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FRANCISCAN INSTITUTE ST. BONAVENTURE UNIVERSITY
SAINT BONAVENTURE, NEW YORK

EMMANUEL

(Monthly Conference)

"Neither is there any other nation so great, that hath gods so nigh them as our God is present to all our petitions." (Dt. 4, 7).

Moses, who had witnessed the miracles God had worked to free his chosen people from the bondage of Egypt and bring them into the Promised Land, could truly utter these words. The ten plagues of Egypt, the opening of the Red Sea, the feeding of the multitude for forty years in the desert of Sinai, the pillar of fire to lead them by night and the cloud to cover them from their enemies and from the burning heat of the sun in the day—these were proofs positive that the God of the Israelites was indeed a living and a merciful God, a God who was very close indeed to His people. But how much more truly are these words of Moses fulfilled in us, God's chosen people of the New Testament. In His dealings with the Jews, God was merciful and kind. He was the God of power and of miracle, but He remained the Invisible One, the All-Pure, the Unapproachable. To see even one of His Angels was, according to the Jewish way of thinking, an omen of sudden death for a mere human. Nazareth and Bethlehem changed all that.

Mary trembled, yes, at the approach of the Angel, but his words strengthened her and she gave her "fiat" in a steady voice. The prophecy of Isaias was that instant fulfilled; the Invisible God of Heaven had at that moment come to dwell amongst us. He became "Emmanuel", "God with us". *Verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis*". The moment of the Incarnation is the central point of human history; all the previous centuries looked forward towards it with hope; all the generations that have since come, look back to it with joy and thanksgiving.

The manger of Bethlehem is for us the symbol of God's infinite condescension, of God's infinite Love; it was the resting place of the newly born Divine Babe and the cradle of humanity's new lease of spiritual life and hope. The thunder of Sinai is replaced by the angelic song of "peace" in Bethlehem. The lightning of Horeb is now the heavenly light of the Shepherds' field; the burning bush which no one dared approach has become the stable to which even the lowly shepherds are invited. "The old order changeth, yielding the place to the new".

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God has come to dwell amongst us to lead us by the hand of love and kindness to our destination, to show us the way, the truth, and the life.

It is often said with truth that familiarity breeds contempt, but of no true lover of Christ can it be said that familiarity with Him will breed anything but a deeper love. That great lover and imitator of Christ, St. Francis of Assisi, had but one all-consuming desire in life, namely, to strive to bring his fellow men closer to God. To do this, he brought God closer to men. The astounding miracle of God's infinite love for us, which produced the manger of Bethlehem and the cross of Calvary, was being gradually forgotten in Francis' day. Men were drifting away from God and forgetting that He was amongst them. Their hearts were becoming daily more enmeshed in the fleeting goods and pleasures of this world. Bethlehem, Nazareth, Galilee, and Calvary were being relegated to the closed pages of history books, items of interest to those who studied the days gone by, but of little or no concern to men of business, to men engaged in the medieval quest for wealth and fame.

Francis saw this and found a remedy. He did not write learned books of theological lore, nor did he preach soul-stirring sermons to the intelligentsia of his day. No, he reenacted, before the eyes of his fellow Umbrians, the drama of Bethlehem in a manner so simple and so unsophisticated that not even the most unlettered peasant, present that memorable Christmas night in Greccio, could fail to comprehend its meaning.

What a boon to humanity was this simple act of Francis! From our earliest childhood the lesson of Bethlehem was impressed on us by that little crib in the parish church. We have heard many profound sermons on the great drama of Christmas, but who can remember their syllogisms and their learned discussions, their proofs and their highly legitimate conclusions, whilst the *contadino* of Calabria or the peasant girl of Mexico can interpret the crib to a doctor of the Sorbonne.

Yes, we can kneel before our crib and we need no treatise on theology to understand its message. God has become Emmanuel; He has come amongst us in the form and nature of man. He was born of a Virgin and laid as a tiny Babe in the cold manger of that dark cave in Bethlehem. And for what purpose?—in order that He might draw us to Himself by this example of unparalleled love. If God could so humble Himself as to hide His infinite divinity under the cloak of humanity, if the Creator of heaven and earth could take on the weakness of a child, if the Lord of the celestial palaces could deign to suffer the cold and discomfort of a gloomy stable, surely we mere creatures, mere unworthy work of His hands, can do the little He asks of us in return.

Lukewarm indeed is the love of any Christian who can look on the crib at Christmas and still feel a grudge against the world and God. Weak and wavering is the faith of him who can kneel at the manger and not realize how much God has done for him, and how much he means to God.

