed in an online talk that it is “never morally justified to develop a vaccine through the use of cell lines of aborted fetuses.”

It added that the cardinal said that vaccination should not be imposed on citizens “in a totalitarian manner” and spoke of the possibility of microchips being planted under people’s skin, permitting them to be “controlled by the state regarding health and about other matters.”

Pope Francis, who received two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, in January and February, has repeatedly encouraged Catholics to be vaccinated and has promoted the fair distribution of vaccines throughout the world.

He said in a public service announcement produced in collaboration with the Ad Council in August that getting the COVID-19 vaccine is “an act of love.”

“I pray to God that each one of us can make his or her own small gesture of love, no matter how small, [love is](#) always grand,” the Pope [said](#) in the PSA, published 17 August.

The COVID-19 vaccine has been a controversial subject in Slovakia, where as of 15 September, only half of the country is fully vaccinated against the coronavirus, well below the 71% of adults fully vaccinated in the European Union overall.

From the editor

Mags Ivatts

I do hope you enjoy this Transitus edition of The Cord, our regional newsletter.

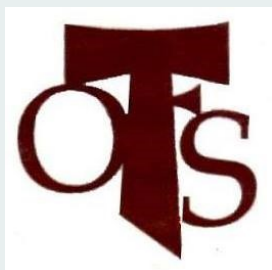
This year has been very special for me and my husband as we were both professed on 2nd May. What a joy and grace and blessing it was!

I've shared with you all the homily from our profession ceremony and a book review of one of the beautiful gifts we received from one of our fraternity brothers.

We are so blessed and thankful for the inspiration and encouragement that we have received from the Poor Clare Community at Hollington. The Sisters have been so very supportive and are very special to us indeed and much loved.

If you have any comments, ideas, suggestions, articles or anything at all please send them to me at m.ivatts@btinternet.com

With thanks to everyone who has contributed, and for being helpful and supportive generally.



Homily from profession ceremony at Hollington Fraternity given by Sr Frances Teresa Downing OSC 2 May 2021

Perhaps one of the things the pandemic has done for us, is to show us again that when we speak of the church, we mean more than the building. We mean the people and in some unclear way we mean the presence of God among us. In a parallel way, when we belong to an Order, like the Secular Franciscan Order, we mean more than rules and obligations, though formation can look as if that is all. A moment like a profession is a good time to look more closely at the deeper implications of joining an Order, and any Order, but today specifically, this Secular Franciscan Order. To understand the Church, we look at Christ and the Gospel. To understand Franciscan life, we look to Francis and Clare. This is why we read and re-read their stories.

It is clear from their lives that both Francis and Clare realised that God had entrusted a task to them for which they had been prepared by the powerful gifts of the Holy Spirit. They knew

that a large part of their task was to restore the person of Jesus Christ to people's hearts and minds by sharing with others the journey of discovery which they themselves had made. Their journey began when they came to believe the Gospel, and above all to believe that God is the One and only Creator and Father of all that is. They understood that the Gospel means what it says. As they thought about the life of Christ, they began to find answers to the suffering of the world which was all around them. Remember that Assisi was in a post-war condition, that the Spoleto Valley was full of the Catharist heresy denying the importance of anything material or beautiful, and above all undermining the Sacraments by insisting

that they were not valid unless the clergy were holy! At a time when various scandals have left us with a greatly discredited clergy, this is a significant parallel for us today.

When Francis and Clare spoke of their own journey, they did so in a number of rich images and one of the most powerful is that of walking in the footsteps of Christ. Francis tells us in his testament that in the beginning nobody told him what he should do, but the Lord himself showed him and 'led me among lepers'. There in the leprosarium first Francis and later those who joined him, almost certainly Clare, learnt to follow in the footprints and poverty of Jesus Christ. In a short letter Francis later wrote to Brother Leo, he makes it clear

that this is part of the Franciscan calling. He wrote: In whatever way you feel called to serve the Lord and to make Him happy, to follow His footprints and His poverty, do that with my blessing and the blessing of the Lord God.

