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Editorial and Business Offices

THE CORD

Saint Bonaventure, N. Y. 14778

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Editorial

May the Lord give you peace!

Although Saint Francis' relationship to God was a very intimate and personal encounter, it was not an ephemeral thing. Profoundly complex and patently cogent as love itself, his vision quickly overflowed the brim of individual experience to assume the nature of a message to other men. It is this message, translated into modern expression, that THE CORD tries to bring you.

Someone has facetiously described mixed emotions as the sensation a man experiences while watching his mother-in-law drive over a cliff—in *his* Cadillac.

During the past year, our review has been experiencing some mixed emotions of its own. Many of you have written to us to ask why we have fallen behind in our publishing schedule. While it is certainly comforting to know that we are missed, we do regret deeply the circumstances that prompted the concern expressed by your letters.

We should like to express our sincere apologies to you for letting you down as we have. Having now made a few adjustments here at the editorial desk, we have every hope, with God's help, of bringing the review to you on time in the future.

At the same time, we ask for your indulgent acceptance of the manner in which we propose to bring THE CORD back to its schedule. In the face of these euphemistic "circumstances beyond our control," we have decided that it would be best to begin immediately, with this issue, to concentrate on getting the current issue out to you on time. In addition to the current issue, however, we shall do our best, during the next three or four months, to send out several double issues which will complete the previous volume (1964) as well as the present one (January and February, 1965).

Finally, we thank you for your patience with us during our present difficulty, and we ask God to bless you for it. And we pledge to you our renewed efforts to bring to you—on time—a meaningful and enjoyable review.

The Editors

Rededication for Franciscan Sisters

In the thirteenth chapter of his Gospel, Saint Matthew records several parables which Jesus told to describe the kingdom which He had come to establish among men. With a neatness characteristic of his accountant's mind, the evangelist rounds off our Lord's teaching with a short epilogue, itself in the form of a miniature parable: "And He said to them, 'So then, every Scribe instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings forth from his storeroom things new and old'" (Mt. 13:52).

Nova et vetera, the new and the old! Christ's founding of His kingdom was the culmination in perfect form of the ancient covenant which Yahweh had made with His people. With the advent of the new, none of the old was really lost, for Jesus came not to destroy, but to fulfill (Mt. 5:17). And the Christian who truly understands the kingdom of Christ has the knack of giving to each its proper value.

Holy Mother Church has drunk deeply of the spirit of her Head and Founder. Instructed by the Holy Ghost, she is a prudent householder who knows how to use both the old and the

new in her storeroom. God has endowed her, as he always will, with wonderful gifts. She cherishes the old, even while embracing the new. She understands how to employ both of them effectively for God's glory and man's good.

Now, one of the outstanding blessings which our heavenly Father has bestowed on the Church are her religious institutes, those societies whose members strive for gospel perfection according to the law peculiar to their society by the profession of public vows (cf. C. I. C., n. 488, §1). New to the Church at the time of their inception, many of these institutes have now grown quite old. But the Church does not on this account discard them. Since she is aware of their perennial value, she occasionally brings them up to date with new ideas, new apostolates, new activities, new adaptations. Thus does she act the part of the prudent householder.

In our own days, which are so thoroughly permeated with the spirit of *aggiornamento*, it is not a bit surprising that the Church should address herself to the task of updating her religious institutes.

Religious Renovation

Pope Pius XII had been vicar of Christ only a few months when he began to manifest a keen interest in revitalizing religious life in the Church. It is a sign, incidentally, of the high esteem which the Church has for her religious, that one of the earliest movements toward *aggiornamento* took shape precisely in the area of religious institutes. In a series of letters and allocutions to religious superiors from 1939 to 1950, the supreme pontiff repeatedly expressed his desire that their institutes undertake both an adjustment to modern conditions and a revival of the essential spirit of their respective founders. By 1950, this double theme of accommodation to the times and renewal of original spirit had assumed the Latin name of *Renovatio Accomodata*, and had gained sufficient momentum to be the subject of discussion at the First General Congress on the States of Perfection, which was held in Rome that year.

By its twofold nature, the effort toward accommodated renewal concerns both superiors and subjects of religious institutes. The task of accommodation to modern conditions involves an external, administrative adjustment of the institute's *modus operandi*; therefore, although it considers the indi-

vidual religious, it is more directly the concern of superiors. On the other hand, the renewal of spirit depends largely on the effort of the individual religious; hence, while superiors are indirectly involved in personal renewal by providing means to effect it, the revival of the founder's spirit is incumbent especially on subjects.

In order to provide an impetus and environment for personal religious revitalization for their members, many religious institutes (predominantly, as it seems, those of women) have arranged what have come to be known in the United States as Renovation Programs. These generally have taken the form of a sort of workshop of spirituality, lasting from two to six weeks, in which sisters of a particular community work under the direction of a priest to renew themselves in the spirit of their founder.

A Unique Program

During the past summer, a group of Franciscan sisters took part in a program of renewal which appears to have been quite unique. On July 5, approximately one hundred sisters from five Franciscan communities gathered at Christ the King Seminary on the campus of Saint Bonaventure University in New York State, to de-

vote two weeks to rededicating themselves to the spirit of Saint Francis. The program was conceived and arranged by the Very Reverend Donald Hoag, O.F.M., Minister Provincial of the Province of the Most Holy Name of Jesus, and conducted by priests of that province.

Three factors contributed to make this rededication program different from most efforts of this sort. The large number of sister participants allowed for a true community atmosphere, which was noticeable especially in the various liturgical functions which were held. The team of eleven priests involved in the program ensured the sisters a wide choice of confessors and spiritual directors. The presence of diverse Franciscan communities provided for a lively and enlightening exchange of viewpoints. It is reported that the sisters who took part considered these three things distinct advantages, a view shared by those priests who had had previous experience in this sort of work.

Three Point Format

The activities of the day were divided into three parts, each with its peculiar purpose: reconsideration, re-evaluation, and re-animation. Each morning two lectures were presented, dealing with Franciscan spiritual theo-

logy, and its implications in practical religious life. The single exercise held in the afternoon was a seminar in which the sisters discussed modern problems concerning the vows, community living, the apostolate, and the like. To facilitate active participation by all, the sisters separated into groups of about twelve, each group with a priest moderator. Discussion was prompted by a list of talking-points related to the morning lectures, and given to the sisters at the beginning of the program. A sister scribe recorded the salient points of each seminar, and a summary report of the day's sessions was mimeographed and issued to each sister. The re-animation aspect of the program took place in the evening, in the form of a sermon or bible service, followed by Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament.