And, if this is true of the ordinary faithful, what of the religious, who has been chosen from millions to be Christ's special friend in this life, and a member of the Celestial Choir "which will sing the Praises of the Lamb wherever He goeth" in the next? Can a true religious kneel at the crib and still grumble at the little inconvenience the vow of poverty causes him? Jesus could have been born in a marble palace and laid in a cradle of gold. The stable was His palace, and His cradle the manger of an ox. Can we be devout religious if we leave the presence of the Divine Babe where we so vividly realized the self-abnegation, the awful humiliation of the Lord of heaven and earth, for our sakes, and still feel that our vow of chastity is a great sacrifice, instead of what it actually is, a blessing from heaven, which frees us from the cares of this world and leaves us free to return some little bit of love to our Maker for all He has done for us? Having seen in the crib that example of obedience wherein the Creator places Himself in subjection to his own creatures, and not only to the good and holy Mary and Joseph, but even to the wicked and sinful, to Caesar and Herod, can we refuse to submit to the will of those the Lord has appointed over us?

But, above all, can we be worthy of the name of religious, can we call ourselves God's chosen ones, if Christmas and the Manger leave our hearts cold and uncharitable towards our neighbor? This indeed is the real test of our true love of God, as St. John tells us when he says: "If anyone says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar. For how can he who does not love his brother, whom he sees, love God, whom he does not see" (I John 4, 20). The heart of Francis of Assisi burned with love for his fellow-man because he loved God. All God's creatures he called his brothers, but the masterpiece of God's creative act, man, was to Francis a brother in name and in truth. It was to bring this doctrine of the brotherhood of man in Christ, that Francis went among the farmers in the fields and the craftsman in their workshops. He could have lived a life of seclusion and sanctity in a monastery, and would undoubtedly have become a great Saint, but his burning love for God compelled him to live among his fellow-men in order to tell them of the great love God has for them and thus lead them to realize that they also were sons of the great Father and brothers of Christ. His simple but sincere sermon on the great love of God for us, which he preached on that Christmas night in Greccio, moved the listeners to tears and its echoes spread through the valleys and hillsides of Umbria, giving new

hope to many a soul. Its echoes are still to be heard not in Umbria or Lombardy only, but around the globe, for everywhere the Manger of Bethlehem is erected we have before our eyes a sermon, a moving, eloquent sermon, on God's love for man. Could a follower of Francis miss its lesson? Is it possible that a Franciscan could pray at the Manger and retain rancor in his heart against a fellow-religious? Our acts of love for God and thanksgiving to Jesus for coming among us were sinful mockery if such were the case. Ignorance will excuse the inn-keepers of Bethlehem for driving Mary and Joseph from their doors, but if we lock the door of our hearts against Jesus by our lack of fraternal charity what excuse can we offer? We are not His disciples, He is not amongst us. He is not our Emmanuel, if we fail in this His own *new* commandment, for He says "a new commandment I give you that you love one another . . . by this will all men know that you are my disciples if you will have love for one another" (John 13, 35). As children of Francis, then let us this Christmas strive especially to imitate our Holy Father in our practice of this fundamental Christian virtue. Let this new commandment of Christ be our guiding spirit in all our dealings with our fellow religious. Let Charity, the queen of virtues, be the queen of our hearts so that our love will abound like the love of Francis and overflow outside the monastery walls to shed its warming light on all those with whom we may come in contact. Francis asked the farmers of Umbria to spread some grains of corn outside their doors on Christmas day so that his brother birds, too, might rejoice in God's coming. Let us spread the solid grains of true brotherly love in our monasteries and outside our doors so that all who know us will rejoice that the spirit of God—the spirit of Christ—the spirit of fraternal charity—is still on this earth.

Yes, each time we kneel at the crib we should come away better religious. The sermon of St. Francis has profound lessons for us. His manger of Greccio is still preaching to us after 700 years. It still has the power to move our hearts and our wills, for it is but a representation, vividly placed before our eyes, of that immense love of God for man which made Him humble Himself and take on weak human nature in order to lead us back home. The crib of Francis is but a representation of the fulfillment of the many prophecies which gave meaning to the pages of the Old Testament and gave faith and hope to the chosen people—prophecies which reached their climax in the great Isaias whose one word sums up all that could be said of the divine economy of man's salvation. "Emmanuel"—God with us.

