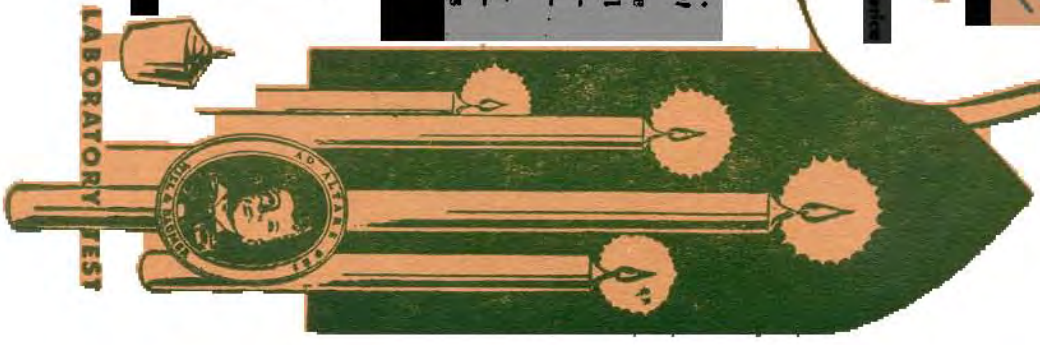


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The CORD

A FRANCISCAN SPIRITUAL REVIEW

VOL.

the CORD

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A Commentary on the Psalms:

Father Jerome A. Kelly, O.F.M.

PSALMS 123 and 128

There is still one other Psalm from the hour of Sext to be considered, Psalm 123. We are going to consider it now, in conjunction with Psalm 128, which is the first of the Psalms used in Compline. The association of these two poems is dictated by the strong resemblance between them in points of style, structure, and general content. The likeness is so marked, in fact, that it moves many commentators to a conclusion thus expressed by one of them: "They may well have been written by the same poet in the same period, with reference to the dangers which threatened the community in the time of Nehemias."

This resemblance, too, is more likely to strike a reader, perhaps, because the Psalms come so close to each other in the Psalter, only four short Psalms intervening, none of which has more than eight verses. They are found in that part of the Psalter which contains the "Pilgrim Songs," so called, as we have conjectured, because they were sung by the pilgrims making the annual trips to Jerusalem commanded by the Law (Deuteronomy 16:16).

Strangely enough, there is next to nothing in either of these Psalms—as there is something, for

example, in Psalms 120 and 121—that has any direct relevance to such a pilgrimage, the circumstances of the trip, or its object. You might at first reading, I suspect, wonder why they are included among the Pilgrim Songs. But study them more attentively, and you come to realize that their blending of intense patriotism and religion, of fierce pride in their race and deep gratitude to God for defending it, makes these poems ideal for expressing sentiments that would naturally well up in the hearts of travellers to Jerusalem, the capital of the nation and the chosen city of God.

As a matter of fact, you can say fairly that these two Psalms must have been intended by their composer or composers to become just such hymns. They were designed to be the songs Israelites would sing in grateful remembrance of God's stupendous and loving care. A remembrance, moreover, warranted to strengthen the singers' confidence in God's future protection. I think that we can make this claim because of the short, sharp command that appears so early and so abruptly in the first verse of each poem:

Let Israel say.

The poet surprises you, almost shocks you with these words, with

the suddenness of them. The Psalms begin calmly, move along logically, then their flow is interrupted by this forthright exhortation. The repetition of the opening words after his command seems to invest them with a new force that grows to a ringing climax as the sentence carries along to its triumphant close.

Incidentally you can easily catch the resemblance in style if you compare the first two verses of these Psalms. In Psalm 128 the poet commences his poem by saying:

Much have they oppressed me from my youth.

Almost by way of afterthought he injects a command that makes his poem the utterance of all God's people:

Let Israel say.

He picks up again and repeats the statement he had interrupted:

Much have they oppressed me from my youth.

Then comes a boast that completes his thought and makes his verse a perfect example of antithetic parallelism:

Yet they have not prevailed against me.

This effective rhetorical device is the very one used in the opening verses of Psalm 123. There you find the matter-of-fact opening:

Had not the Lord been with us;

the sudden interruption:

Let Israel say;

the resumption and the repetition of the line of thought;

Had not the Lord been with us;

then the completion of the thought:

When men rose up against us, then would they have swallowed us up alive.

Not identical in style, to be sure, but like enough to be remarked.

The two Psalms not only commence alike; they run along for exactly the same number of verses, eight in each case. And the verses fall obviously into two strophes.

The first strophe deals with the dangers which Israel has faced and from which God has delivered them; the second is an expression of trust and confidence in the continued Providence of God. The Psalms are alike, too, you discover, in structure. The poet builds up a set of pictures, a series of images in both strophes of the poem to illustrate and to drive home the point that he is trying to make.

Or, I suppose I should say, the theme that he is presenting. To see how he does this involves reading each poem separately.

Let us begin with Psalm 123 and with the first strophe of it, verses 1 to 5. The framework of the entire strophe is that of an ordinary conditional sentence, the contrary to fact kind. You know, if President Lincoln had not been assassinated, he would have adopted a kindly attitude to the defeated Confederacy. That kind of thing. The poet

first states his condition, a single condition even though he does state it twice

Had not the Lord been with us, let Israel say,

had not the Lord been with us.

Then he states his conclusion three times, each time in a slightly different way. Here it is once:

When men rose up against us, then would they have swallowed us alive.

Here it is another way:

When their fury was inflamed against us,

then would the waters have overwhelmed us.

And here it is the third way:

The torrent would have swept over us;

over us then would have swept the raging waters.

Obviously in each one of these statements the poet is saying the same thing: the human enemies of God's people would have prevailed against them and destroyed them utterly had it not been for the Lord. What saves the statements from being mere repetition of the same idea is the metaphor in each of them. In the first statement the enemy is pictured, seemingly, as a wild beast that would have devoured Israel, "would have swallowed us alive." The metaphor is a familiar one for the depiction of the enemies of God's people. Jeremiah, for one example, uses it in his Lamentations: "All thy enemies have opened their mouth against thee: they have hissed,

and gashed with the teeth, and have said: We will swallow her up: lo, this is the day which we have looked for: we have found it, we have seen it" (Lamentations 2:16). Elsewhere he presents Jerusalem describing her destruction in these suggestive words:

"Nabuchodonosor king of Babylon hath eaten me up, he hath devoured me . . . he hath swallowed me up like a dragon" (Jeremiah 51:34). So there are good grounds for taking this verse of the Psalm as another instance of this animal metaphor. The only trouble with so treating it comes from the fact that the figure is suddenly dropped, and the rest of the strophe is developed by the metaphor of flooding waters. This figure, too, was a familiar figure of great afflictions. One of the richest uses of it, surely, is found in Psalm 68:

Save me, O God, for the waters threaten my life; I am sunk in the abysmal swamp where there is no foothold; I have reached the watery depths; the flood overwhelms me.

And later on in the same Psalm we read these words:

Rescue me out of the mire; may I not sink! I may I be rescued from my foes, and from the watery depths. Let not the flood-waters overwhelm me, nor the abyss swallow me up, nor the pit close its mouth over me.

(Psalm 68:2-3, 15-16)

National as well as personal calamities were described by the imagery of waters engulfing the lands. Psalm 92 uses the figure of raging waters for chaos and rebellion spreading out over the land. Psalm 45 does the same. And this figure was used by Isaiah to describe the Assyrian invasion. "The Lord will bring the waters of Euphrates upon it in full flood; I mean the king of the Assyrians in all his greatness. This flood will fill up all the channels of the river, overflow all its banks, till it pours over Juda, overwhelming her and reaching up to her very neck" (Isaiah 8:7-8).

The problem created by these facts is whether to take the figure in verse 3 as that of a wild beast and to let the figure of engulfing waters begin in verse 4, or to take the figure in verse 3 as that of rising waters, a figure which then carries through verses 4 and 5. In favor of this latter alternative is the mounting movement that it gives to the strophe. The figure of rising waters to represent the enemies of Israel is just suggested in the words "swallowed us alive."

That the flood increases is evident in the words "then would the waters have overwhelmed us." The full fury of the torrent is depicted in the words "over us then would have swept the raging waters." Thus you have flowing through the entire threefold conclusion of this conditional sentence a single figure, that of rising

waters sweeping in to engulf Israel. You have a perfect metaphor for the afflictions and disasters which would have wiped out the Chosen People "had not the Lord been with us."