Although a great amount of intellectual activity was compressed into two weeks, an earnest effort was made to provide the participants with time to digest what they were acquiring. Discussion during the day was free and enthusiastic. But, since the accent was on the task of personalizing what had been assimilated, the sisters spent a great deal of time alone in meditation. The scenic seminary campus, surrounded by the ma-

jestic Cattaraugus hills, provided acres of the natural beauty that is so conducive to conversing with God. Furthermore, an abundance of good reading material was available, both in the seminary library and—within walking distance—the library of St. Bonaventure University.

The Franciscan nature of the material discussed during the program was matched by a very perceptible, almost tangible, Seraphic spirit. Serious discussion was frequently punctuated by lighthearted laughter; devout prayer was interspersed with a great amount of conviviality; sisterly charity prevailed everywhere; and, despite heroic efforts to the contrary, Brother

Ass departed a trifle heavier than he had been on his arrival.

All who took part in this rededication program—sisters and friars alike—considered that our heavenly Father had given them a great grace indeed. The experience of observing the spirit of Francis alive in members of other communities; the opportunity of sharing one's experience of the Seraphic vision with others; the gift of a few days of blessed leisure in which to give oneself again entirely to God; for all these things, and for many more, the religious involved in this rededication are grateful to one another, to their superiors, to the Holy Mother Church, and to almighty God.

The mind of the Church was never so clear as now, when it is finding expression in the searching of individual priests and laymen, in the mushrooming of so many new Christian apostolic movements, and in the ringing decisions of Vatican II. This is what the Church is thinking. This is what she wants. She has every right to expect nothing less than a wholehearted response, especially from her priests and religious.

— Aquinas M. Ferrara, O. F. M.
in INTEREST

Saint Francis and Fear of the Lord

Regis F. Marshall, O.F.M.

God is our norm. He is also our way. God is more than an ideal. He is the truth. To God we attribute life. In fact, He is life itself. To know and love God, our way, our truth, and our life, after the manner, and with the same motive, in which God infinitely knows and loves Himself spells out the ultimate and only explanation of our God-gifted existence. To be aware of the encouraging truth that God came to live with us in the same humanity He created makes our knowledge of Him the more accessible and His love for us the more discernible. That the same God submitted Himself to the humiliation and absurdity of the cross in full view of Jerusalem and exposed in full sight of mankind and inexhaustible mercy is purpose enough for every man to tremble but hardly reason to regard the death of the God-Man an evil from which he should shrink.

Christ came to us not as an avenger but as an advocate who

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called, invited, drew, and yes, even begged. And herein lies the heart of our subject matter. That Christ's loving attempt in His Passion and Death may not be appreciated; that there may be only apathetic acceptance of His Sacrifice on Calvary; that the crosspiece to which His arms were transfixed may not be construed as the beam of justice righted to horizontal perfection, can make of God the source from which may come the evil of punishment. Man may turn his back on the God of love but in doing so he must face up to the God of justice. The God who ought to be feared is the same God who gifts us with a fear of the Lord. Fear of the Lord is properly a grace and gift of the Holy Spirit. As a grace it is necessary and ever sufficient. As a gift it is a need and never superfluous.

When St. Francis of Assisi lamented that "love is not loved" he did not so grieve without a touch of trepidation. A most practical psychologist, of whom Chesterton said, "he deliberately did not see the mob for the men" and "he only saw the image of God multiplied and

never monotonous," St. Francis knew that man's nature is to desire and when he does not anchor his heart in God he will all too readily submerge it in the things that God has made. God's very gifts can become gods. When the co-curricular obligation of reparation is shirked then inevitably there results a self-privileged separation from God. This is a disorder of the first order a dread Francis always feared in his Order.

It has been suggested that there are no punishments only corrections thus styling every man a custodian whose lifelong effort is one of maintaining, preserving, and restoring the order that Christ ordained on Golgotha. "Now go hence, Francis, and build up my house, for it is nearly falling down" was the call issued from the crucifix of San Damiano, at first so misunderstood but soon so well undertaken. It has since become the unambiguous call to every follower of the Poverello. And the call has become more important in the truth that the order which Christ restored on the heights of Calvary obviously has not been preserved in the valleys and main streets of our day.

St. Francis' "love is not loved" of medieval mintage is no less true of our modern mentality. An age which has so delivered

itself to an exaggerated accent on change and transition, to disruptions and disjunctions, to separations and insecurities, has also allowed a chaste fear of the Lord to go by the board. And this when our times should be so generative of such an attitude towards God. For despite the transiency of our age we have no choice but to live in the permanent company of two presences, the one, the silent Presence of actual salvation in the Holy Eucharist, and the other, the slumbering presence of a potential destruction in the nuclear bomb. If the fear of the second, a fear that an unbridled pride and prejudice may trigger a universal holocaust, was subordinate to a fear of the first, a fear that Sacramental Love may not be loved, then we would see the gem that is the fear of the Lord a gift of the Holy Spirit, emit its most brilliant sparkle.

At first blush it might appear quite strange to predicate of our holy father, the mirror of Christ, a fear of the Lord. To find in him who so gloried in the divine attributes of goodness and mercy and who was so evidently enrapt with the Fatherhood of God, a fear of the Lord, might strike us as somewhat alien. And again we are given to feel the pulse of our subject matter. It was pre-

cisely in Francis' "Deus meus et omnia" that the roots of his filial fear of the Lord struck so deep. The more God became to him a Father the greater the fear that the son of Pietro Bernardone might become an outright orphan. The more exciting and scenically reminiscent of heaven became the world of creation the more did the saint of poverty fear that he might cease to be a stranger and pilgrim in this world. The more ingrained became the love of Christ for us in the Eucharist, the love of Him who called us "friends", the greater the fear that we might through indifference become His foe. Inside the darkness of a cave at Poggio Bustone Francis expressed this fear of separation with the prayer, "I fear everything from by badness, but from thy goodness I also hope for all." Such a fear was the next of kin to the virtue of attachment, faith. A firm faith is always productive of a chaste fear of the Lord. A confirmed faith founded on God's love rather than the evil of punishment begets a rewarding and fertile fear of the Lord. Only the faithless are fearless of God and only the foolhardy dare not fear Him.

This world was to Francis God's own backyard. Wherever he tarried he saw there a cultural affiliation to God. He him-

self whether strolling across the sunny Umbrian countryside or mingling about a busy corner in Assisi did so as a child who makes bold to say and do things while standing in the shadow of its father. For indeed the spirituality of St. Francis could be reduced to just such a posture; he bivouaced his thoughts, desires, and works neath the providential umbrella that is God the Father. However, aware that "it is in giving that we receive" Francis also saw in the Father a God who had to be revered as a judge. The Scriptures that he so loved were not only pages imprinted with a patient mercy but also the leaves loaded with a levelling justice. They contained words of threat as well as promise. And the Scriptures have to be fulfilled. Rewards there will be, God the most coveted; punishments will be meted out, eternal separation from our Creator the severest. Many were the sobering examples of a salutary fear of the Lord in the Old Testament! Many too were the examples of a presumption and pride that smothered a like fear in the New!