*From the VITA PRIMA of Thomas of Celano*¹

The highest striving of holy Francis, his principal desire and his supreme purpose, was to observe the holy gospel in all things and through all things; with perfect vigilance, with all zeal, with all the longing of his mind and all the fervor of his heart, he aimed to follow the doctrine of our Lord Jesus Christ and walk in His footsteps. He would ponder His words in constant meditation, and with keenest consideration bethink himself of His works. Most of all did the humility of the Incarnation and the love of the Passion so fill his memory that he was scarce able to think of ought else. What he did, therefore, at the town called Greccio, on the birthday of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the third year before the day of his glorious passing, ought to be recorded and dwelt on with reverent memory. There was in that place a man named John, of good repute but of better life, whom blessed Francis loved with a special love, because, although he had been a man of outstanding nobility and honor in the town, he had trampled upon the nobility of the flesh and followed after nobility of the mind. This man did blessed Francis send for, as he was often accustomed to do, about fifteen days before the Nativity of the Lord, and he said to him: "If thou desire that we celebrate the present festival of the Lord at Greccio, make haste to go before and diligently prepare what I tell thee. For I would make memorial of that Child Who was born in Bethlehem and in some sort behold with the eyes of the body the discomforts of His infant hardships." And when the good and faithful man heard this, he went quickly and prepared in the aforesaid place all things as the Saint had told him.

The day of gladness drew nigh, the time of exultation arrived. The friars were summoned from many places, and men and women of that neighborhood, with hearts rejoicing, prepared tapers and torches according as they were able, to illumine that night which, with its radiant star, has brightened all the days and the years. At length the saint of God came, and, finding all things prepared, he saw them and rejoiced. The manger was made ready, the hay was brought, and the ox and the ass were led in. There simplicity was honored, poverty exalted, humility commended, and Greccio was made, as it were, a new Bethlehem. The night was illuminated as the day, and it was delightful to men and beasts. The people came, and at the new mystery rejoiced with new rejoicings. The woodland rang with voices and the rocks replied with jubilant song. Friars chanted, offering due praises to the Lord, and the whole night resounded with jubilation. The

¹ Ed. Quaracchi, *Anal. Franc.* C.XXX, 84; T. X, 63's.

holy one of God, full of sighs, overcome with tenderness and overflowing with wondrous joy, stood before the manger. The solemnities of the Mass were celebrated over the manger, and the priest enjoyed a new consolation. The holy one of God was vested as a levite, for he was a levite, and chanted the holy gospel in a sonorous voice. And in this voice of his, a loud, sweet, clear and resounding voice, he invited all to the highest rewards. Then he preached to the people standing about and spoke in the sweetest words concerning the birth of the poor King in the little town of Bethlehem; and often when he would name Christ Jesus, glowing with exceeding great love, he would call Him the Child of Bethlehem, and, uttering the word Bethlehem in the manner of a sheep bleating, he filled his mouth with the sound but even more with the sweet affection. Moreover, when he named the Child of Bethlehem, he would, as it were, lick his lips, relishing with happy palate and swallowing the sweetness of the word. There the gifts of the Almighty were multiplied and a wondrous vision was seen by a certain man of virtue; for in the manger he saw a little child lying lifeless, to whom the holy one of God seemed to draw near and, as it were, to rouse the child from the lethargy of sleep. Nor was there anything out of place in such a vision, for the Child Jesus had been given over to forgetfulness in the hearts of many, in whom, by the working of His grace, He was raised up, again through His servant Francis and imprinted on a loving memory.

At length the solemn vigil was ended and each one returned with joy to his own home. The hay that had been placed in the manger was kept that through it the Lord might save the beasts of burden and other animals, even as He multiplied His Holy mercy. And verily it so came to pass that many animals in the region round about which had divers diseases were delivered from their sicknesses by eating of that hay. Indeed, even women in long and grievous labor were safely delivered when some of this hay was placed on them; and many persons of either sex suffering from divers ailments gained their long-desired health in this place. Finally the spot where the manger had been was consecrated as a temple to the Lord, and over the manger an altar was reared and a church dedicated in honor of the most Blessed Father Francis, so that where beasts had once eaten fodder of hay, men might henceforth, for the healing of soul and body, eat the Flesh of the spotless and undefiled Lamb, Our Lord Jesus Christ, Who in supreme and unspeakable charity gave Himself for us; Who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, God, eternally glorious, world without end. Amen.

QUEEN OF THE ORDER OF FRIARS MINOR

Lessons of the Second Nocturne of the Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of the Order of Friars Minor, December 15. From the Encyclical Letter, "Ob Singularem," Pope Pius X, September 8, 1910.