The second strophe is a hymn of thanksgiving for what the Lord has done. Again you have a spate of lively, dramatic images, the first appearing in verse 6. Here it is:

*Blessed be the Lord, who did not leave us
a prey to their teeth.*

The obvious interpretation is that the enemies of the Israelites are devouring beasts whom the Lord has foiled of their quarry. This, too, is a familiar metaphor in the Psalms. David uses it, for instance, in this prayer:

*O Lord, my God, in you I take refuge;
save me from all my pursuers
and rescue me,
Lest I become like the lion's prey,
to be torn to pieces, with no
one to rescue me.*

(Psalm 7:2-3)

The difficulty about this interpretation is that it isolates verse 6 from verse 7, in which appears the metaphor of a fowler, whose snare has been broken, whose prey has escaped. So that Israel can exult:

*We were rescued like a bird
from the fowler's snare.
Broken was the snare,
and we were freed.
It is I think, this disappointed*

fowler who is depicted, too, in verse 6, robbed of the prey he planned to feast on. The two verses are really using a single metaphor like the one that appears in this description of David's enemy:

*He waits in secret like a lion in his
lair;
he lies in wait to catch the
afflicted;
he catches the afflicted and drags
them off in his net.*

(Psalm 9B, 9)

Likening Israel to a bird emphasizes his defenselessness and makes his deliverance all the more exclusively the work of God's omnipotence. The expression of this truth brings the poem to its close. No imagery now, no figurative language, but blunt, straightforward, matter-of-fact statement:

*Our help is in the name of the
Lord,
who made heaven and earth.*

We may miss certain defiance about these words, I suspect, unless we remember that the enemies of Israel placed all their trust in what Jeremias contemptuously described as "gods that neither heaven nor earth could fashion. . . . Fond imaginations, antic figures, when the time comes for reckoning, they shall be heard of no more" (Jeremias 10:11, 15).

And so we come now to Psalm 128, the companion piece, as it has been called, of Psalm 123. We have already noted the rhetorical structure of the first two verses: statement, interruption, repetition,

and conclusion. The next thing to notice is that the poet builds up his first strophe by taking parts of these first two verses and illustrating them imaginatively. The Psalm opens with the declaration:

*Much have they oppressed me from
my youth.
The third verse describes this
oppression figuratively:
Upon my back the plowers plowed;
long did they make furrows.*

This metaphor, when you come to think about it, is as revealing as it is stark. Isaiah had figuratively described the enemies of his people as "cruel oppressors that bade thee lie down and let them walk over thee, dust under their feet, a pathway for them to tread" (Isaiah 51:23). The metaphor in this Psalm is more intense, more shocking. Stretched prostrate, face ground into the dirt, Israel's back is ripped and furrowed by the sharp plowshares of invading armies, one after the other. And each intent on doing a more thorough job and sparing nothing:

Long did they make their furrows.
The figure comes, of course, from an occupation common enough in so agricultural a society. Everybody would have been familiar with the sight of the plowman, following in the footsteps of his oxen, guiding the bright blade of the earth, turning over the red-brown soil in long, even grooves. And all would have recognized how aptly

the figure described the history of their land, themselves, and their ancestors.

However grievously the enemies of Israel have oppressed him, he can still claim:

Yet they have not prevailed against me

This plain statement of truth from the first part of the strophe is figuratively presented in the fourth verse:

But the just Lord has severed the cords of the wicked.

Actually the metaphor of verse 3 is subtly continued. The Lord puts an end to the oppression of Israel by stretching out his hand to cut the harness that hitches the oxen to the plow—and all plowing stops! He "has severed the cords of the wicked." And with that note of finality the strophe closes.

The second strophe is both a prayer for continued defense and an expression of confidence that the prayer will be granted. As in the first strophe, a direct, literal statement is elaborated metaphorically. First you have Israel's prayer for deliverance from enemies:

May all be put to shame and fall back

that hate Zion.

The hope of the heart of this prayer is next expressed in figurative language. Here again the poet uses a familiar experience of his hearers to make the full import of his wish more surely

evident. A house-top in Palestine was usually a simple structure of tiles, flagstones, and rubble, laid across the roof beams. It was reached by a stairway that ran up the outside wall of the house. Sometimes seeds of grass or of other grains would lodge in the crevices and, in the rainy spring days, start to sprout. With the coming of summer "when the sun was up, they were scorched: and because they had not roots, they withered away" (Matthew 13:5-6). So may it be with them "that hate Zion,"

May they be like grass on the housetops, which withers before it is plucked.

Here today and gone tomorrow! The flashy kind of crop *With which the reaper fills not his hand,*

nor the gatherer of sheaves his arms.

A desolate yield, indeed, these dry and withered blades! How unlike the waving fields of golden grain into which the happy farmer goes with all his helpers to gather in their harvest, cheered at their work by neighbors who, while passing along the road, call down a blessing on them. No such harvest on these rooftops, no happy reapers.

And those that pass by say not, "The blessing of the Lord be upon you!"

We bless you in the name of the Lord!

The artistry of this poet is demonstrated, I think, by his success in picturing by suggestion a harvest scene, so peaceful and charming, so idyllic, that his prayer for vengeance is intensified by his wish that nothing so lovely ever be the lot of the enemies of Israel. It is some kind of tribute to him that we are so captivated by the details of his imagery that we almost lose sight of its completely negative quality, in the sense that there are no greetings, no blessings, no gatherers, no reapers, no harvest at all because they "that hate Zion" are to be "like grass on the housetops, which withers before it is plucked." It is likewise a tribute to him that he has drawn all the imagery of his poem from the one same area of experience familiar to his hearers: the plowers and

their plowing the furrows, the oxen and their cords in the first strophe; the grass on the housetops, the reapers and gatherers of sheaves, the passers by and their blessings of the second strophe. That similarity seems to lock the two strophes together and give this Psalm unity that Psalm 123 lacks. It is quite accidental, of course, that this poem may send our minds off on a tangent to think of "the hills of the fields" and the grasses of the fields" (Matthew 6:28, 30); of "the sower gone out to sow his seed" (Luke 8:5); of "the True Vine and the Father who tends it" (John 15:1). Accidental, that is, until you remind yourself that all these words, all of them, have for their author the one same Holy Spirit.

In Christ Jesus Our Lord

Valentine M. Breton, O.F.M.
(Translated from the French by Michael D. Melich, O.F.M.)

IV. GETTING TO KNOW CHRIST

(Continued)

Bartholomew of Pisa wrote a very important book which is presented to the General Chapter at Assisi on Pentecost Sunday, 1398. Entitled *The Conformity of the Life of Blessed Francis to that of our Lord Jesus Christ*, this book proposed the thesis that every event in the life of our Lord had its counterpart in that of St. Francis: the precursor, the birth in a stable, the twelve companions, the seventy-two disciples, and so forth, even to Calvary and the borrowed tomb.

Now, even if we allow for literary convention at the time and for minor accommodations here and there, the book obviously contains undeniable facts; it is the work not of a mystic but of a historian

who cited sources and referred to works later unearthed and found authentic.

Bartholomew's thesis is quite correct, moreover: every event, every mystery in the life of Christ had its counterpart, or better its reproduction, its "conformity," in the life of Francis. The coat-of-arms of the Order expresses this conformity perfectly; it depicts two crossed arms—Christ's bare and Francis' covered by the sleeve of his habit—before a Cross.

But we know the facts well enough. The question that comes up now is, where did Francis gain his knowledge of Christ? What were the SOURCES of his knowledge and therefore of his imitation?

The importance of this question is obvious: if we are to be imitators of Francis as he is of Christ, we too shall go to draw from his sources. Now we know from the life of St. Francis that these sources were the same ones that we have available to us today: Scripture, the Liturgy, the interior life, and above all the Passion.

Scriptura gratia Christi, said St. Jerome in a figure difficult to translate into English: "Scripture is pregnant with Christ." In fact, the whole of Scripture really amounts to a prefiguring, a recounting, and an explanation of the life of our Lord. The historians, prophets, and wise men who wrote it had in mind only the incarnate Son of God come among us to teach us, to save us, and to sanctify us.

That is the sense in which, for us, the New Testament is Scripture; whatever was true and valuable in the Old, has passed into the New—into its Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Apocalypse—all of which should be familiar enough to us. But that is not to say that we should ignore the Psalms and the Sapiential Books, or that we can afford to be ignorant of at least the general outlines of Jewish history.