St. Francis was quick to learn a fear of separation from the Master Himself. Anxiety rode astride the donkey as it bobbed its hesitant way toward Egypt. Fear and trembling were Christ's

acolytes during His ordeal in the Garden of Gethsemani. An awesome fright hung heavy about the Saviour's cross on Calvary. The fear of futility, the fear that the Via Dolorosa might be for some just a sentimental journey, a fear that enroute to the hill of the skull He might be going against the traffic, leaned as heavily on Christ's shoulder as did the awkward weight of the cross. Some twelve centuries later Christ was given to know so joyfully in the Poverello that His fear was not in vain. In St. Francis it became the cotter-pin that locked in place the wheel of a dove-like simplicity on the shaft of a serpentine wisdom. Francis in turn bequeathed this fear to all his sons and daughters when he concluded the simplicity of his rule with the wisdom of a threat and a promise, a malediction and a blessing. There would be no living neath the same umbrella with our holy father without an appreciative acceptance of the gift and grace that is a chaste fear of the Lord.

In numbers there lies strength. When those numbers are dedicated individuals banded and bonded in a religious community, but for a singular purpose, then strength becomes power. There is no power on earth to compare with the power of a communal effort ignited by

a burning love which is insulated with a fear of the Lord. If an individual fear of the Lord is our first baby step along the path of wisdom then a communal fear finds us well in stride with wind to spare. Such a fear prevents the most shattering of dispersions, that which comes from within. It cannot but have an honorable homiletic effect on those to whom we minister spirit and life. This was the fear that St. Francis desired as his bequest to all who would brave the opinion of the world and embrace the vows. "Come little children, harken to me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord" (Ps. 33:12). And teach it he did. Having lived the rule before he wrote it, he loved God the more in preaching it. What original sin wrought so as to lean us away from God, a chaste Franciscan fear of the Lord would, as a counter force, retrieve standing us upright before the irreprouchable justice of God. So as to instill a more paternal dependence on God and a more genuine filial fear of the Lord Francis would call his community the Lesser Brothers. The vow of detachment, poverty, would be taken to underscore this dependence. Fidelity to this vow would make of God a pronounced object of our faith. And the more substantial became our faith the more prac-

tical our fear of the Lord.

Our entrance into the Franciscan Order was marked with a fear that was born of an ambitious love. The Franciscan ideal, whether contacted in the reading of the Franciscan story, listening to the inspired words of a simple sermon, or observing one of the many apostolates in action, became our ideal. The inherent desire and attempt to identify ourselves with such a noble aspiration reflected a fear that we might not "measure up". In the beginning our fear was the more emphatic in that while the ideal was so vibrant and alive our initial steps were so strange and unsure. But as the faded colors of autumn ceded to the freshened hues of spring the Franciscan habit became second nature to us and St. Francis our first love. In the classroom, the choir, our daily chores, but above all in the example of our mentors, we felt the breath of his presence. Legends there were many, object lessons not a few, but none surpassed in inspirational value and imminent need, the holy rule, the soul of Francis in print. In the rule we found our best entrance into his mind's intent and our best expression of his heart's desire. In fact one of the few times that we read of Francis flaring into anger was at the suggestion that an exception be

made to the rule. This was an anger provoked by fear, a fear that all that was primitively pure and challenging in the rule might one day be dissolved into an anemic formula. The rule was ever to be the bowstring of our Franciscan commitment. Fear of the Lord and Francis' displeasure would ever keep it taut.

A community stands only as tall as the sacrificial efforts of its members to bring to a corporate conclusion the goals of the Order itself. With a faith in and a fear of the Lord each Franciscan with his own accent pronounced his vows with a resounding "volo". As if in encouragement the walls of the church reverberated the echo. We reaped the joys of the day and the holy harvest of the hour. But distance does not always lend enchantment and today somewhat removed from our initial gesture we know that the change from a "volo" to a "nolo" can be quicker than our next footstep. The "ecce quam bonum et quam jucundum" which so tickles our ears need not touch our hearts. The sun of our Franciscan lives may sink into the west bigger and redder without our fear of the Lord growing more sensitive and our communal love more beautiful.

A fear of the Lord in community life should obviously

find its target in our superior. A convent or a friary housing such a fear is fortified with a strong antidote to that wedge-shaped pride that divides without ever conquering and a mushroomed presumption that smothers the desires and directives of a superior. Familial and familiar to all, a communal fear of the Lord should transcend the personality of a superior and translate itself into a responsible obedience. Fear of the Lord will thus happily blend obligations with privileges, prayer with play, and pleasure with penance. "We're in this together" is the frantic cry of a cringing crowd in proximate danger. "We're in this together" is the Franciscan promise of a community that touches the heart of God. Understanding, patience, forbearance, and a limitless charity are indispensable in any community. Just as necessary is a collective fear of the Lord, that gift of the Holy Spirit which so securely packages our communal gift of love to God.

Our Franciscan apostolates are as varied as the colors of an autumnal finale in all its glory. Each is in itself an immediate and flexible means of sanctification. And once more we return to the heart of our subject matter. The more lofty the apostolate the greater should be

the fear that the means might become the end, apostolates might cease to be weapons for the armory of the spirit and calisthenics for a healthy soul. We may preach charity to others with all the eloquence and zeal of a truly professional and be so sorely in need of it ourselves. We may instruct the ignorant to a nervous exhaustion without inching a degree toward wisdom. We may work our backs to an ache and our foreheads to a sweat without having earned so much as a denarius in the sight of God.

An apostolate accompanied by a chaste fear of the Lord will never fall short of its mark. The higher the pulpit the more humble will be our delivery. The more erudition and learning demanded of a lecture the more simple will be our preparatory prayer. The tighter our grip on the plow the freer will be our dedicatory love for God. Fear of the Lord will be our teleprompter as we go about preaching by word, deed, and example. It will keep foremost before the eyes of the soul the spirit of our rule and the reminder that every apostolate can be likened to a pair of binoculars: they can give us either the nearness or the farness of God; or crutches: they can be a support but also when used beyond their purpose, a harm; or

the nails that transfixed Christ to the cross: they can be the same nails that can fasten a hardened heart to an obstinate will. Apostolates that are meant to make of us strangers and pilgrims in this world can also make us strangers to God.

The Franciscan Order has provided its generous portion of saints and blessed to the treasury of the church. Much credit for such a fruitful output must be given to a deep and enduring reverence for authority. Even as an army depends so greatly for its combat effectiveness on an unbroken chain of command so too the Order relies so sorely for its successful campaign against evil on the continuity of a filial obedience. When it is the sacrifice of a chalice obedience hammered out with a fear of the Lord then the rout of the enemy has already begun.