*"Come into thy garden, Our Queen, our Princess."
(Resp.)*

As a reminder of the inexpressible tenderness of Saint Francis towards God's most blessed Mother We desire the sons of that great father to recall these words of Thomas of Celano: "Especially would he render praise to her, pour out his prayers to her, to her proffer his love: to so great an extent and so earnestly as to surpass any human tongue's accounting. But what gave him the greatest joy was to make her the Patroness of the Order and place under her protection the sons he would leave after him, to be cherished and guarded forever."

In this relation the Seraphic Doctor says that "he enshrined the Mother of the Lord Jesus Christ with an unutterable love, in order to procure the Lord of Majesty as our Brother, and through her that we may obtain mercy. Resigning his special trust to her, after Christ, he named her the Advocate of himself and his children."

In consequence, ever since the very commencement of the Order, as the Seraphic Doctor goes on to say, Francis, the shepherd of his little flock, guided by divine grace, led those twelve first friars to Saint Mary of the Portiuncula, so that where the Order of Friars Minor began, there through the favor of God's Mother it might have an increase in her help.

This most holy Apostle especially longed for a strengthening in humility for his brethren though the most Blessed Virgin Mary, so that, growing stronger as the days went on, they might be "Minors" not in a feigned sense, but in heart, word, and deed, in their sayings and in their acts, humble in very earnest and really meek; not only that, but humbly poor, meekly poor, poor with a Gospel poverty grounded in perfect humility. In asserting the rights of this poverty grounded upon humility he calls upon the Mother of God: "But thou, most noble Queen of the World, Protector of the Poor and Advocate of the

Humble, far more exalted among thy people than Esther and more sublimely readied in time, rise up to the cries of thy Mardochai, thy Francis, and deign to beseech the King to glorify by thy holy example and favor and preserve this state of poverty, which He wished to be like His Own and thereto joined in a special brotherhood."

In order that the urgings and advice of the Seraphic Father and of his holy and wise son, Bonaventure the Seraphic Doctor, may always be followed faithfully, and because this privilege of calling upon the Most Holy Mother of God in the Litany of Loreto with a special invocation of one's own Order has been granted to some families of religious by the Apostolic See, We grant this privilege in perpetuity out of the fullness of Our Apostolic power as a new pledge of Our special benevolence to the sons of Saint Francis. It is, therefore, Our command that in each and every convent, church, and oratory of the Seraphic Order, in all their processions and sacred functions, in which the Litany of Loreto is customarily recited or sung, the invocation, "Queen of the Order of Friars Minor, pray for us," shall be added after the invocation, "Queen of the Holy Rosary, pray for us." We declare that under this special invocation the protection of the Immaculate Virgin must be asked for each and every child of the three-fold family of Friars Minor, for the nuns who follow the Rule of Saint Clare, whatever the name they may bear, for the Tertiaries of both sexes who lead the common life in religion, and for the secular Tertiaries subject to the jurisdiction and direction of any of the Franciscan families.

In addition to the above, and to increase still more among the sons of the Seraphic Father the liturgical cultus of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, Pope Pius XII graciously granted the whole Franciscan family their own Feast of the Immaculate Virgin under the title of "Queen of the Order of Friars Minor" to be celebrated with a proper Mass and Office.

St. Bonaventure University

Fr. Columban Duffy, O. F. M.

LITTLE FLOWERS OF BROTHER JORDAN

Adapted from *Bruder Jordan Mai*, Antoniusbote, Oct. 1950.

HOW BROTHER JORDAN WAITED IN VAIN FOR A MIRACLE

Once, when Brother Jordan was still in the world, he read in the life of a certain saint how the sins he had written down for confession were miraculously erased from the paper after absolution. Brother Jordan wished that he, too, might become worthy to receive this sign of God's pleasure, for then, he thought, he would be certain that the affairs of his soul were in good order and that his entering religious life would be truly a new beginning. So he wrote down, according to his knowledge, whatever he had done in his life that could have been in the least contrary to the will of God. He then applied himself to earnest thinking of all these things, and in sorrow and remorse pondered his sins in the depths of his soul until he knew them by heart. Through fasting and devoutly saying the Stations of the Cross, he prepared himself with all diligence for his general confession. When at last he was ready, he went to church, slipped the list of sins into his pocket, and knelt in the confessional. No sooner had he received absolution than he rushed from the church and snatched the paper from his pocket, confident that the miracle had happened. He looked at the paper. Alas! There had been no miracle. All his sins remained just as he had written them. And there he stood with the paper in his hand, agape and staring, stupid as a sheep. But on the way home he began to consider for what purpose, after all, he had so desired this miracle; for in no way would it have added to the grace or efficacy of the Sacrament nor would his soul have been made any the purer thereby. Indeed, burning the paper would efface his sins as truly as would the miracle, but what good to his soul could result from that? And questioning himself in this way, Brother Jordan came to understand the folly of regarding external signs rather than realities in the spiritual life, and he humbly thanked God for the great truth this disappointment had taught him.