So Francis saw the Franciscan call as to serve the Lord and to "make God happy" not because God is unhappy

without us but because making a person happy is what we do for someone we love. It is an attitude within us rather than a need in God. We do this service and we give God happiness or joy when we follow in the footprints and poverty of Jesus. That was a life-changing insight for Francis. This means to try and live by the Gospel, and follow his holy footprints and poverty. So he gives Leo great freedom to listen to the Spirit in his heart and that is another very Franciscan way of proceeding:

In whatever way you feel called to serve the Lord do that with my blessing and the blessing of the Lord God.

The Hollington Convent Chapel altar



The calling is always to follow his footprints and his poverty, the footprints are marked out for us in the Gospels. Poverty governs our relationship with the material world, and is summed up in the Franciscan understanding of *sine proprio*. Literally that means without ownership or possessiveness. Spiritually it means seeking first the Kingdom of God and its justice. For the friars, it gives freedom for mission, for the Poor Clares it gives simplicity of life and a continual search for what Clare calls 'the incomparable treasure hidden in the field of the world and the human heart' [3Ag,17].

For Secular Franciscans it is, I think, more challenging because it touches closely on the difficult responsibility of stewardship. The example of your responsibility is something the rest of the Order looks to you for, since it is very possible and not unknown for friars and Poor Clares to have a very unrealistic attitude towards money and goods. Secular Franciscans on the other hand have to grapple with the decisions of stewardship. To do that well may be your greatest challenge and it is certainly your greatest contribution to the mission of the Order.

Francis understood this very well, and wrote a letter to the first Secular Franciscans, what the Omnibus calls the Earlier Exhortation, in which he promises that if you do this: The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon (you) and make its home and dwelling place among (you) and (you) and (you) are children of the heavenly Father whose works (you) do, and (you) are spouses, brothers and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(Onibus vol1, p41ff)

Your call as secular Franciscans is to do the works of the Father, to be a dwelling place for the Spirit and to be spouses, sisters, brothers and mothers to the Word made flesh in our own times. That should keep you busy!

In that same letter, Francis unpacks it more for us, setting out what he means by those important relationships:

We are spouses when the faithful soul is joined by the Holy Spirit to our Lord Jesus Christ. We are brothers (and sisters) to Him when we do the will of the Father who is in heaven. We are mothers when we carry Him through a holy activity which must shine as an example before others. [Earlier Exhortation 1.8]

We might spend years unpacking that and more years living it but I think the Letter to Leo shows us the way into this very challenging spirituality. It is wonderfully wide because nobody knew better than Francis that the Spirit of God is full of surprises. It is also wonderfully simple, it means just to put our feet on the path of the One who said: I am the Way. It means to walk truthfully in those footprints like King Wenceslaus' page in the carol. It means to draw life

from the life of Christ. This is basically what it means to embrace the Gospel. The thing to remember is that, like the rest of us, you did not say to God: Choose Me! You were called into it by the Spirit and that calling will never be taken back by the Spirit. It has nothing to do with worthiness and everything to do with God. We don't know where the footprints of Jesus Christ will lead us, any more than Francis knew and certainly he had never imagined anything like what happened to him on the mountain of La Verna. What we can know is that we shall be formed into a house for the Spirit of God, but what that means in daily life we don't yet know.

So to close, let's hear again what Francis wrote to Brother Leo and then hear what Clare wrote to her friend and spiritual companion, Agnes of Prague, and try to take on

Our beautiful cake made by fraternity minister Pat Lee, Master Baker! It was so delicious



board what trust and vision they brought to their friendships, Francis first:

In whatever way you feel called to serve the Lord and to make him happy, to follow his footprint and his poverty, do that and do that with my blessing and with the blessing of the Lord God.

and Clare to Agnes:

I judge you to be a co-worker of God himself, and one who supports from beneath those members of his ineffable body who are giving way. [3Ag8]



Franciscan Ecological Examination of Conscience

(from *Care for Creation* p. 99-101, by Illia Delio,

Keith Warner, Pamela Wood)

Sunday:

Is my whole life centered on God's overflowing love in my life, revealed through Jesus and through all of creation? Do I respond wholeheartedly to the call of the Spirit in my life?

Monday:

Do I accept with a grateful heart the gifts of God's goodness and diversity in creation? Do I respond, as Francis did, by building bonds of love, care, concern and companionship with all living beings? Do I value creation not as mine alone but first and foremost as God's home?