An abiding fear of the Lord primes the pump of our Franciscan confidence, promotes the interests of the Order, and polishes to a reflective brilliance the mirror whose content is Christ the true God in Whom "we live and move and are" (Acts 17:28). It postpones and even cancels that parlor game which reduces to a lightheaded recreation the demands and desires of authority. It behooves the disgruntled religious who

is wont to construct mountains of murmuring out of mole hills of minutiae. Absenteeism premised on the most fickle thread of an excuse is aborted. Temptations find a vigilant conscience walking its beat. Presumption is curbed and pride is cut. Docility dominates, holiness of conscience prevails, the uprightness of God's justice is regained.

To gain heaven we need all the prodding that can be had. One of the better stimulants is a fear of the Lord which strengthens the grace that has been provided through the reception of the sacraments. Fear of the Lord is the aqueduct that carries the living water of God's grace into the reservoirs of our souls. This gift of the Holy Spirit makes our life one with the spirit of the "confiteor" and the "act of contrition", one with the spirit of amendment.

Every well balanced prayer has as an integral element a fear of the Lord. However, as prayers that so simply and forthrightly express the fear of separation from God may I suggest the three communion prayers that we pray at mass in conjunction with the priest just before he receives the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ? Prayed with Franciscan fervor and with the mind and heart of St. Peter who so painfully knew a separation from God they can

become our version of his thrice repeated prayer. "Lord thou knowest that I love thee" (John 21:15). Then love will be loved. And for the last time we come back to the heart of the conference. Once we have gained this mutual love our fear should grow apace with it so that "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38,39).

Reflection on the mystery of the Eucharist yielded Francis the deepest meaning of poverty; it also supplied him with the most forceful motive for renouncing everything, for keeping nothing, for emptying himself entirely — the Lord Jesus Christ gives himself completely to all men. The response that Francis must make before such radical self-giving was plain to him; he would offer himself to Christ through a life of absolute poverty.

Poverty represented for Francis the pattern of perfect imitation of Christ; poverty was not solely an important practice of the evangelical life; rather it constituted and expressed this very evangelical life. In Francis' view poverty was a life of total renunciation culminating in most intimate union with Jesus Christ, who 'for our sake made himself a poor man in this world'.

— *Benedict V. Scarfia, O. F. M.*
in INTEREST

The Johannine Message for Franciscans

Reynard Kinkel, O.F.M. Cap.

In the Encyclical *Rite Expiatis*, Pius XI stated that "today in the world there exists a need for another Francis." If this "other Francis" emerged, he said, "would not that have enough force and efficacy to heal and root out the corruption of our times?"

Recently a follower of St. Francis, a Tertiary, took up again with renewed zeal the mission of The Poverello of Assisi. That Tertiary was John XXIII. He exemplified in his life what Francis and so many after him have tried to condense into words. A glance, therefore, at the life of Pope John will help us call to mind the authentic spirit of Francis and will show us a concrete way of practising it.

St. Francis insisted that his followers had come to the "school of the humble Savior Jesus Christ in order to learn humility." His teachings stressed that humility is the foundation virtue: we must begin by being humble in the sight of God, so

that He may lift us up. Angelo Roncalli had no trouble understanding this lesson. Upon it he founded his revolution within the Church which reflected so well the ideal of Francis.

His humility found him considering each individual as a person. Whether a man was rich or poor mattered little. As the Apostolic Delegate to Turkey he served the poor as readily as he did the rich. It was the poor who especially had the power to move his heart.

In February, 1937, Msgr. Roncalli's old sacristan died. As the Apostolic Delegate he took part in the modest funeral services. His reason? "In order to show," he said, "that the Church, like the Lord whom it represents, considers the merits of the humble as much as those of the powerful."

With this conviction regarding the dignity of the human person, regardless of his rank or office, Msgr. Roncalli drew men to himself. His humility, ultimately, was the root of his appeal. Always ready to adapt his feelings and preferences to others, he would say, for instance, during his early years

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in Turkey: "If in Rome, Christ is a Roman, in Turkey He must become a Turk."

Many of his straight-laced colleagues looked bewildered at the effect of his very human and understanding attitude. He associated freely with socialists, communists, and free-thinkers. In each of them he saw the good which was present despite the efforts of others to obliterate it and uncover only the evil and the grotesque. When chided for his actions, he reminded his friends that perhaps he might convert some of his free-thinking brothers. And this was enough for him to continue in his ways.

More than anyone Pope John understood the words of Robert Frost: "Good fences make good neighbors." He would advise us to recognize the real differences that exist and must exist as long as there are people other than Catholics. But he would tell us to assume mutual good will, and to respect one another's conscience. He would point out what we have in common in the faith of Christ and how we might work together in the Spirit, if only we had the humility to bend.

Let us listen to this humble Tertiary as he introduces himself to his newly acquired subjects, the faithful of the Patriarchate of Venice: "I come of humble stock. I was raised in

the kind of poverty which is confining but beneficial, which demands little, but which guarantees the development of the noblest and greatest virtues and which prepares one for the steep ascent of the mountain of life."

No one was surprised to read in his personal diary reflections such as the following: "This year's celebrations for my priestly jubilee have come to an end. . . . What an embarrassment for me! Countless priests already dead or still living after twenty-five years of priesthood have accomplished wonders in the apostolate and in the sanctification of souls. And I, what have I done? My Jesus, mercy! But while I humble myself for the little or nothing that I have achieved up to now, I raise my eyes toward the future" (Sofia, October 30, 1929).

"The Vicar of Christ? Ah! I am not worthy of this title, I, the poor son of Baptist and Mary Ann Roncalli, two good Christians, to be sure, but so modest and so humble" (August 15, 1961).

When the opportunity presented itself Pope John stressed the virtue so dear to him — humility. On one of his trips to the Pontifical Gregorian University, he had a potent message for the students. "One should arm oneself with humility," he said, "and not permit oneself

ambitious thoughts or impulses or the desire for high pastoral offices or beg in prayer for special missions and popular fame." The words were effective because he lived them.

On his deathbed Pope John repeated the theme of humility which ran throughout his entire life. "...This *Pacem in Terris*, what a stir it is making! What is mine in this document is above all the humble example which I have tried to give all my poor life."

John XXIII had discovered the secret of the poor man from Assisi. The breviary points to it in the passage, "Franciscus pauper et humilis." Because Pope John lived the virtue of humility, Franciscan simplicity had to emerge. It was the same kind of simplicity which Pius XII had envisioned when speaking to the Franciscan Tertiaries of Italy. Franciscan simplicity, he said, "brings the soul to search for God directly, following the short way, the simple way, that is to say, paying less heed to its own disfigurement and more to the infinite beauty of God."

This spirit of simplicity forced Pope John to break through the barriers of formalism which surrounded the Vatican. In place of them he raised an image of love and respect that all men recognized. He had great dignity but did not stand on it.