¹ Brother Jordan Mai was born September 1, 1866, in Buer, in the Ruhr District of Germany. The son of an upholsterer, he learned his father's trade, and having served his time in the army, entered the Franciscan Order in 1894. He was employed as cook in several houses, and also in various other capacities, always, however, seeking by preference the less appreciated tasks. Humility was perhaps his outstanding virtue, and the Mother of God, his model. Of all Our Lady's feasts, the Annunciation was dearest to him, for it revealed the great humility of the Handmaid of the Lord whom he loved to invoke as "Virgin most humble." After 1907 he lived in the monastery at Dortmund, the heart of the industrial center of the Ruhr. There he died on February 20, 1922. Immediately and spontaneously his veneration spread among the working people of Dortmund, and within the few years since his death his cult has become popular throughout the world.

HOW BROTHER JORDAN RENOUNCED ABSTINENCE AND DRANK BEER

Although Brother Jordan never bound himself by vow to refrain from drink, he none the less practised total abstinence. One day, when several clergymen of high dignity were celebrating a feast day in the monastery, they sought to amuse themselves by playing a joke on the simple Brother. They began to converse on the subject of abstinence, and heaped glowing praises upon Brother Jordan for his work in the Catholic Temperance Society. The humble Brother, in all modesty, brushed aside these praises, but listened attentively to what was being said of the good work done by the Society. Gradually the conversation was made to shift from praise of abstinence to suspicion of fanaticism, and the learned clergymen began to quote many examples of heretics and fanatics and enemies of the truth who had tried to conceal error under the cloak of zeal. As the discussion grew more heated, Brother Jordan grew more dismayed. Finally one of the speakers arose and with many violent gestures and in ringing tones denounced all pharisees and zealots who refused to drink the good things God had provided for man's comfort and joy. "The Catholic Temperance Society", he shouted, "is like all the rest of its kind—it aims to stir up the masses by show of false zeal, and unless it is stopped it will soon sweep over the country in a flood-tide of blind fanaticism, drowning in its muddy depths all those who refuse to conform. Christianity is a religion of moderation, of balance and sanity. Away with zealotry!" Scarcely had the words been spoken when Brother Jordan arose, pale and trembling, and, pouring himself a great draft of beer, he addressed the clergymen: "Reverend Fathers, when I gave my support to the Temperance Society I did so in all good faith and only that I might help save souls from dying in the bondage of drunkenness. But if what you say is true, that the Society is an evil thing in a holy disguise and a movement against the Faith, then I shall have no part of it either publicly or privately. And in proof of this, I empty my cup." And saying this he threw back his head and without taking a breath quaffed the beer. Thereupon all the clergymen and friars burst into merry laughter, and, when the good Brother understood that it was all but a joke, he joined the laughter and with a happy mind resumed his practice of abstinence.

In this way, in this simple and direct acceptance of the word of priests, Brother Jordan always followed with great fidelity the example of our holy Father Francis.

HOW BROTHER JORDAN USED TO MEDITATE

Once in the monastery of Dingelstädt a young candidate besought Brother Jordan to explain to him the secret of a good meditation. Brother Jordan replied:

"My Brother, you must hold fast to the subject of meditation—yes, cling to it until the sweat runs off your forehead." The candidate followed this advice most faithfully and for the rest of his life gathered great fruit therefrom.

On another occasion, Brother Servulus, a beloved friend and confrere, complained to Brother Jordan of his difficulties in meditation, of his struggles against drowsiness and lassitude of mind, and he asked the good Brother whether he, too, did not experience similar difficulties. "Sleep during meditation? Indeed not," replied Brother Jordan. "Meditation is my theatre. The whole day long I look forward to the time of meditation, just as if I were going to a play. The time passes all too quickly for me." Then, since it was Christmastide, Brother Jordan described to him the manner in which he meditated at the Crib. First he saluted the Christ-Child, adoring Him and engaging Him in sweet conversation. Then he turned to Mary, the Child's holy Mother, and congratulated her. He then greeted in turn St. Joseph, the pious shepherds, and the three holy kings. In all this he acted with the most humble reverence and in a plain and simple manner, following the example of our holy Father Francis at the Christmas Crib in Greccio.