We should get to know the Bible, and to know that it is not enough to be exposed to the Sunday Gospels. We must read it as a whole; and we must re-read it over and over again, for with continued effort we come to understand it better and to derive greater profit from it. In its light the truths of our catechism become more vital, our faith is enlivened, and we develop that Catholic Sense which is so essential to the Franciscan soul.

We can leave the exegetical problems to the scholars; for as Bossuet said, Scripture is no less divine in its obscure passages than in its clear ones. All commentaries can do is to clarify the letter of Scripture, but we are seeking its Spirit. In the beautiful analogy of Thomas a Kempis, we are seeking communion with the Word of God hidden in the facts of Scripture just as He is in the Host (*Imitation*, IV, xi, iv, 22).

Of course those who have the ability and the desire to use a commentary can do so with profit; but it is by no means absolutely necessary to do so, for any modern translation of the Bible, complete with notes and summaries, is enough to give us a good idea of the text. At any rate, nothing can take the place of consistent, daily reading of Holy Writ. That is how our Holy Founder acquired his own knowledge of Scripture.

Francis, by the way, knew the letter as well as anyone, but he was not one to stop there, for he was no professional theologian, and scientific discussion meant nothing to him. Rather he passed quickly from the letter to the spirit of Scripture. In the Gospels, for example, he never saw simply facts, anecdotes, edifying stories and examples to use in sermons—nor were they "authorities" to use in support of his personal opinions. Perhaps the best possible description of what the Gospels meant to Francis is to say that they were a sort of television screen on which he could see the life of Jesus enacted before his own eyes—and from which he could assimilate that life to his own.

At any rate, his mind was filled with Scripture, as is apparent from the few writings he has left us: the Rules, Admonitions, and Letters. But he did not use Scripture as Bernard and Bonaventure did, to convey his own ideas with the words of the Bible; rather it was as though the words of Scripture welled up from within his heart by a special divine inspiration. That is why he could compose an entire Office of the Passion out of Scriptural texts. And that is why, when he was on his deathbed and a friar volunteered to read the Bible to him, he answered, "I can read it with greater unction and profit within my own heart."

St. John Chrysostom was once appalled to think that Christians did not know the exact number of Epistles St. Paul wrote; but is not our ignorance of Scripture much greater—and should we not be all the more appalled at it?

* * * *

Long before the average Catholic comes to know Scripture as such, he has been exposed to its living realization in the Liturgy. Indeed, many Catholics have read no more Scripture than that offered them as members of the worshipping Mystical Christ.

Nevertheless, in the absolute sense, Scripture is prior to the Liturgy, which gives it to us, which comments upon it, and which realizes its content before our eyes. Not only does the Liturgy make use of the letter of Scripture in formulating its prayers, but it comprises a real enactment of the spirit of Scripture.

This will become clearer if we take the example of Good Friday. On that day, the Liturgy enacts before our very eyes the entire drama

of Calvary, under the all but transparent veil of richly symbolic rites. The Lessons prefigure the Lamb's sacrifice, and the Gospel relates it. The beautiful prayers for the various classes of men recall those of our Lord on the Cross—for the impatient sinners, for the repentant, for the tried and true faithful, for the Church committed to Mary. And then follows the adoration of the Cross with its *Improperia*; finally, after the preannounced Victim has been consumed, there is the abandonment of the tomb. Truly, the Liturgy brings to life what history merely relates as past events.

And in that sense, the Liturgy is an introduction to—better, an initiation into—Holy Scripture. But it is still more than that: it is the life of Jesus relived by the Church, not merely in memory, but in actual fact: in the Church as a whole as well as in each of her members. During the Liturgical Cycle Advent, Christmas, the Hidden Life, the Public Life, the Passion, and the Glorious Triumph of Easter all pass through the Liturgy into the lives of Christians.

And the whole history of the Church is likewise summed up in the Liturgy. Feast after feast reflects the development of her thought, dogmas and mysteries, as well as her ever-growing catalog of saints.

Let us follow the example of St. Francis, then, and make the Liturgy a living force in our own lives. We know well enough how he did this from his Admonitions and from the record of his own life, so replete with examples of his devotion to the Grib, to the Cross, and to the Mass.

As he did, so let us attend Mass with the vivid realization that we are praying in union with the entire universal Church and in the name of Christ. Let us make an effort to offer as worthily as we can the prayer of the Mystical Christ.

Never mind the archeology and the affectations; let us go to the Liturgy for LIFE, for the living TRUTH which is CHRIST. Let us look above and beyond the mere letter of the spirit. Let us try to appreciate the treasure we possess in our liturgical books, our missals, breviaries, and rituals. We need a "material" knowledge of these books, of course (their rubrics, format, etc.); and we need a "literal" knowledge of them (the meaning of the prayers and rites). But we cannot be content with mere material and literal knowledge; we must try to acquire a "spiritual" knowledge of them: a living and vibrant understanding of the Liturgy as the very Life of the Mystical Body—as the continuation of the Life of its divine Head.

Surely St. Francis would have thought our expensive liturgical books useless if despite them we lacked devotion, reflection, and love. Let us try to see his point of view, then; for, after all, every one of us can say, and mean it, *Jam non vivo*—"It is not I who live; Christ is

my life, for I am Christ, insofar as I live in Him."

Like St. Francis, we can come to know Christ also by being attentive to His presence within us. This is an easy way to grow in knowledge of Him, and therefore it is an easy way to facilitate our imitation of Him.

We have already seen that Jesus lives within us as an interior Model whose features are made known to us by the action of the Holy Spirit. Let us reflect on that fact. The same Jesus Who lived and taught the Gospel in ancient Palestine now lives within us! He Who called Himself the Way, the Truth, and the Life, He Who made our hearts for Himself, dwells within us!

Yes, Jesus lives within us. This is the teaching of our Faith, not the wishful dream of a mystic. Jesus our Head acts and speaks through us and in us, His members and organs. Each one of us, within his own limits, IS CHRIST, just as each consecrated Host is Christ, even though all the consecrated Hosts are but one sole and same Christ. Each of us can repeat: "For me, life means Christ; death is a prize to be won. True, I am living, here and now, this mortal life; but my real life is the faith I have in the Son of God" (Phil. 1:21; Gal. 2:20).

Thus we are instructed by our Faith; thus we must believe. Now let us act as though we believed it; let us put our knowledge into practice; let us become ever more aware of our own nobility by means of a life more and more Christlike!

After all, this is the course our holy Father took. Once he had learned from the vision at St. Damien's that Jesus had impressed upon him the likeness of His Passion, he spent the rest of his life trying to conform to the Model presented to him on the Cross and *living within his own soul*. What happened on Alverna proves beyond any doubt that he was perfectly attentive and docile to his interior Model.

A word of caution is necessary at this point. It is true that the saints—and for us, St. Francis in particular—are our models; but we should not strive to imitate them too literally—particularly in those external actions for which each individual saint is known. For each one of us has his own personality and his own proper method of conforming to Christ. In each of us, Christ relives His own life in a slightly different manner. That is why we must be attentive to His action within us, why we must seek His will, know it, and accept it. Each of us must "help to pay off the debt which the afflictions of Christ still leave to be paid, for the sake of His Body, the Church" (Col. 1:24). We live not only for ourselves, then, but also for the Church, and for all mankind; or else the Communion of Saints is meaningless. Each of us has his own Bethlehem, his own Nazareth, his own work, apostolates,

contradictions. Some of us will have a Thabor, but all of us will have a Calvary and a sepulchre. What is important is that insofar as we allow our Lord to live His life as He wants to live it within us, we shall grow in knowledge and love of Him.

(To be continued)

MY LENT

Is Lent a time in which I choose
The practices I do,
The prayers I say, the food I eat
The pleasures I pursue?
A time when friends all know I suffer
And sympathize with me,
For Lent was meant for torture,
And for everyone to see!
Shall I pat Me on the back and say:
"Not one resolve I broke"—
And in self complacent pleasure
All my selfish pride invoke?
Or—has Lent seen the Me die out,
Seen Goodness in me grow,
Set Patience deeper rooted,
And the sap of Kindness flow?
Do I give the tiny gift of time,
Smile through disappointment clouds my day
Smooth o'er the critic's stab,
By some thoughtful word I say.
Can I withhold that curious glance,
Take no sugar in my tea,
Recite the self-same prayers—with zeal,
Reserve less pleasant tasks for Me.
Then—too small my deeds for Self to enter
Too common-place for Pride to claim
Lent—just a string of loving Deaths
And "Easter" more than just a name!