He had great learning but made no display of it. He was a diplomat, and yet he had the simple, friendly manner of a neighbor.

Some say that it was this new attitude of John XXIII that set him apart from his predecessors. His walks found him wandering freely about Rome. Hospitals, prisons, children's homes — all these became his favorite stops. He participated in the sacred rites in ancient basilicas and new churches. His many excursions through the less traveled streets of Rome earned for him the nickname of John Without-the-walls. The common people loved him. And he loved all men.

One time the governor-regent of the State of Vatican City asked the Pope if he should close the entrance to the Cupola of St. Peter's during the hour that the Pope takes his walk.

"Why?" asked John.

"Because the people might be able to look down and see Your Holiness."

"Oh, we'll conduct ourselves properly and give rise to no scandal" was John's rejoinder.

He wished to be close to the people; he wanted above all to be a shepherd. He knew that a true shepherd remains close to his flock. To ensure his nearness to mankind, therefore, Pope John did away with ornate symbols of papal pomp which

caused more confusion and dismay than respect or admiration. The new spirit which he unleashed was therefore the friendly attitude of a neighbor, and he made others understand his mind concerning it.

He gave a few suggestions on writing style to the editor of one Italian newspaper. Less formality was John's wish. "Instead of phrases like, 'The Supreme Pontiff,' or 'The Illuminated Holy Father,' please simply say, 'The Pope or Pontiff did so and so.'"

Some believe that the words of the Pope must have a touch of mystery and dread. But in his diary Pope John wrote just the opposite: "The truth is that it is simplicity that is more in conformity with the example of Jesus."

Everyone around the Vatican began to feel the difference. No one could give an explanation for the change; but whatever it was, they liked it.

Pope John was a staunch defender of humility. And because he spoke out in fervor of this virtue, he naturally avoided formalism and tradition for tradition's sake. Instead, he, in the spirit of St. Francis, raised an image of friendliness and love. From this attitude there could only flow a thoroughly genuine and profound joy—the peace that our Lord promised

to those who would heed his new Commandment.

It wasn't mere chance that the joyful spirit of John reflected the same characteristics Pius XII enumerated when speaking to the Italian Tertiaries in 1956. He told them that Franciscan joy "is not the same as noisy gaiety or unseemly laughter, but is rather the tranquil smile full of amiable serenity." No one could doubt that this notion of Franciscan joy belonged to the image of the man called John.

At a social gathering one Monsignor described him as "extremely popular . . . I recall seeing him at a reception, spinning like a top, all purple and reddish colored, between the Minister of Foreign Affairs and his Secretary General, in the midst of five Ambassadors, several Cassocks and a few Academicians."

During a French Embassy reception, Angelo Roncalli met a woman wearing a very low cut dress which shocked even her friends. He casually offered the scantily clad woman an apple with the comment: "When Eve ate the first one of these she realized she was naked and hurried to cover herself with a fig leaf." The Cardinal, with his quick wit, had gotten his point across.

While the Patriarch of Venice, Cardinal Roncalli was out for a

walk when a very fat person came struggling to catch up to him. The Patriarch turned around and said: "The Lord must certainly have patience with us fat people."

It's hard to dislike a man like that—very few did. But he enjoyed himself most when he walked among his flock. His greatest happiness came from being with the simple, common people. Venice afforded many opportunities for this.

The Venetian parks were picturesque and beautiful. So many times Angelo Roncalli could be found walking through them. Yet on one occasion, having stayed out too long, he sent his secretary for a car. While his secretary was gone the Patriarch changed his mind and decided to return home by water bus (the counterpart to our subway). He joined the line of people at the bus stop, bought his ticket and finally boarded the bus. When he saw the people pass by—too timid to sit by the Lord Cardinal of Venice—he said in a loud voice: "Come on and sit down by me. I pay the same fare!" All the way home he talked and chatted with the simple laborers of Venice, and none in the group was happier than Angelo Roncalli. He once said, "Let us go on cheerfully," and he truly meant what he said.

Perhaps pseudo-analysts will spend time searching for the secret of Pope John's success as a world leader. If they conclude that it came from some artful technique, they will certainly be on the wrong track. His secret lies in the fact that he was meek and humble of heart. And even though he held the highest office in the Roman Catholic Church, in his private notes he wrote: "I am a sinner and dust and ashes before the Lord: I live by the mercy of Jesus to whom I owe and from whom I expect everything." These words are reminiscent of the humble confession of St. Francis: "To myself I seem to be the greatest of sinners, for if God had pursued a criminal with the same mercy, the man would be ten times more spiritual than I."

The Johannine revolution, which was influenced so much by Pope John's life as a Franciscan Tertiary, "can perhaps be arrested but it cannot for long be turned back." This is the opinion of Walter Lippman. John's influence was immense, and the world is different because he lived.

In a certain sense, he was a man sent by God to teach Tertiaries and all Franciscans the ancient spirit of Francis. The teacher has spoken. Have the students heard?

Franciscan Love and Human Fulfillment

Elliot Luce, O.F.M.

Saint Francis gave us a life to lead based on a primacy of love, which he himself found manifested in the mystery of the Incarnation. This mystery was revealed to Francis in the Gospel according to which we are to live.

"O Lord Jesus Christ, I entreat you to give me two graces before I die: first, that in my lifetime I may feel in body and soul as far as possible the pain you endured, dear Lord, in the hour of your most bitter suffering; and second, that I may feel in my heart as far as possible that excess of love by which you, O Son of God, were inflamed to undertake so cruel a suffering for us sinners" (*Little Flowers*, 3rd Stigma).

The Gospel teaches us the *life* of the poor, crucified Christ; therefore we have a life to live, a goal to attain—not merely a life of doing, but a life of being. It has been said that we must throw ourselves into this life as the professional football players throw themselves into a game. To achieve this we must become Sam Huffs of the Gospel life,

which requires that we know what the Gospel life is. In a sense, the Gospel is both the fact and the explanation of the Incarnation.

Before the Incarnation, our contact with God was limited: he was protected from us, not fully open to us, not sensible to us. We could not see, hear, or touch God, for his spiritual nature existed as a suit of armor. Then that miracle of love took place when the Son of God came close to us, openly and sensibly as Jesus Christ to share our life and our love even though he would endure suffering and death in its accomplishment. This was that true love which consists in exposing to another one's most sensitive depths so that he may more fully experience the beauty and the goodness of the other. To become sensitive is to become *defenseless*; and so it is true that "we can only be hurt by the ones we love." We love in spite of this danger. In fact, love is the living in constant danger for the sake of another.

When Francis beheld the poor Christ every emotion filled his heart as he realized that the Son of God had left the safety of the Godhead, thrown off the de-

fenses of pure transcendence, and let down his guard, no longer to be secure—and all of this for us. St. Paul explains this transformation thus: "Christ equal to God a thing to be clung to, but emptied himself, taking the nature of a slave and being made like unto men. And appearing in the form of man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death" (Phil. 2:6-11).