HOW BROTHER JORDAN OFFERED HIS LIFE IN REPARATION

On the evening of February 20, 1922, Brother Jordan sought out his confessor and said to him in all simplicity: "Father, help me to go to heaven. I went to confession a few days ago, and I received Holy Communion this morning. Now I ask you to give me the Last Sacraments and General Absolution." Having said this, he returned to his cell. The Father Confessor hesitated, as well he might, to comply with so strange a request; but knowing Brother Jordan to be a man of perfect simplicity and deep holiness, he soon followed him to his cell. There he found the good Brother already in bed, though by no means a dying man. As they were speaking together, the Brother's face suddenly grew pale and his features took on the cast of death. He received the Last Sacraments with deep fervor and reverence, then calmly closed his eyes and died.

Later it became known that Brother Jordan had offered his life to the Lord Jesus in reparation; for it had happened, a few days before his death, that robbers had broken into the Franciscan church and had shamefully desecrated the tabernacle. The knowledge of this sacrilege caused him such grievous sorrow that he besought the Lord to accept his life in atonement.

In his great love of Christ hidden in the Blessed Sacrament Brother Jordan proved himself a most faithful son of our Holy Father Francis.

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

According To Saint Bonaventure

In order to reach religious perfection, "it is first necessary," says Saint Bonaventure, "to forget all exterior things and to enter the secret room of our conscience."¹ In other words, "know thyself."

There are many things about himself a man ought to consider. First and above all he should be conscious of his dignity, based as it is on the worth and beauty of his soul, which surpasses the splendor of all other earthly creatures. He is the natural and supernatural image of the Triune God, reflecting, though faintly to be sure, the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. The soul of man has almost divine power which renders him capable of union with God (*capax Dei*), a union attainable through understanding, volition, and love. This union is most perfectly attained in heaven in the beatific vision; but it is commenced on earth and fostered by the God Who delights to dwell in the soul of man as in a sanctuary.

Despite his dignity, however, there exists in man forces which militate against his union with God. Sinful actions, bad habits, disordered affections, wilful defects, and imperfections are typical of these forces. It is true, such disorders do not completely efface the image of God, but they distort that image and tend to debase man's dignity and hinder him from reaching intimate union with God. They must, therefore, be discovered, and the discovery presumes self-scrutiny. With the aid of divine grace, however, the scrutiny can be effective. It is absolutely necessary that any religious striving to reach perfection undertake this task of learning to know himself.

In a most emphatic manner the Seraphic Doctor urges upon all religious the duty of discovering personal sins and imperfections. One must not mistake St. Bonaventure's purpose in this matter. His insistence is not based merely on the necessity of examining one's conscience for a worthy sacramental confession, although he does not exclude this laudable aim. Nor does he recommend and stress true knowledge of one's character, disposition, and inclination, simply as an important means of developing what might be called a religious personality. He is impelled by deeper reasons, and it is to these reasons that he draws the attention of those who have accepted Christ's invitation to perfection.

It is of universal occurrence that the development of a deep love of God is accompanied by a deepening sense of one's own sinfulness. The Seraphic Doctor

¹ *De Perfectione Vitae C. I. 1.*

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

expresses this law in the words of Saint Gregory: "The more that saintly men advance in the dignity of virtues before God, the more sharply they discover their unworthiness; because, as they approach the light, they discover within themselves all that was formerly hidden from them."² Has it not been so in the life of every saint? The Seraphic Doctor, himself possessed of a high degree of sanctity, understood without the least difficulty how the radiantly holy Francis could revile himself as the worst of sinners and do so with perfect sincerity and profound truth. For Francis the confession of his sinfulness was by no means a pious exaggeration, but the recognition of a fact; and this was the very essence of his humility and greatness. After all, grace is given to the humblest of the beggars in the spirit, who know that they are in dire need of the mercy of the Father in heaven against Whom they have sinned. Will the poor man who needs help hide his poverty? Will the wounded man who comes to the physician conceal his wounds? It is solely by a display of our misery to the merciful God that we can hope to obtain His grace. "We are unable to incline to the mercy of God to grant us grace except we implore Him and lay before Him our misery and need,"³ says St. Bonaventure. Here, then, he touches an essential reason for knowing our sins and imperfections: self-knowledge is indispensable for the humble statement of our weakness and misery before the Eternal Judge and Merciful Father.