Sister Teresa Claire, O.S.F.

Felician Foundress Upholds St. Francis' Love For The Eucharist

CHAPTER II

St. Francis, Knight of the Eucharist

A new renaissance of spirituality marked the Christian life of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The keynote of the moving trend was a greater devotion to and study of the human life of Christ. St. Bernard, a leader of this movement, wrote a sermon on the Incarnation and the Life and Passion of our Lord.

On the day of creation God made us to His image, supernatural life came down to us directly from Him. After the fall, an intermediary was necessary. Henceforth, the divine will ordained Christ, His well-beloved Son, to be our Mediator.

In view of this point, the Benedictine, Dom Cuthbert, explains that St. Francis and his followers gave the impetus to greater personal love for the God Man consequently, to the Holy Eucharist.

When we find that a change appears in Western Christendom towards the middle of the thirteenth century, a great wave of Eucharistic devotion and piety then beginning to flow, and when we recollect St. Francis' Eucharistic propaganda, we can hardly be mistaken in looking on him and his friars as the first heralds of the movement that more than aught else has given increasingly its most special character to all subsequent piety and spiritual life.¹

The Eucharist is the cornerstone of the House of God. It is everything that the Catholic Church stands for. Faith remains constant, dogma does not change, yet theology develops and emphasis of piety shifts. In the Middle Ages the Eucharist was not an object of personal devotional life. The Holy sacrament of love was very often only revered rather than received. Catholic piety centered around the Mass as a sacrifice. The Blessed Sacrament was reserved in some hidden place and not upon the main altar. The faithful approached the Holy Table only on rare occasions. Into this milieu came a "genuine Knight of the Holy Grail," Francis of Assisi.² The troubador who loved to sing about the wonders of God's creation beheld the Eucharist as the wonder of

¹ Butler, Cuthbert, *Ways of Christian Life*, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1933),

p. 53.

² Hilariin, Felder, O.F.M. Cap., *The Ideals of St. Francis of Assisi*, (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1925), p. 37.

wonders. Fundamental to the spirit and life of the Poverello is his faith and great love for Christ as really present in the Sacrament of Love. The threefold meaning of the Eucharist unfolded itself in his life, each bearing its own character and proper meaning.

The Crucified Christ in the Eucharist

He commenced by repairing the church of St. Damian. The young Assisian could not behold his Eucharistic King living in such a dilapidated house after hearing the words of Christ Crucified, "Francis, go and repair My House, which, as thou seest, is falling utterly into ruin."³ It was then he ascertained the true meaning of Christ Crucified. And as Father Gratien tells us, "Love of Christ on the Cross logically led to love of Christ present in the Eucharist, to love of everything relating to Christ. . . .⁴ St. Thomas says that "The Eucharist is the perfect sacrament of the Lord's passion in as much as it contains the very Christ Himself who suffered."⁵ Celano describes this point aptly in the life of St. Francis, "And chiefly did the humility of the Incarnation and the charity of the Passion so occupy his memory that he would scarce ponder over anything else."⁶ The Seraphic Doctor also comments that Christ Crucified always filled his soul. "Christ Jesus Crucified, was laid as a bundle of myrrh, in his heart's bosom, and he yearned to be utterly transformed into Him by the fire of the exceeding love."⁷ The Seraphic Doctor further relates that on the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, September 14, ". . . by seraphic glow of longing he had been uplifted toward God, and by his sweet compassion had been transformed into the likeness of Him Who of His exceeding love endured to be crucified."⁸ ". . . Francis descended from the mountain, bearing with him the likeness of the Crucified, engraven not, on tables of stone or of wood, by the craftsman's hand, but written on his members of flesh by the finger of the living God."⁹ Elsewhere St. Bonaventure says: "The way followed by St. Francis was none other than a burning love of Christ Crucified." Justly does St. Francis de Sales remark, "Love transferred the interior sufferings of that great lover St. Francis to the exterior, and wounded his body with the same

³ Bonaventure, St., *The Life of St. Francis*, trans. Gunney Salter (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1902), p. 14.

⁴ Gratien de Paris, *I Know Christ*, trans. Paul Oligny (St. Bonaventure, N. Y.: Franciscan Institute, 1957), p. 48.

⁵ *Voulet, op. cit.*, p. 254.

⁶ Thomas Celano, *The Life of St. Francis of Assisi*, trans. A. G. Ferrers Howell (London: Methuen and Co., 1906), p. 82.

⁷ Bonaventure, St., *op. cit.*, p. 95.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

spear of sorrow that pierced his heart."¹⁰

Under the aspect of Christ Crucified Francis conceived the true meaning of the Eucharist, the participation in the life of God in order to continue His life in ours. The words in the liturgy of the Mass reveal this profound significance so well understood by the Poverello:

O God, who in a marvellous manner didst create and ennoble man's nature, and in a manner still more marvellous didst renew it; grant through the mystical union of this water and wine we may become partakers of the divinity of our Lord, Jesus Christ, thy Son, even as he vouchsafed to share with us our humanity.

Christ, in the Sacrament of Love, became his model, Christ offering himself as a sacrifice on the altar of Calvary, in Holy Communion and in the Tabernacle.

The Eucharist: An Agent of our Incorporation in Christ

A deep understanding of the Eucharist as the most efficient agent of our incorporation in Christ, after the seed of sanctifying grace has been planted by Baptism, can be noted in the First Rule of the Friars Minor. The chapter is entitled, "Prayer, praise and thanksgiving."

Almighty, most high, most holy and sovereign God, holy and just Father, Lord King of heaven and earth, for your very self we give you thanks, because by your holy will and through your only Son in the Holy Spirit you have created everything spiritual and corporal, and you placed us, made according to your image and likeness, in Paradise, and it was through our fault we fell.

And we give you thanks because, just as you created us through your Son, so in that true and holy love with which you have loved us, did you have him, true God and true man, the born of the glorious and most blessed holy Mary ever virgin, and wish us captive to be redeemed through his cross and blood and death.

And we give you thanks because this your Son is to come again in the glory of his majesty to send to the eternal fire those accursed ones who did not practice repentance and did not acknowledge you; but to say to everybody that did acknowledge, adore and serve you in repentance, "Come, you blest of my Father, take over the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world (Mt. 25, 34)."

And since we wretched sinners all are not fit to mention your name, we implore insistently that our Lord Jesus Christ, your beloved Son, in whom you were well pleased, may together with the Holy Ghost the Paraclete give you such thanks as please you and them for everything—for he ever suffers you in

¹⁰ Marion Habig and Alexandre Masseron, O.F.M. *The Franciscan*, (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1959), p. 50.

every regard, through whom you have done so much for us.¹¹ In the conclusion of the Rule again St. Francis makes mention of this point.

With all our heart and soul and mind and strength and fortitude and understanding and all our faculties; with all our endeavor, affection, and yearning; with all we desire and will, let us all love God the Lord, who has given and still gives us all our whole body, soul and life; who has created and redeemed us and only in his mercy will save us; who has done and keeps doing everything good to us, miserable and wretched, corrupt and foul, ungrateful and wicked as we are.

So let us desire nothing else, wish for nothing else, take pleasure and delight in nothing else but our Creator, Redeemer and Savior, the only true God, who is the perfect good, everything good, wholly good, the true and sovereign good; he who alone is good (Lk. 18, 19), loving and gentle, sweet and lovable; he who alone is kind, innocent and clean; from whom, and through whom and in whom is all pardon, all grace, and all glory for all the repentant and the just and for all the blessed rejoicing together in Heaven.¹²

And since the word *eucharistic* literally means thanksgiving, Francis admonishes us to be ever thankful to God through Christ reserved in our tabernacles.