Tuesday:

Am I willing to accept Francis' invitation to live as a "lesser brother or sister" within the kinship of creation? Do I pray for the forgiveness of sins between humans and the created world, and for the healing and reconciliation of our broken relationship with creation?

Wednesday

Am I caring toward my larger family of creation? Have I shown fidelity, humility, reverence and love to my Sister Mother Earth and all my brother and sister species? Have I used my God-given gifts to honour and protect the diverse, interdependent, fragile nature of all life and to preserve it for all future beings?

Thursday

Have I lived in a state of un-relatedness, over and against creation? Have I used my God given gifts to honour and protect the diverse, interdependent fragile nature of all life and to preserve it for all future beings?

Friday

Do I seek to eliminate from the world whatever keeps all creatures in their full development intended by their Creator: pollution, greed, over consumption, loss of habitat, disease, war, extinction of species, oppressive laws and structures? Do I support organisations that I work for ecological improvement on a systematic scale, restoration of habitat and preservation of open spaces?

Saturday

Have I committed myself to follow Francis' example of ecological conversion? Have I encouraged others to take care for creation seriously? Have I been judgemental or mean-spirited towards myself or others when we live imperfectly in our journey to heal our relationship with creation?

After spending time with your question of the day, hold in your mind and heart the ways in which you have lived in disharmony with creation. Ask the earth and the Creator for forgiveness for your transgressions. Offer these mistakes up to God and ask for the strength and the wisdom to learn to live with integrity within the web of creation. Resolve to amend your life in the spirit of penance and love for our world. Name one action you intend to take today to work for care for creation.



*Book Review: **Lest she pollute the Sanctuary***

by Dr Patricia Rumsey (Abbess: Poor Clares, Arkley)

Review by Anne Murrin

East Anglia Region reproduced with grateful thanks

Patricia Rumsey has written a fascinating book called “Lest She Pollute the Sanctuary.” (It is only recently that I have discovered that Dr Patricia is an associate professor at Nottingham University!)

It is a study of the role of women in the church and the influence of the Gospel of James. This gospel was popular in the 2-3rd centuries and continues to have influence to the present day. It is Dr Patricia’s view that this text is a significant factor in the denial of presbyteral ordination to women in some churches. She argues that the ordinary Mary of the gospels has, through the Gospel of James, turned into a miraculously ideal of womanhood unattainable by flesh and blood women.

In the canonical gospels Mary is a peasant girl, in an unknown village, engaged to a local carpenter, generally a more down to earth Mary. In the Gospel of James, the young Mary is secluded as a child in the sacred precincts of the Temple, hidden from anything which would contaminate her other-worldly purity.

According to this gospel, at 12, the priests decided to marry Mary off to an aged Joseph, “lest She pollute the Sanctuary”. A key point Dr Patricia makes in her book is that there are four key liturgical feasts in the church that

are dependent on the Gospel of James, rather than the New

Testament. These are:- The Feast of Joachim and Anna, the Immaculate Conception, the Nativity of Mary and her Presentation in the Temple.

You can find on You Tube the book launch, which occurred on Friday 5 February 2021. One of the speakers was Fr Nick King, SJ, who speaks authoritatively on male misogyny in the church. He states the church will not be credible in our culture unless it changes its attitudes to women in four key areas. Vocabulary, ministry, liturgy and authority.

I would recommend you buy the book. However it retails at about £62.00 if you can find a copy. (Amazon are out of stock). I have based the above on an article in The Tablet, the You Tube Book launch and limited access to some pages of the book on the internet. Hopefully the book will become more available and come down in price. The message, however, is an important one.



Dr Patricia Rumsey OSC

Root and Branch is a lay-led inclusive synod movement you can find out more at www.rootandbranchsynod.org.



*Pope Francis
wants
a Synodal
Church that
listens deeply.*

Book Review: FRANCIS A Life in Songs by Ann Wroe

Mags Ivatts

2 May 2021 will always be special date for me and David. We were professed to live the Gospel Life as members of the OFS which included all the wonderful experiences that many of you will recognise and share. Following over a year of not meeting physically, and clinging on to our formation via emails, telephone and Zoom it was almost overwhelming just to see each other again never mind experience the ceremony of profession.