But there is still a deeper reason. May a soul called to the wedding feast of the Spouse disregard her sins and imperfections? On the contrary, her recollection of them increases her love. It is true that "there is no fear in love but perfect love casts out fear."⁴ True love is not disturbed by the sins and imperfections as such, but it is deeply pained by the offenses against the Beloved. The Crucified Lover is the object of the most tender compassion; He is likewise the living reproach of the negligences, the inordinate inclinations, the lack of complete good will on the part of the soul so dear to Him. Conscious of her failings and of her offenses against the Divine Spouse, the soul deepens her appreciation of the Infinite Goodness; she realizes with increased intensity the depth and the breadth of Christ's love and how undeserving of it she is. Time and again she will recall her unworthiness, she will confess her weakness as only love can do, without the least restraint; she will go with her Lord to the Tenth Station and be completely stripped of everything which could be found offensive in His eyes. Thus prepared, she will be ready to be nailed with Him

² *Soliloquium c. I, 9.*

³ *De Triplici Via c. II, 1.*

⁴ *1 John 4, 18*

to the Cross, "dead, as it were, to the external world, yet understanding, as far as possible in this life, the words Christ spoke to the robber crucified with Him: This day thou shalt be with Me in paradise."⁵

The remembrance of past sins and the knowledge of present imperfections are demanded by Saint Bonaventure of every religious, no matter how intimate his union with Christ. For the Seraphic Doctor cannot conceive of the purgative way as merely a stage in the spiritual life from which the soul eventually emerges purified of sins and imperfections, but rather as a state of mind which must endure even after the soul has advanced to the illuminative and unitive way in meditation, prayer, and love. The Franciscan soul, paradoxically, is always at the beginning, no matter how close it is to the end.

A sound, objective knowledge of self, therefore, is of necessity, not merely of counsel. It should not be difficult for the mature religious to understand the almost impassioned statement of Saint Bonaventure: "How dangerous it is for a religious man to seek knowledge of many things, but to neglect knowledge of self. How near to perdition and ruin is a religious who is prone to know things, who is concerned with judging the conscience of others, yet does not know himself. O my God, whence is such blindness in religious?"⁶ It is to remedy this blindness that Saint Bonaventure offers to religious a plan for profitable examination of conscience. It is both brief and general; brief enough to be inserted in this article and general enough to warrant a series of explanations in forthcoming issues of THE CORD. Yet, all possible explanations and comments having been made, the plan at most can be no more than a guide, a helpful suggestion for further and more personal development by the individual religious.

PLAN FOR EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

I. Sins of negligence:

1. Was I negligent in guarding my heart; in using my time well; in fixing my mind on purity of intention?
2. Was I negligent in prayer, in spiritual reading and meditation; in doing good?
3. Was I negligent in mortification; in resisting temptations; in advancing in perfection?

⁵ *Itinerarium* c. VII, 2.

⁶ *De Perfectione Vitae* I, 6

II. Sins of concupiscence:

1. Did I seek inordinate pleasure in food and drink; in apparel; in physical comforts?
2. Did I give free rein to curiosity by prying into the secrets of others? Did I yield to a fastidious desire to behold beautiful objects, to have precious things?
3. Did I give in to vanity by seeking the favor of men; by working for human praise and recognition; by aspiring to worldly honors?

III. Sins of Malice:

1. Was anger alive in my heart? Did I allow it to appear in word or in manner?
2. Did I yield to envy by rejoicing over the failures of others or by grieving over their success and good fortune; by being pleased at discovering faults in them and unhappy at discovering good qualities?
3. Did I give in to sloth by lukewarmness, day-dreaming, laziness? Was I slow, negligent, undisciplined at work? Did I yield to indifference, melancholy, disgust?

Perhaps a final word of caution should be added. Self-knowledge can be obtained only by constant and consistent effort. The day of recollection should afford an opportunity for more thorough self-analysis over a broader though coherent field, than the daily exams. Let the religious be convinced, also, that the prudent guidance of the confessor or spiritual director is practically indispensable. Such guidance is often seriously hampered, if not rendered utterly useless, by subtle insincerity, by unconscious ignorance of self, by the blindness deplored by Saint Bonaventure. Only through radical humility, perseverance, and prayer, especially to the Holy Ghost, and a willingness to answer completely and truthfully the questions of the director will the religious be able to employ effectively any method of reaching self-knowledge and perfection. In fact, serious and sustained effort to attain self-knowledge is actually growth in perfection.

St. Bonaventure University

Fr. Philotheus Boehner, O. F. M.

FROM THE GOLDEN SAYINGS OF BROTHER GI

✚ ✚ ✚

He who doth not wish to honor others shall not be honored, and doth not wish to know shall not be known, and he who doth not wish fatigue shall not rest.

✚ ✚ ✚

To cultivate piety and kindness is a work fruitful above all works.

✚ ✚ ✚

By his own works a man is made poor and by divine works he is rich. Hence a man must love divine things and despise his own.

✚ ✚ ✚

No one can come to the knowledge of God except through humility.