Then let nothing hinder us, nothing keep us apart, nothing get in the way. All over, everywhere, at every hour and at any time, day after day and without ceasing let us all believe in him with a true and humble faith, cherish him in our heart, and love, honor, adore, serve, praise and bless him, glorify, exalt and extol him, and give thanks to him, the most high, sovereign, eternal God, in Trinity and Unity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, the Creator of all things, the Savior of all who have faith and hope and love for him; who is without beginning and without end, unchangeable, invisible, unutterable, ineffable, incomprehensible, unathomable, blest, worthy of praise, glorious, exalted above all, sublime, supreme, yet sweet, lovable, delightful, and always altogether desirable beyond everything forever and ever.¹³

Just as the contemporaries of Christ doubted His divine nature, the people of St. Francis' time overlooked and neglected the wonderful real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. St. Francis had a deep appreciation of this dogma and we can readily say he spoke as a profound theologian. The first "Admonition" of the Seraphic Father illustrates this fact. With all the love of a seraph he urges and counsels everyone to prostrate in deep faith and receive the Sacred Banquet frequently.

¹¹ James Meyer, O.F.M. (ed.), *The Words of St. Francis*, (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1959), p. 280.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 282.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 283

So, you children of men, how long is your sense going to stay dull (Ps. 4, 3) ? Why do you not see into the truth and believe in the Son of God (Jn. 9, 35) ? See, day after day he humbles himself, as when he came down from his royal throne (Wis. 18, 15) into the Virgin's womb. Day by day he comes to us personally in this lovely form. Daily he comes down from the bosom of his Father on the altar into the hands of the priest. And just as he appeared before the holy Apostles in true flesh, so now he has us see him in the sacred bread. Looking at him with the eyes of their flesh, they saw only his flesh, but regarding him with the eyes of the spirit, they believed that he was God. In like manner, as we see bread and wine with our bodily eyes, let us see and believe firmly that it is his most holy Body and Blood, true and living.

For in this way our Lord is ever present among those who believe in him, according to what he said: 'Behold, I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world' (Mt. 28, 20).¹⁴

Another describes the faith of Francis in the Eucharist quite graphically:

The faith of Francis beholds behind the crystal of the monstrance, on the linen on the altar, and on the tongue of the communicant, the hands and feet, the eyes and mouth, the flowing blood and throbbing heart, the majestic personality and the saving grace of Him who once walked the fields of Galilee and Judea, and to whom he himself had sworn allegiance as a knight of the cross. And this unfathomable mystery and infinite treasure the priest calls back from the bygone days of Palestine into the presence of every tabernacle, from the height of heaven into the hearts of the least of men. The thought is overwhelming, is staggering to the human mind.¹⁵

It is interesting to note the observation pointed out to us by Father Stier, namely, that St. Francis did not use the traditional terminology of Eucharistic literature as "the awful bread", "the awful sacrifice", "fear and trembling." "To him the Eucharist was the sacrament of infinite tenderness, a real feast of love, a bond of union, a banquet which Christ desired with great desire to eat with us . . . He constantly speaks of 'humility' and 'reverence' or 'veneration'.¹⁶

The words of his "Testament" also rang out his deep and profound spirit of faith in Christ permanently present in the tabernacle, day and night, and not just during the solemn moments of Holy Mass. The tabernacle became the center of his life.

And the Lord gave me so much faith in churches that I prayed

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 129-130

¹⁵ Myles Schmitt, O.F.M. Cap., *Francis of the Crucified*, (Milwaukee: Bruce Publ. Co., 1956), p. 133.

¹⁶ Mark Stier, O.F.M. Cap., *Franciscan Life in Christ*, (Paterson: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1953), p. 163.

and said simply thus: 'We adore you, O Lord Jesus Christ, here and at all your churches all over the world, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.'¹⁷

The person of Christ in the Eucharist captivated every faculty of his being. Thomas of Celano declares:

Toward the Sacrament of the Lord's Body he glowed with the fervour of all his being, marvelling at the thought of that loving condescension, of that most condescending love . . . and as he received the immaculate Lamb, he immaculated his spirit with the fire that was ever burning on the altar of his heart.¹⁸

In his "Letter to All the Custodes," Francis suggests a beautiful devotional act filled with faith and worship, called *latría*.

And when it is sacrificed on the altar by the priest or borne about anywhere, let all the people on bended knees render praise, glory and honor to the true and living Lord God.

And tell and preach this to all peoples in his praise, that at every hour and when the bells are rung, praise and thanksgiving should be offered to almighty God by all the people all over the earth.¹⁹

In the "Letter to the General and all the Friars", a noteworthy paragraph can be cited. It is an expression of one filled with holy fear and awesome dignity and faith for his God hidden under the tiny form of bread.

Let everything in man halt in awe, let all the world quake, and let Heaven exult when Christ, the Son of the living God, is there on the altar in the hands of the priest! Oh, admirable dignity and amazing condescension! Oh, sublime lowliness! Oh lowly sublimity! That the Lord of the universe, God and the Son of God, should so humble himself as to hide under the tiny little form of bread for our welfare. Look brothers, at the humility of God and pour your hearts out before him. Be humbled yourselves, so you can be exalted by him.²⁰

In the following words Francis urges all to be crucified through love, to consecrate themselves wholly to the service of God and neighbor as Christ in turn sacrifices himself for us. "So, do not keep anything about you back for yourselves, so that he may have altogether as his own who puts himself altogether at your disposal."²¹

At one time St. Francis wondered about continuing his public apostolate. After spending several days in prayer, undoubtedly in the Divine Presence, meditating the divine mysteries of Christ's life, he weighed the situation in favor of continuing his apostolate as Christ his Model, thereby, setting the example for his friars that they may

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 282.

¹⁸ Celano, *op. cit.*, p. 329.

¹⁹ Meyer, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 146-147.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

always reap the spirit for the apostolate from the Author of all grace. St. Bonaventure relates the indecision of St. Francis.

Brothers, what do you advise and commend? That I give myself wholly to prayer, or that I go about and preach?

For of course as an insignificant, unlettered person without skill in speech I have received the grace of prayer rather than that of speech. Then too in prayer one seems to win and heap up graces whereas in preaching one as it were distributes the gifts received from Heaven. In prayer there is purification of the interior affections and union with the one true and sovereign Good together with invigoration of virtue; in preaching our spiritual feet pick up dust, we are distracted in many ways, and discipline suffers relaxation. Finally in prayer we address and listen to God and associate with the angels as if leading an angelic life; in preaching we have to exercise much condescension toward the people and in living among them as people do, we have to think and see and speak and hear things that are human.

On the other hand, there is one thing that seems to outweigh all this before God, namely that God's only begotten Son, who is the supreme Wisdom, descended from the bosom of the Father for the salvation of souls in order to instruct the world by his example and speak the word of salvation to the people, whom he was both to redeem with the price and cleanse with the bath and nourish with the drink of his sacred Blood, keeping nothing whatever back for himself that he did not give away liberally for our salvation. And since we ought to do everything according to the model of what we saw in him as on a high mountain, it seems to be more pleasing to God for me to interrupt my retirement and go out for such work.²²

After restoring St. Damian Church, St. Francis devoted himself to rebuilding the walls of other churches as an outlet for the love which welled up in his heart for his Eucharistic God. With his own young and inexperienced hands he gathered stones and mortar to rebuild crumbling chapels. Perhaps the job was more difficult than he had anticipated. It meant not only physical labor for a rich merchant's son, but also begging for money, tools and oil to have a lamp burning continuously before the most Holy Sacrament. Thus, the old Benedictine Church, St. Peter; St. Mary's of the Portunucula, Mother Church of the Order; the chapel of the Holy Virgin between San Gemini and Porciana, and the completion of the Church Santa Maria del Vesovado in Assisi were renovated and made into beautiful houses of God.²³

Biographers tell us that even prior to rebuilding churches, Francis cherished a reverent love for anything related to the Blessed Sacrament. He would purchase valuable vessels which were used at the Holy

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 170-171.

²³ Felder, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

Sacrifice and then send them secretly to poor priests and parishes. It would be incorrect to say, however, that St. Francis was prompted to remodel churches, sweep out cobwebs, wash church linen, clean altar vessels and bake altar bread as an expression of talent and a passion for cleanliness. Again, we say it was an exercise of his virtue of faith.

It was during the lifetime of St. Francis that the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 took steps to ensure external reverence and care for the most Blessed Sacrament. In fact, some biographers believe St. Francis was present for this meeting. The 19th decree of this Council admonishes those

... who not only leave the churches uncared for, but even the vessels of the ministry and the vestments of the ministers, and the palls of the altar, nay even the very corporals, which are left so dirty that they are at times and in some places a horror. But since the zeal for the house of God consumes us, we firmly prohibit such furnishings to be allowed in the churches. . . .