Christ did not do this *so that* he might suffer, but *though* he might suffer. He was going to love us no matter what price would be demanded of him. Francis saw that Christ did not wait for the manifestation of our love before he gave his love; rather, Christ loved us first.

Christ had such great confidence in men that he came as a baby, defenseless, with needs that only men could satisfy. He actually needed the love and care of a human mother, and the protection of a human father, and time in which to grow in wisdom, age, and grace. He needed the twelve Apostles to establish his Church. During his entire lifetime he remained at the mercy of men, so much so that he even allowed men to inflict punishment upon him, and, ultimately, to take away his life. All this because he wanted to expose himself to us no matter what this would de-

mand of him.

Francis's delight thrived on this thought! Look what God did for us! The crib at Greccio was the expression of his delight. But the cross seems to be the focal point of the spiritual life of St. Francis, for here he perceived that the Gospel life, the life of Christ, was the complete giving of oneself to another through self-exposure—bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things, and enduring all things (cf. 1 Cor. 13:6).

The final proof of Christ's love for us is his presence in the world till the end of time in the Holy Eucharist. The Body and Blood of Christ was now left in the hands of the priest, in complete obedience to his will. The *Testament* of Francis reflects his great respect and veneration for these most holy mysteries. Soon the vision of the crib, the cross, and the ciborium in the mind of Francis began to take shape in history. Prudence seems to have been thrown to the wind, a cavalier attitude inflamed Francis, every rampart was broken, every human defense removed; that which was precious and sensitive was left unguarded so that Francis and those who followed him could love men and God according to their own proper capacity.

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The follower of this life had only one Rule—which was not to be afraid to be hurt by others, by himself, or by God. It was a type of unilateral disarmament according to the pact of the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, which opens us materially, affectively, and humbly to receive the love of others and to express our own love. Materially, wealth serves as a protection for our future, our good name, and our bodily needs. Poverty allows us to trust in another, to receive from another, to give our complete faith to another.

Chastity, rather than being a refusal to involve our complete personality, affections and emotions with another person, is the acceptance of the dangerous act of exposing our complete personality with its complex affections so that we may love and be loved by all whom God places along the path of our lives. The risk we take here is great, since we are vulnerable to loneliness and are easily hurt by those to whom we present our love.

Despite this danger, Francis admonished his friars that wheresoever they would be and meet together, they were to show themselves members of the same family and frankly expose their needs one to another. For if a mother loves and cher-

ishes the son that is born to her, how much more should each one love and cherish his spiritual brother! If they suffered because of their love, Francis pointed out, the friars would then come to know perfect joy.

Obedience, for the Saint of Assisi, was to trust more in the will of another than in one's own will. It was to allow love to take place with complete freedom.

Francis saw the faith that God had in man—a faith that enabled him to entrust his own Son into our hands, knowing that he would be loved. Francis, in the same way, put himself entirely in the hands of God and trusted in the goodness of men so that the love which was contained within his entire self might be revealed, released, and returned to God, the source of all love. As we all know, Francis did feel in body and soul as far as possible the pain which his Lord endured, and the corresponding excess of love in his heart which had inflamed Christ to undertake such a suffering for us sinners.

If we follow this Gospel life, with its primacy of love, openness, and self-sacrifice, then we will be able to uncover that singular particle of pure love which is in reality our own unique self.

Principles for Franciscan Re-Evaluation

Brother Philip Harris, O.S.F., Ph.D.

Everything in the changing Church and world demands a re-examination of Franciscanism by the followers of Francis in a determined effort to achieve relevancy and to spread the Gospel more effectively. These suggested guidelines are offered as a stimulus to such re-evaluation: 1) Franciscanism is a universal humanism that appeals to all men when presented in contemporary terms. Even the Hindus of India are attracted by the ideals of Francis of Assisi. But his Twentieth Century disciples must adapt Francis' timeless teachings to the current situation and needs. Franciscanism is not intended to be tamed, domesticated, packaged or institutionalized. It must always retain a flexibility and mobility of the mendicant who has here no lasting home. The human structures, therefore, designed to manifest Franciscanism, are only means and not ends in themselves. When they become so rigid or ritualistic as to block

the transmission of the Gospel message, then they must be revitalized, bypassed, or even abandoned. 2) Franciscanism, by its nature, is dynamic and relevant, not static or withdrawn. In 1965 or beyond, the friar extracts from his Franciscan heritage that which is truly meaningful to our times, and integrates it with new discoveries and insights. Not everything our Seraphic Father said or did has such significance today, and his words and actions must be viewed within the cultural context of medieval society. Thus, Francis' views on flagellation, women, excessive self belittlement, and other topics must not be taken verbatim and might more appropriately be disregarded today. Franciscan literature of the past five hundred years suffers in this regard, instead of redredging old truths and propagating inadequate translations, modern Franciscan scholars need not interpret the essence of Francis' message in the light of the evolutionary history of the Church and mankind. We must not preoccupy ourselves with Franciscan folklore to the neglect of the real religious and social issues of the

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day. With the cosmic emphasis on Christ as the Alpha and Omega, the Christocentricity of Franciscan theology and philosophy is very timely. It is distressing to hear a Franciscan lay student describe us as "that Order which worships St. Francis instead of Christ."

Therefore, the friar cannot withdraw from reality into the Franciscan past. Rather, as Father Andrew Geaney noted, the messenger of the Gospel "must gladly bear the stamp of his time. He must identify himself with its culture, wear its garb, make the aspirations of its people his own. He must will their salvation, but never in a vacuum, apart from the real lives of the people. Prayer must precede, accompany, and support his work, but never can it be used as an escape or refuge from the cares of his times." The Franciscan, then, cuts through the debris that encrusts the Gospel message. He relates to all that is good and new in the changing Church, as well as in the world which is in the process of transformation. As a co-creator and redeemer, he helps God's people to see how the new products of men's minds, ranging from atomic power to cybernetics, can be used to serve better man's corporal and spiritual needs, thus freeing mankind for greater

spiritual growth. 3) Franciscanism is perennial. It is in harmony with the latest developments in theology, liturgy, catechetics, scripture, and the apostolate. It is the task of the friar to forge the link and to show this relationship to contemporary thought. Everything implied in the renewal of the Church fits within the traditional Franciscan pattern. The friar or other followers of Francis should be in the vanguard of this "aggiornamento", not among the inflexible, closed-minded, or ultra-conservative.