We were overjoyed that we could go ahead with a small but very special ceremony in the Poor Clare Convent with Sr Frances Teresa OSC acting as celebrant as no Mass was possible due to Covid lockdown. Our minister Pat Lee arranged special permission for a liturgical ceremony.

One of the many special and beautiful joys of a profession ceremony is the real sense of fraternity among the OFS members present. Our experience in fraternity is quite bonding anyway, as over the last few years we have shared and discussed our thoughts and feelings and have felt loved and supported. Another special joy is the gifts that newly professed members receive! We were blessed enough to receive a number of beautiful gifts one of them being the book by Ann Wroe called Francis A Life in Songs a gift given to us by our visitor Leslie Bunt.

This book is an absolute gem. It is unique and original and unlike any other Franciscan biographies. It is an understated life of Francis of Assisi told in spare, unpreachy verse, and illuminates him and his time and our own times too.

Ann Wroe, an accomplished biographer of Shelley, Pontius Pilate and Orpheus, has created an original collection of poems that tells the life of St Francis as he lived it – through song. It does what poetry is meant to do but seldom does: it takes you to another place while making you reflect on what it is to be here.

In our secular age it is a lovely devotional book, published by Cape, with an image of St Francis taken from a medieval fresco in Subiaco, Italy, on its blue cloth bound cover. As I began to read it I felt an incredulous sense of excitement that the book references many of the local places where we live in East Sussex. Ann Wroe lives near Brighton and her poems reference many of my favourite places and invoke happy childhood memories.

The book has an intriguing structure: each section of Saint Francis's life is divided into four parts, like the

panels of an altarpiece. It begins with familiar autobiographical information from source documents. Next comes a poem about Francis's life, and then a companion poem which provides a link and added reflection to the aspect of his life being looked at. Then there are short pieces that link the sections together. Each section is a four-beat rhythm, so when you read them aloud you can't fail to notice they are a troubadour song.

They would be wonderful set to music.

Ann Wroe is known as a non-fiction writer and had a career as obituaries editor for the Economist but this is such a rhythmic and beautiful poetry book. Her inspiration from Francis is tangible and she has written his life in songs. His world is recreated in this book (transposed alongside the modern world we all live in) but his absence is made acute in poignant scenes such as the tramp in Morrisons in Brighton:

"He's given a wide berth in the checkout queue

At Morrison's; the stench of ancient piss

Makes the girl sniff. Lank threads of greying

hair

Straggle from beneath a Russian hat;

His jeans fray to the floor, and every ripped

Vent in his coat shows lining poking through,

Curiously clean. Puddings are all he's bought:

Jam mini-sponges, finding sweetness there

He won't get otherwise. Job done, he goes

shakily, stiffly out, pausing with care

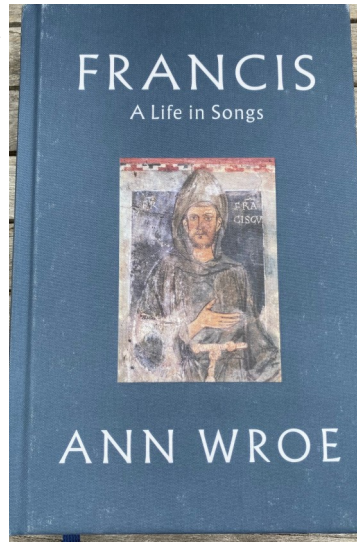
to count his change into a bankers bag.

Within the beard, his delicate small lips

murmour a silent word – might take a kiss –

Ann Wroe's inspiration is almost tangible, as in this poem we see the parallel with Francis and the leper. It is incredibly tender. The book is filled with these incredible parallels. If you love Francis and this love has changed your life, you will enjoy this book. Ann Wroe has written a beautiful praise song, that parallels Francis with our own everyday experiences and makes him alive with us.

A wonderful book to treasure always.



Perfect Obedience: Admonition 1 of St Francis.

A reflection by Tim Castle, Candidate Hollington Fraternity

(1) Francis had a life changing event at the foot of the crucifix at the old church of St. Damian, leaving the church a different person to the one that entered. Through this experience he surrendered himself completely to Christ and his mission given to him to rebuild the church.