✚ ✚ ✚

A great degree of humility in a man is to know that he is always open to his own welfare.

✚ ✚ ✚

Blessed is the man who esteemeth himself to be vile before man, knoweth himself to be vile in the sight of God.

FRANCISCAN BRIEFS

Franciscan Briefs welcomes communications relating to such spiritual matters as are of interest to the Franciscan Family in general.

*Franciscan Biblical Institute
In China*

The process of Brother Jordan's **beatification** is following the normal course, but the devotion of the faithful is growing with extraordinary rapidity. This was evidenced on the occasion of the transfer of his body on August 20 of this year, from the cemetery in Dortmund to the Franciscan Church. A conservative estimate places the attendance at approximately 100,000. Many ecclesiastical dignitaries came to venerate this humble "friend of the people," as Brother Jordan is affectionately called. The Very Reverend Minister General of the Friars Minor, Father Pacificus Perantoni, was one of the many speakers. In the course of his address he said: "We have here among us a plain and simple man, the son of a laborer, a simple man in his monastery. But he fashioned his life according to the model of the humble Virgin. He stood before God with a total fiat, a fiat with passion for God. When we have pronounced our fiat to God, completely as Mary did, humbly and totally as did the faithful servant of the humble Virgin, Brother Jordan, then will God perfect in us also that mystery, that final mystery which has already become a reality in Mary—the resurrection of the body; and the way to this is the way followed by the humble, simple man, the humble son of Saint Francis, our Brother Jordan of Buer."

On the feast of the Portiuncula, 1945, the Very Reverend Delegate General Alphonse Schnusenberg, O. F. M., instituted a commission for a new translation of the Old and New Testaments into Chinese. The Studium Biblicum was placed under the patronage of John Duns Scotus, "because he is the theologian of the Incarnate Word and the defender of the Immaculate Conception." Chinese and European Franciscans under the leadership of Father Gabriel Allegra, O. F. M., have completed the version of the Old Testament, most of which has already been published. It is hoped that the entire work will be finished by 1954, the centenary of the definition of the Immaculate Conception, Patroness and Queen of China. It is planned, after the completion of the translation, to publish the whole Bible in one volume, to prepare a biblical dictionary, and to issue a biblical-apologetical periodical. The report (Acta OFM LXIX, 165) concludes: "We who are engaged in this biblical study humbly entreat and greatly desire that our confreres who read the Bible explore the Blessed Virgin, the Celestial Mother, the Mother of the Lord, the Mother of Blessings, the Mother of the Holy Spirit, who may grant us the grace to persevere in these working

in Quaracchi] who, by their virtue and learning, will make this humble labor germinate and grow like a seed sown in the vast field of China."

Feast of Our Lady, the Queen of the Franciscan Order.

At the joint request of the Very Reverend Ministers General of the three branches of the Franciscan Family on July 10, 1944, the Sacred Congregation of Rites has graciously granted the celebration (II. class.) of the feast of our Lady, The Queen of the Franciscan Order. In granting the



MESSAGE OF THE EDITOR

Pax et Bonum

With gratitude to God I wish to thank all the children of Saint Francis who have answered the invitation to subscribe to THE CORD. Many of them have expressed their great joy and enthusiasm. May the Lord bless them for their encouraging words. It has been physically impossible to thank by personal note the Reverend Mothers Superiors who subscribed to THE CORD for all the houses in their jurisdictions: I ask them to accept these words as proof of my deep gratitude.

The publication of THE CORD was made possible by the generous gift of a person whose name cannot be revealed. The Franciscan Educational Conference under its president, Fr. Pius Barth, O. F. M., has not only encouraged the start of this Franciscan spiritual review, but has also given substantial financial help.

It is my sincere wish that Franciscans everywhere will consider THE CORD their own and help to assure its continuance. It is true that THE CORD needs still more subscribers; but we likewise invite the assistance of contributors. Above all, however, this venture needs the constant prayer of those who will benefit by it.

May the Christ Child, the Infant of Bethlehem, whom Saint Francis of Assisi so ardently loved, bless you on Christmas Day and strengthen you in your holy vocation.

May the Lord give you peace!

FR. PHILOTHEUS BOEHNER, O. F. M.

request on July 14, 1949, the Sacred Congregation made special mention of the great devotion of our Father Saint Francis to our Lady, a devotion which has been a distinctive character of the entire Franciscan Family (Cfr. Acta OFM, LXVIII, 258). In view of the fact that the text of the Office and the Mass was made available several months ago, it is likely that a large part of the Franciscan Family will celebrate the new feast for the first time on December 15.

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