Perhaps there have been some false elements in the formation of the Franciscan religious and Tertiary in the past which have promoted a contrary attitude and approach to that expressed above. Has a distorted post-Reformation type of Franciscanism encouraged withdrawal and private spirituality, a dehumanization and emasculation of the Seraphic apostle? 4) Franciscanism is most effectively propagated through the Laymen's Order of St. Francis. The major means for the friar to transmit the ideals of Christianity entrusted by our Father to his sons and daughters is the Third Order. The last four Popes have clearly emphasized that the revitalization, mobilization and spread of the Tertiary life is a providential means of Chris-

tian social reform. Francis was a prophet when he established this first mass lay movement, so appropriate to this age of the laity to form and utilize laymen in the hierarchical structure and mission of the Church.

The challenge to the priest director of this Order is to help the Tertiary confront the problems of temporal society. An army of such men and women gratefully responding to God's love by throwing themselves, like Francis, into the unfathomable abyss called Christ, can transform the world! Such Tertiaries must be committed and involved, unwilling to seek peace at any price. They become a part of A.I.U. or the liturgical movement, rather than compromise or conform to the status quo. From their Franciscan spiritual advisors, they receive the inspiration to leave Mount Alverno's contemplation for engagement in the marketplace of Assisi. 5) Franciscanism is a means of leadership in the Mystical Body when it truly mirrors the spirit of Christ in the Gospels in an up-to-the-minute manner. It is social action in practice. Francis' insistence on peacemaking, the dignity of all men, the alleviation of the poor and suffering, require his followers to be involved and com-

mitted, especially to the "minores" or little people. Such Franciscanism should lead in the renewal of Christian spirituality which emphasizes scripture and liturgy, as well as Christ the mediator. Its theology and philosophy meet the needs of the times when mankind is taking a more incarnational view of the world. But if this leadership is to be effectively exercised, there must be aggiornamento on the part of all Franciscan religious. Within the Third Order, the Thomas Murray Training program, the Milites Christi for college students, and the Vico Necchi Franciscan Apostolate with business and professional persons, are indications of updating these principles for the development of Franciscan leaders for our times.

The Franciscan religious who provides such spiritual leadership, integrates the best in incarnational thinking today with his heritage within the Order. He encourages a Franciscanism which is outgoing, making contact with all that is good in Creation, and in touch with diverse viewpoints—a Franciscanism which constantly undergoes a prayerful reassessment of the Franciscan and what he is doing.

Seraphic Prayer: Christ Communication

Stephen Mannie, O.F.M. Cap.

Unity is the dynamic word of our times! Unity in planning maps out a better way of reaching a goal. Unity in school systems, in radio and television networks, transmits truth more clearly. Unity among administrators and workers welds better conditions for life. Moreover, our heart hungers for the fullest unity possible—with God himself.

At the core of all unity is communication. God communicates himself to us in Christ Jesus. "I and the Father are one" (Jn. 10:30). "Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son and him to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Mt. 11:27). "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through me" (Jn. 14:6). In Christ both God and man converge. He is our Christogram from and to the Father.

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Saint Paul broadcasted the good news of the Christ who saturates and transcends all time, space, and face. St. Paul turned up the volume about the purpose of our existence—to be shaped to the likeness of the Son of God, so that Christ's life and mind will be expressed through us. For Paul Christ is all.

Saint Francis of Assisi, the carbon copy of Christ, channelled on Christ and translated his good news into his own life and words. When we examine the recorded words of Francis' prayer, we find the focal point of direction and the springboard of expression in Christ and his good news. Our Seraphic Father had color Christovision and multi-dimensional Christophonics in his conversation, his communication, his confrontation with Christ. Celano says: "Always was he occupied with Jesus; Jesus he carried in his heart, Jesus in his mouth, Jesus in his ears, Jesus in his eyes, Jesus in his hands, Jesus in all his members" (I Celano, 115). Christ Jesus was the prayer and the life of Francis.

Christ is also to be our prayer, our communication, if we

are to fulfill our reason for being made, if we are to grow in our Franciscan life, if we are to conquer outer and inner space. Prayer focused in Christ will give us dimensions to the Father, depth in authentic sincerity with ourself and extensions to our fellow men on each side of us. It will give us the reach of the cross.

Prayer

Before we start considering how to pray better—and that's what we are mainly interested in—we first have to understand what prayer is. Perhaps the best description we have is that prayer is the communication of our mind and heart with God, particularly in and through Christ. Prayer is compared to a conversation between friends, a telephone call in which we talk, listen, and love. Prayer is likened to breathing. We have to breathe to stay alive naturally. So too, we have to pray to stay alive supernaturally. Prayer might also be likened to a compass needle, indicative that the directive force of our mind and heart always swing back to Christ.

Certainly we all know that prayer is necessary. Our own salvation and the salvation of many people depend upon our prayer! We Franciscans are commissioned pray-ers by the

Body of Christ for the people of God. Imagine taking your second cousin, Ferdinand, from Chicago to Desert Dry in Arizona. Ferdinand has been deathly sick, and the arid Arizona air should do him a world of good. During the trip, Ferdinand is completely dependent upon you for food, for being dressed and undressed, for being moved about. Christfully, you would take care of Ferdinand with the utmost kindness. But what would you think about Ferdinand if he would never talk with you? We are like Ferdinand before God. God is not only always with us at every moment and in every place, but we depend on him for every breath we take. How unnatural it would be for us not to speak with him. How easy it should be for us to ask God to help us, to apologize to him when we have offended him, to admire his goodness and to thank him for his great goodness. God gave us a mind to know him and a heart to love him. We are to use our mind and our heart—our whole body and soul—to pray with.

Now, we don't want to spend time proving that we have to pray. We all know this. We Franciscans realize that it is our privilege to pray. We are interested in how to pray better.

There are different ways of praying. We can pray by using

words, by using our mind and our heart alone and by using our body and actions.

Words

The way we are most familiar with is by using words. We use words when we pray together at Mass. We use words when we pray the Our Father. Words are like an elevator. They are to raise our heart and mind to God, or they are to be an expression of a heart and mind that is already in communication with Christ. Words alone don't make a prayer. Words alone can sometimes be shallow and without heart. There is great danger that in our community and personal life there are often too many vocal prayers. Sometimes these are rattled off without thought—just to get them said. I think that it was Saint Francis of Sales who advised that one Our Father prayed well was better than many prayed in haste and without thought. And Hamlet observed, penetratingly, that "My words fly up; my thoughts remain below. Words without thoughts never to heaven go!"? This might be poetic commentary on our Lord's own words, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me" (Mt. 15:8).

In the liturgy we use words to encounter the Word. At Mass we want to digest the word of

God and translate it into our daily life. In this Sacrifice-Sacrament we offer Christ to his Father, and ourself—our love, our hopes, our plans, our disappointments, our happiness and the needs of God's people—with, in, and through Christ to the Father. We receive God's word, God's power, God's love and the God-Man himself.