We also command that the aforementioned oratories, vessels, corporals and vestments be preserved clean and bright. For it surely seems absurd to neglect stains in sacred things which are becoming even in profane things.²⁴

In studying the life of St. Francis we find that he became a true Knight of the Holy Grail, and as a faithful son of the Catholic Church, he did everything in his power to do away with the shameful abuses toward the Blessed Sacrament. In a "Letter to all the Clergy" he expressed his devotion and love of the Blessed Sacrament by explaining the dogma of the transubstantiation as later defined by the Council of Trent. The Poverello also pleaded with the clergy to have the utmost concern for all things pertaining to the Blessed Sacrament. It follows that this letter should be quoted:

Let all of us who are clergymen note the great sin and the ignorance of which some are guilty with regard to the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, as well as the most sacred names and written words which sanctify the body.

We know that the body cannot be at all unless it be sanctified first by the word. For in this world we have and we see nothing in bodily form of the Most High except his Body and Blood and the names and words through which we have been created and brought back from death to life.

Now, let all who administer mysteries of so very holy a nature, and especially those who minister thoughtlessly, give their careful attention to how wretched are the chalices, corporals and other linens where the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ is sacrificed. And many leave it in wretched places, and convey it along the way in a regrettable fashion,

²⁴ Martin Wolter, O.F.M., "Liturgy of the Blessed Sacrament", *The Cord*, VII, No. 7, (July, 1957), p. 196.

and receive it unworthily, and administer it to others without due concern.

Then too his names and written words are sometimes trampled under foot, because the sensual man has no appreciation for the things of God (1 Cor. 2, 14).

And all this does not move us with loving concern, though Our Lord is loving enough to entrust himself to our hands, and we handle him and receive him on our lips day after day! Do we not know that we are destined to get into his hands?

Well then, let us be quick and determined to do better in these matters and others like them. Wherever the most holy Body of our Lord Jesus Christ may be put away or kept in a way that is not proper, let it be removed from there, to be put away and reserved in a respectable place.

In like manner wherever the names and written words of our Lord are found lying about in dirty places, let them be picked up and put in a decent place, as is proper.

We know that we are above all bound to observe all these things according to the teaching of our Lord and the decrees of Holy Mother Church. Let whoever does not act that way, know that he shall have to give an account of it before our Lord Jesus Christ on the day of judgement.

And let whoever has copies of this writing made in order to get it observed the better, know that he is blessed by the Lord.²⁵

The same type of admonition can be found in "Letter to all the Custodes."

I beseech you more than if it concerned myself, that where it is proper and you find it helpful you may plead humbly with clerics that they ought to venerate above all else the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and writing with his holy writing with his holy names and words, which sanctify the Body. The chalices, corporals, the ornaments of the altar and everything pertaining to the sacrifice, they ought to regard as precious. And if there is any place where the most holy Body of our Lord is lodged very poorly, let it according to the command of the Church be placed by them in a choice place and reserved there, and let it be borne about with great reverence and administered to others with discretion. Also the written names and words of our Lord, wherever found in sordid places, should be picked up and they ought to be put in a decent place.²⁶

Appropos is the fact that the immediate successor of St. Francis, as Minister General, decreed for the whole Order that the sacred species should henceforth be continued in a properly secured tabernacle instead of the suspended pyx arrangement which was then in vogue. This injunction brought about a very desirable change. The tabernacle received the place of honor on the high altar.

²⁵ Meyer, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

²⁶ Meyer, *op. cit.*, pp. 163-164.

His "Letter to the Chapter General and all the Friars" is replete with passages in regard to reverence for the Blessed Sacrament.

So, I entreat you all, brothers, with a kiss for your feet and whatever charity I can, to bring all the reverence and all the respect you ever can to bear on the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom whatever there is in Heaven and on earth has been appeased and reconciled (Col. 1, 20) to God almighty.

It likewise beg in the Lord all my brothers who now are and will be and wish to be priests of the Most High that when they wish to celebrate Mass, they should be pure and in a pure and reverent manner perform the true sacrifice of the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ with a clean and holy intention, and not for any earthly return or out of fear or love of any man, as if to please men. But let all their will, so far as the grace of the Almighty favors, be directed toward him in the desire to please with it the sovereign Lord alone, because in it he alone acts, as it pleases him. For, now that he says, 'Do this for a commemoration of me,' if anybody acts otherwise, he becomes Judas the traitor, and makes himself guilty of the body and blood of our Lord.²⁷

In the following paragraph of the same letter, Francis with great solicitude admonishes all to always receive the Sacraments worthily lest they are guilty of judgment.

For a person despises, soils and tramples on the Lamb of God when, as the Apostle says, he does not make a difference and distinguish between the holy Bread of Christ and other foods and actions, or when he eats it while unworthy or, if worthy, then in an idle and improper manner, since the Lord says in the words of the Prophet, 'Cursed the man who does the work of the Lord deceitfully' (Jer. 48, 10). And spurning those priests who do not bother to take this to heart, he will say: 'I will curse your blessings' (Mal. 2, 2).²⁸

The same type of admonition can be cited in the "Letter to all the Faithful."

We should, in particular, confess all our sins to the priest and receive from him the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Whoever does not eat his flesh and drink his blood cannot enter the kingdom of God. Let him of course eat and drink worthily, because whoever receives unworthily, eats and drinks judgment on himself, not distinguishing the body of our Lord (1 Cor. 11, 29),—that is, not distinguishing it from other foods.

All they, however, who are not repentant and do not receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ but commit vice and sin, walking the way of their evil appetites and desires; who do not observe what they have promised;

who with their person serve the world, their fleshly desires, and the cares and worries of this world, while with their mind they serve the Devil, deceived by him whose children they are and whose work they do: all such are blind, since they do not see the true light, our Lord Jesus Christ. They have no wisdom spiritually, because they do not have the Son of God in them, who is the true wisdom of the Father, and it is said of them: Their wisdom has been swallowed up (Ps. 106, 27). They see the truth, acknowledge it, know it, and yet commit evil and knowingly lose their soul.²⁹

Going back to the "Letter to the Chapter General and all the Friars", a beautiful parallel can be noted. The Poverello stresses the dignity of holy priesthood as well as the proper disposition of one communicating.

Listen, my brothers: If the Blessed Virgin Mary is honored so much—and rightly so—because she bore him about in her most holy womb; if the blessed Baptist trembled all over and did not dare to touch the holy crown of his God; if the tomb in which he lay for a while is venerated so much; then how holy, just and worthy ought the person to be who freely handles him, receives him in mouth and heart, and presents him for others to receive, not in a mortal state any more, but as going to live and as glorified forever, 'whom the angels yearn to gaze upon' (1 Pet. 1, 12).³⁰

The troubador of the Eucharist reminds the clergy of the obligations of a priestly vocation. The eucharistic vocation and the priestly one must complement each other. It must be first in the lives of all priests. Above all, the gift of self must follow as the holocaust of the Victims of Calvary.

Let everything in man halt in awe, let all the world quake, and let Heaven exult when Christ, the Son of the living God, is there on the altar in the hands of the priest! Oh, admirable dignity and amazing condescension! Oh sublime lowliness! Oh lowly sublimity! That the Lord of the universe, God and the Son of God, should so humble himself as to hide under the tiny form of bread for our welfare. Look, brothers, at the humility of God and pour your hearts out before him. Be humbled yourselves, so you can be exalted by him.³¹

The following admonition pertains to respect, and reverence towards the clergy.

... and be respectful to the clergy not only for their sake, if they are sinners, but for their charge and ministry of the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which they sacrifice on the altar and receive and distribute to others. And let us all be firmly convinced that no one can be saved except through the Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and the holy

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 187 and 191.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

words of our Lord, which the clergy repeat and announce and minister to us, and which it is for them alone to administer, and for nobody else.³²

Celano records the words of Francis which also speak of great respect and reverence for the clergy. "If I chanced to meet at the same time any Saint coming down from heaven, and any poor priest, I would do honor to the Presbyter first, and would sooner go to kiss his hands; and I would say (to the other), 'Oh, wait, St. Lawrence! for this man's hands handle the Word of Life, and possess something that is more than human.'³³

The words of his Testament point out this fact clearly, too.