I feel as a Franciscan I have also agreed to follow in the mission of Saint Francis and rebuild the church, but to do so I also need to follow the Gospel, ***“whoever does not renounce all that he possesses cannot be my disciple” Lk14:33*** so, like Francis, I willingly submit all I possess to be a follower of Christ. This obviously has some hang ups for the third order, as we have a different lifestyle to a Monk or Nun or even a priest. We have families, we are married, we have jobs, we are tied down to everyday life. So can we achieve what is set out in this section.

Perhaps not in the same way, however, we can perhaps minimise the distractions of everyday life, so the voice of God and Christ can be heard. Making the effort to reduce these distractions maybe easier than we think. Making more time for dedicated prayer? Making more time for intentional discipleship? Reducing our possessions to what we only need, removing the clutter. In Mahayana Buddhist culture the removal of ego and want, helps the clarity of the mind in the finding of the path of pure nirvana - maybe there are similarities here.

Perhaps another way forward is to share our possessions, I get a lot of love and happiness from owning my animals, but I also get a lot of love from sharing those animals with the people who have not got the same chances in life as I do. Life is full of opportunities to do this, if we are prepared to go and seek them. After all ***“seek and you shall find” (Mt 7:7)*** is clearly stated in the gospel.

(3) Perhaps this is what is meant here- if we can use our life clutter for the benefit of all maybe we can be obedient to Christ and the gospels.

(5) Offering what we have to use for the sake of others is a gift to God.

(6) For this loving gesture could please both neighbour and God.

Possessions are not the only thing that can lead us away from obedience. Fear of persecution from others can engage our fight or flight instinct. Saint Peter himself denied Christ three times ***“Woman, I don’t even know him”***

Lk22:57, “You are one of them too! But Peter answered Man I am not” Lk22:58, “There isn’t any doubt that this man was with Jesus, because he is also a Galilean! – Peter replied Man, I don’t know what you are talking about” Lk 22:60

Francis himself was persecuted by others after his conversion, he was derided by his friends, beaten by his father, stoned by members of the public, spat at, called names, seen as bringing dishonour to his household and his family. (8) He who suffers from persecution, let him love them even more – this is the obedience to follow the gospel message of love thy neighbour – Francis certainly showed this by his love for the poorest of the poor, attending to and loving the lepers in his society – but also through his complete obedience to poverty – this I think gave him the empathy and understanding of how it was to be in that class of people. How can we show love to the poorest of the poor today – there are many ways to help people today, through conscious giving of alms, charity work, volunteering, social media campaigns etc – but also to look for the proactive giving – stopping to talk to the poor person begging. Smiling and saying hello to the person on the street. Grabbing those opportunities to make a small but important show of love acorns can quickly grow into mighty oaks.

(9) For those that ***choose*** persecution show complete obedience to Saint Francis way of life – Obedience after all is some way the ability to let go and trust in the consequences of the bigger picture [4]. Obedience is to be true to our deepest voices, which is the only way God can speak to us. But that means we have to have some deeper voices! We have to be practiced in prayerfully listening to our unconscious, to others and even “entertaining angels who

usually come unaware” (Hebrews 13:2).

“Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” – John 15:13.

St. Maximilian Kolbe was a Franciscan friar and ordained priest who was arrested in Poland in 1941, and sent to Auschwitz. When a prisoner escaped the camp, ten men were picked to suffer death by starvation as both punishment and deterrent. Fr. Maximilian offered to take the place of one of the men; Franciszek Gajowniczek, who had let out a cry of pain for his family, touched the heart of St. Maximilian Kolbe who immediately volunteered to take his place. Weeks of unimaginable horror followed as they suffered the pains of dehydration and starvation. This holy man not only offered to be one of the suffering, he ministered to them as well! After three weeks of this relentless treatment there were only four prisoners left alive. In 1941, the day before the Assumption of Mary the Immaculata, Fr. Kolbe and three fellow prisoners were killed with injections of carbolic acid [5].

We all have to at some point give in to the voice of God steering us towards the mission that has been chosen for us – That’s why we are Franciscans, because we listened to the voice that told us to go find and become.

God gives us an inner strength which enables us to persevere in life’s turbulence. I think this gift goes hand in hand with obedience and allows us to feel what Francis felt and live as Francis did [6].

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