After that the Lord gave and gives me so much faith in priests that live subject to the law of the holy Roman Church, by reason of their Orders, that even if they were to persecute me I will take recourse to them. And if I had as much wisdom as Solomon had, and were to come upon poorly-off priests out in the world, it is my will not to preach against their pleasure in parishes where they are stationed. And it is my will to love and honor them and all others as my masters: and I will not regard sin in them, because I discern the Son of God in them and they are my masters. And I do this for the reason that in this world I see nothing bodily of the most high Son of God himself but his most holy Body and Blood, which they have in charge and they alone administer to others.

And I want these most holy mysteries above all else to be honored and venerated and kept in choice places. Wherever I find his most holy names and written words in improper places, I mean to pick them up and I beg that they be picked up and put in a respectable place. And all the theologians and persons who administer the most holy words of God, we must honor and respect as people who minister spirit and life to us.³⁴

Frequent Reception at Holy Mass

The Seraphic Patriarch promoted the practice of frequent Holy Communion in a day when it was customary to receive once a year by many of the faithful.

The First Rule of the Friars Minor reads:

This contrite and confessed, let them receive the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ with great humility and reverence, bearing in mind that the Lord himself says (Jn. 6,55), 'He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood, has life everlasting'; and (1K. 22, 19), 'Do this in remembrance of me.'³⁵

³² *Ibid.*, p. 188.

³³ Celano, *op. cit.*, pp. 329-330.

³⁴ Meyer, *op. cit.*, pp. 244-245.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

The same prescription can be cited in the Rule of the Third Order Regular.

A great sign and aid of the love of Christ is the frequent and even daily approach of the Holy Eucharist, which is at once a sacred banquet and a memorial of His passion. It should also be the endeavor of religious souls frequently to visit and devoutly to venerate our Lord Jesus abiding with us in this admirable mystery; for, this is the greatest Sacrament of the Church and an inexhaustible fountain of all blessings.³⁶

Other passages which can be quoted in regard to frequent reception of the Sacrament of Love appear in the "Letter to Public Officials."

For that reason I advise you strongly, my lords, to think less of all such care and worry, and lovingly to receive the most holy Body and Blood of Lord Jesus Christ in holy memory of him. And do the Lord so much honor among the people entrusted to you that every evening you have a cryer or some other signal summon all your people to render praise and thanksgiving to the almighty Lord God. If you do not act thus, it is well for you to know that you must render an account before your Lord Jesus Christ on the day of judgment.³⁷

Another reference to receiving Holy Communion frequently is found in a "Letter to all the Faithful."

Now, such was the will of his Father that his glorious blest Son, whom he gave up to us and who was born for us, should offer himself up in his own blood as a sacrifice and victim on the altar of the Cross, not for himself, through whom all things have been made (Jn. 1, 3), but for our sins, leaving us an example, so that we all should be saved by him and receive him with a pure heart and a chaste body. But there are few who care to receive him and be saved by him, though his yoke is sweet and his burden light (Mt. 11, 30).

Those who have not the will to taste how sweet the Lord is (Ps. 33, 9) and who love the darkness more than the light (Jn. 3, 19), being unwilling to fulfill God's commandments, are under a curse. It is said of them by the prophet: Cursed are they who turn away from your commandments (Ps. 118, 21). But oh, how blessed and blest are they who love the Lord and do as the Lord himself says in the Gospel: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul, and your neighbor as yourself (Mt. 22, 37).

So let us love God and adore him with a clean heart and mind, because that is what he desires above all when he says: The true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth (Jn. 4, 23). For all who worship him, should worship him in the spirit of truth (ib. 24). Let us speak his praise and pray to him day and night with the words, Our Father, who art

³⁶ Allan Wolter, O.F.M., *The Book of Life*. (New York: Franciscan Institute, 1954).

³⁷ P. xiii.

³⁸ Meyer, *op. cit.*, pp. 183-184.

in Heaven, for we should pray always and never lose heart (Lk. 18, 1).³⁸ Similar yearning for the Bread of Life is disclosed in St. Francis' paraphrase of the Our Father, called the "Praises of God in the Our Father."

"Give us this day—so that we will remember, understand and respect the love he bore for us and all he said and did and endured for us—our daily bread—your beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.³⁹

A great depth of love for the Holy Mass is noted in the fact recorded in the Breviary of St. Francis and also in the Minor Testimonies of the thirteenth century. "When I do not hear Mass, I adore the body of our Christ with the eyes of the mind in prayer, just as I adore it when I see it at Mass."⁴⁰ Although St. Francis had a profound veneration for the priesthood and Holy Mass, he only remained a deacon. He, who was adorned with the sacred stigmata, felt himself unworthy to perform the sublime vocation of the priesthood, to consecrate the bread and wine, and to give the Sacred Species to the faithful. In Celano, we note the following concerning Francis: "He often communicated, and that so devoutly as to make others devout. Attending on that reverend Ordinance with all reverence, he offered the sacrifice of all his members . . ."⁴¹ Continuing in the same vein, Celano also says that, "He deemed it to be treating the Sacrament with no small contempt if, having leisure, he did not hear at least one mass daily."⁴² Hilariin Felder quotes the "Speculum Perfectionis", "If illness prevented him from going to church, he would ask a priest to celebrate Mass for him in the sick room."⁴³ In the "Letter to the Chapter General and all the Friars", Francis prescribes a single Mass in every Friary for he did not want the friars to lose their reverence for the most Blessed Sacrament.

So I admonish and exhort you in the Lord, that in the places where the brothers stay, a single Mass in the day be celebrated according to the form of Holy Church. If, however, there are several priests at the place, let each for the love of charity be glad to have heard the celebration of the other, for the present and the absent that are worthy of it, get their fill from the Lord Jesus Christ.⁴⁴

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁴¹ Celano, *op. cit.*, p. 329.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 329.

⁴³ Felder, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

⁴⁴ Meyer, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

The Eucharist and Followers of St. Francis

The influence of St. Francis' eucharistic legacy to his Order is so great it would take volumes to record it conscientiously. Yet it is only in glancing at the history of the Order that one might say the Eucharist is one of its most outstanding characteristics.

In the thirteenth century, when the Saracens were overcoming Italy, looting and vandalizing homes, churches and monasteries, St. Clare caused the monstrance containing the consecrated Host to be placed on the rampart facing the enemy. Faith and confidence in the Real Presence won them a reward—the enemy retreated.

Another manifestation of the power of the Eucharist may be observed in the episode which St. Anthony of Padua encountered with a particular Jew and his followers. The deep faith of the Evangelical Doctor convinced them to abjure their heresies and embrace the Catholic Faith.

In the writings of St. Bonaventure we find many allusions to the Blessed Eucharist which are indicative of the ardent love that filled his soul toward the Sacrament of Life.

Many others of the Order were likewise zealous in furthering the triumph of the Eucharist over heretics and unbelievers. Alexander of Hales and Duns Scotus developed works of theology concerning the Eucharist.

Pope Leo XIII chose St. Paschal Baylon, a humble lay brother, to be the special patron of Eucharistic Congresses since his devotion to the Blessed Sacrament was so eminent. Many other Franciscan saints could be mentioned who also had an untold devotion to the Blessed Sacrament; namely, St. Leonard of Port Maurice, St. Mary Frances of the Wounds of Jesus, St. Angelo of Foligno, and Ven. Pierre Julien Eymard, a Franciscan tertiary. St. Pius X issued a decree proclaiming that all the faithful should come nearer to our Eucharistic Lord by frequent reception of the sacrament.

The Franciscans of yesterday and today have always endeavored to spread devotion toward the most Holy Eucharist. They have become the troubadours of a great Eucharistic message to the world according to Father Lombardi's words:

If concern should arise at the thought of preserving in grace all those souls once they have been regenerated, let it not be forgotten what a resource we have in the Holy Eucharist . . . Without It, we shall not arrive at the new age, because grace, the fundamental element, will be lacking. No effort can be too great for this end.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ R. Lombardi, S.J., *Toward a New World*, (Staten Island, N. Y.: St. Paul Publications, 1958), p. 260.

In retrospect as to the matter of this chapter, we can summarize by saying that St. Francis has left the world a magnificent eucharistic message, "... the little unlettered man reveals himself to be a sublime theologian, a descendant of Paul and John."⁴⁶ This message can be found not only in his personal life in which he displayed an ardent faith that "... that could see his Creator beneath the symbol of nature, could also pierce the veils of the Eucharist",⁴⁷ but also in formal documents bearing the Eucharist in mind, which have been left for us to study and meditate, namely; his Rules, Testament, and "Letter to the Chapter General", "Letter to the Custodes", "Letter to all the Clergy", "Letter to the Faithful", and a "Letter to Public Officials." These writings point out the necessity of the God-Man, and our incorporation into the Mystical Body through the Eucharist. Emphasis is also placed on respect for churches and dwelling places of the Lord, for sacred vessels, the word of God and priesthood, and all related to the Eucharist.

The effect of St. Francis' Eucharistic devotion was indeed tremendous not only in the Order itself, but also in Christianity at large. His example and works will always serve as an incentive to those who, like their Seraphic Patriarch, desire to become one with Him.

To finally conclude, we quote the words of Father Plasemann speaking about the Seraphic Saint, which express the entire object of this chapter as well as this thesis.

What was the object of his whole life? He did not analyze and divide. It was all creation with all its beauty—the birds, the sun and the rain—all creatures of God. It is the same with the Gospel. Immediately he flies to God, the Alpha and Omega. It was the same with Christ, Christ in the Blessed Sacrament and Christ in the Grib and on the Cross, and the mind concentrates upon Christ. That is the synthesis of St. Francis. The God who wrote the scriptures is the God who created the world. It is one and the same. Here is God in Tabernacle—on the Cross. To him it was "That is my objective; that I will exemplify in my life."⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Jean Gautier, (ed.), *Some Schools of Catholic Spirituality*, trans. Kathryn Sullivan, R.S.C.J. (New York: Deslee Co., 1953), p. 53.

⁴⁷ *Ceaside De Tours*, O.F.M. Cap., *Franciscan Perfection*, Trans. Paul Barrett (Westminster, Md.: The Newman Press, 1956), p. 78.

⁴⁸ Aidan Carr, "The Essence and Characteristics of Franciscan Spirituality", *Franciscan Educational Conference*, XXIX, (Washington, D. C.: Capuchin College Press, 1948), p. 22.

Discussion On Poverty

AT THE 1961 FRANCISCAN EDUCATIONAL CONFERENCE

Sister Helen Marie, O.S.F., Joliet, Ill.

It is perhaps a testimonial to the breadth and depth of Francis' ideal of poverty that his followers found it necessary to ask repeatedly for an interpretation of this ideal. It is also significant, I think, that as true Franciscans they sought such guidance from the Holy Roman Church.

As Father Raphael Huber, O.F.M. Conv. has pointed out, even in Francis' own lifetime the need for such interpretation had become apparent and shortly after the founder's death, the Order found it necessary to appeal to Francis' friend, Cardinal Ugolino, then Pope Gregory IX, for an interpretation of the rule. Gregory laid down the principle that the Order was not to own property and that money must be handled by a lay man, a spiritual friend or syndic. Subsequent Popes confirmed or modified this original position, discussing in addition the notion of "poor" use in contrast to "moderate" use. Finally Clement V, in a bull which is still effective today, reiterated the original ideal that the Order was not to own anything and he also declared in favor of "poor" use.

However, varied interpretation of poverty continued to give rise to new groups of Franciscans until, at the turn of this century, Pope Leo XIII unified some of these groups, recognizing three branches of the First Order. Today Observants, Conventuals, and Capuchins, each with its own government and constitutions, present slightly varied interpretations of Franciscan ideal, all of them approved by the Holy Roman Church.

It may be of some interest to this feminine audience to realize that a similar development of the Franciscan ideal took place among the Poor Clares. During her lifetime, Clare, like Francis, spoke out boldly for the "privilege of property." Even though Innocent IV ruled that common ownership was permitted to the Poor Ladies, at the request of Clare herself he added that no one had to accept this concession. In her own rule, Clare reiterated her precious privilege of poverty. However, the Urbanist rule of 1263 again allowed common ownership. Finally the reform of St. Collette in 1458 returned to the original ideal of no common ownership and no income for the Poor Clares. Thus both the First and the Second Order struggled to maintain Francis' ideal of absolute poverty.

In summary, I am inclined to agree with Father Ignatius Brady when he points out that the issue was not one of strict vs. lax practice of poverty but rather an attempt to balance poverty against the development of the Order as an organized whole.

Seen in this perspective one realizes that Father Huber's historical presentation can be of great service in enabling this conference to discuss Franciscan Financial Administration today. For history is only "the unfolding of the web of eternity under temporal and transitory eyes."

In this light I would like to suggest for consideration the following points:

- 1) The motivation behind Francis' choice of Lady Poverty and the relevance of this emphasis on poverty for our own times.
- 2) The meaning of poverty for the Franciscan—yesterday and today.
- 3) The question of collective poverty vs. individual poverty.

A few points perhaps to stimulate thinking along these lines: Why did Francis choose poverty? In the light of Father Huber's presentation we have something of the historical background for Francis' choice. Francis knew only too well the accumulated wealth within and without the church. He must also have been aware of the various reform movements abroad, the Humiliati and Cathari, for example, which had arisen to protest against wealth in the church. In contrast to these movements, Francis remained firm within the church and there heralded the importance of poverty. The uniqueness of Francis' position and its daring is underlined by a statement made in 1205 by Innocent III in which the Pope expressed his opinion that it was a disgrace for the clergy to live on charity. Such was the thinking of the Pope; such the attempted reform by those who ended up repudiating the church, such was the historical need for the Franciscan reform.

However, I do not believe that Francis' ideal was purely a deliberate response to the historical situation. It seems truer to me to say that Francis' poverty was a whole-souled response to Christ. It was the true answer of a creature completely aware of his dependence on God and of his own sinfulness. This notion, it seems to me, is basic to the Franciscan vocation.

How is this vocation to Franciscan poverty relevant today? Now, as in Francis' time, stands out the shocking contrast between extreme wealth and direst poverty. As someone has said, today's struggle is fundamentally a conflict between those who "have" and those who "have-not". Certainly one of the pivotal points in the Communist

program is the whole question of property reform and relief of poverty. Granted that the Communist solution is no solution, nevertheless it remains true that this very movement can call our attention to the contemporary problem of poverty. Certainly such a concern with the poor can be pre-eminently a Franciscan apostolate.

Today we might consider such points as the contrast between poor and wealthy; between poor and middle class; Communist capitalization on the needs of the poor, for example in Cuba and South America; we might also consider what efforts have been made and can be made to bring the full impact of Franciscan poverty to bear on those problems of the poor in our times.

In view of the contemporary historical situation there seems a special need for poverty in today's apostolate. As Francis realized so many centuries ago, the apostle must first of all bear witness to the "poor Christ" and to the message of the cross and the transcendental need of the gospel! This means that his own apostolate must be worked out in complete dependence on God, trust in his Fatherly care, and realization of the creature's own inadequacy. In this way the Franciscan will bear witness to the role of poverty as an integral part of today's apostolate.

But all of these considerations on the motives for Franciscan poverty may well raise the request for a clarification of our own practice of poverty. Here I might suggest for consideration the topic of exterior poverty in relation to interior poverty. Father Huber's paper has carefully underlined Francis' own concern, as well as the care of the Order itself, in regard to such externals as ownership and handling of money. Obviously, this emphasis on the material aspects of poverty presupposes the detachment, freedom of heart and trust in God which form interior poverty. In the light of our own times perhaps we have need to re-examine our external expression of poverty as a safeguard for the spirit of poverty. How can our Third Order congregations deepen their interior practice of poverty through careful attention to the details of exterior poverty? How can we be poor in the midst of middle class comfort? How can we distinguish (to use the historical phrase) between "poor use" and "moderate use"?

All of which brings us to one final point of consideration: community poverty vs. individual poverty. Again I draw your attention to the fact that this was the issue in much of the legislation which Father Huber has described. In what sense can our community be called poor? How is this notion of community poverty related to the poverty practiced by the individual? At the outset it is planned to be granted that both the poverty of the community and that of the individual will vary

from one Order to another, from one age to another. Demands of the apostolate will also shape this ideal of poverty. Granting these differences in practice it still seems true to me that, "Community poverty is both the root and the fruit of individual poverty." How can we, who do admit of community ownership of property and do handle money, how can we practice community poverty?

These, then, are some ideas for consideration: the motivation for the need of poverty today, especially in view of our contemporary apostolate; the relation of exterior and interior poverty; the need for a community poverty.

* * *

ARIDITY

Jesus!
I call,
But You do not answer.
You are hiding;

But I shall seek You
And I shall find you
Standing.

Behind me,
Waiting for me to turn
That You may embrace me.

Sister M. Josephine, O.S.F.