The diamond of Christ's Sacrifice-Sacrament is surrounded by the golden setting of the Divine Office. This golden setting prepares us for Mass and helps us to thank God more effectively—with his own words. The Divine Office particularly orientates and orbits us in the mentality of praising God. Praise is almost a forgotten word in our modern mentality, unless it is used for Crest toothpaste or Blatz beer. Yet frequent praise is something that God eminently deserves. Through the Mass and the Divine Office our life can be caught up into a glorious hymn of praise throughout the day.

Some people say prayers. It is better to pray. Some people have many devotions. It is better to be devoted to Christ.

Praying within our mind and heart

We have been considering vocal prayers which is certainly necessary in our life. But

now, let's turn to praying within our minds and heart. We call this mental prayer—thinking about God and loving him. It might simply be described as looking and loving. When we kneel alone in the presence of Christ, we may not say a word externally, but our heart cries out: "Jesus, I love you!" When we make the Stations of the Cross, we spend the time thinking about, compassioning with, and loving Christ in his sufferings. After we receive Christ in Holy Communion, we find this kind of praying within our mind and heart very easy. Praying within our mind and heart should be thoroughly easy. We did it when we were children. Yet, sometimes, when we become professional pray-ers, we get complicated about approaching Christ. Years ago, there was a delightful story in *The CORD*. A small boy was questioned by his mother after he had received his first Holy Communion. He was asked what he had said to Jesus when he had returned to the pew and bowed his head prayerfully. The boy hesitated at first. Then he said: "I prayed to Jesus for you and for Daddy, for Helen and for Georgie... And then I said the ABC's for Jesus... And there was so much time I didn't know what to say. So, I told him... a ghost story!" We may smile at what that little

boy said. But when we think it over, was it important what he said or what he actually did. He made immediate contact with his friend, Christ, and told him what he considered important. If we could learn to talk simply with Christ as that little boy did, we would be achieving good mental prayer.

If we really want to enter into the love of Christ's heart and blast through the masks of self love we wear, the thing we want to do is grow in mental prayer. This should be an easy growth.

There are some simple ways to practice mental prayer. One way is to do just what that little boy did. We can visit Christ and simply kneel down or sit down and talk over with our Lord what is close to our heart—our love for him, our problems, the difficulties of his people, our wish to be integrally Christful, our desires to teach him, to preach him, to counsel him more clearly to his people. We can tell our Lord about our sorrow for failing him and our desire to be with him, now and forever. Have a real heart to heart talk with Jesus.

A second easy way is to use a good spiritual reading book that we personally like. Certainly the New Testament, our missal, the Words of Saint Francis, any one of the excellent books by Caryl Houselander,

and many of our current publications, provide a mine of material for mind and heart. Suit yourself. Select something you like. What you read will take root and get a grip. Turn it over in your mind and apply it to your heart. When a sentence or a paragraph lights a flame, read it again slowly. Then dive down to the bottom of it. We can ask ourself some sincere questions. What can I do to love Christ more? What does Christ want to do through me now? Then with all our heart we can speak to our Lord. We can explain what needs to be explained. And we can beg Christ to help us. We can also do this with the vocal prayers we know by repeating them very slowly and tap the power of their depth while applying them to our life.

A third simple way is the use of repetitions. Slowly and continually we can repeat a phrase or a word—Jesus, I love you! Jesus, I love you! or, Jesus, If we repeat this slowly over and over, it will sink into our heart and catch fire. Then we will be made mindful of how Jesus wants to make use of these hands of ours, our tongue, and our heart. We will be lovingly aware of how Jesus wants to express his care, his comfort, his love through us in any situation we may find ourself during the day. Many a good person

who kneels in church for a long time does just this: he has entered deeply into the love of Christ's heart.

Let's repeat. The first easy way of mental prayer is simply talking things over with Christ heart to heart. The second way is using a book and letting its message be a springboard for love. The third way is slowly repeating a phrase or a word over and over until it sets us on fire with Christ's love. All three are good ways which cut through many complications. Francis of Assisi was not a man to be complicated in his communication with Christ.

We want to remember too, that prayer is a two way conversation and communication with Christ. We want to give him a chance to speak. Too often we do all the talking. We don't give him a sporting chance to impress on us what he wants. Then we want to hook our resolution onto some key word or action that can be easily repeated or recalled. This will remind us of what we have promised to do with Christ.

Certainly, we will be bothered with distractions. This is quite natural. External happenings easily distract us. Sometimes we will be worried about the classes we teach, or the talk we are trying to hatch, or the broken window in the convent re-

creation room. Sometimes the involved problems and sticky situations of our students will disturb us. These and a thousand other things tear at our attention until they are solved. Distractions are the common experience of all. They can be lessened, but not entirely eradicated. These distractions should never discourage us from growing in mental prayer. Christ looks at us as I would look at a woman who came to me to talk, but brought along her three children. If during our conversation she was frequently and unintentionally distracted by her children, I would understand that her main intention was to talk with me, despite her other cares and responsibilities.

To combat distraction, we need attractions. Looking at the crucifix or the tabernacle or a holy picture can easily help us to focus our attention while communicating with Christ.

To avoid routine, we can stress fresh and simple variety in our conversation with Christ by highlighting the things that impress us now or the things that affect us today.

A danger to many religious is compartmentalization. Some religious splinter their lives into fragments—now we have Divine Office, now we have mental prayer, now we have spiritual reading, now we must

work with people. Such a pity! We will not grow nor become Christful until we unify our life in Christ. Our life should be a continual communication with Christ—offering his sacrifice with him, praising with him during Office, talking with him during mental prayer, finding him in our reading, serving and loving him in people!

Surely too, when we really go at mental prayer, we realize that our communication, our conversation with Christ, does not consist in merely asking for things. Asking is necessary; our Lord even told us to ask, if we expect to receive. But as we grow in our conversation with Christ, our prayer takes on the orientation of his heart—the spirit of love, of praise and thanksgiving, the salvation of other people, the growth of his Body, the Church.

Praying with our Body and actions

Besides praying with words and praying within our mind and heart, we can also pray with our body and our actions. When we consciously genuflect, when we kneel with folded hands, when we make the sign of the cross, we pray with our body and our actions. Sometimes our minds are fuzzy and our lips are clumsy. Yet, if we keep our body reverently attentive, that

will be our prayer and, eventually, our heart too will be attuned.

Although work does not take the place of prayer, it is easily made a prayer—because backing up what we do and underlying it is the life of the Son of God. This makes it valuable. I wonder if we ever offered the ten minutes of patience, when a person arrived late for an appointment, for a person who has been away from Christ for ten years? Our getting up in the morning could be applied for someone to wake up from sin. There are a thousand ways our work can be a prayer.

We can pray with words. We can pray within our mind and heart. We can pray with our body and our actions. Saint Augustine said that only the person who knows how to pray well can live well. It is through prayer that we will recognize and taste God's goodness, that

we will learn to see sin for what it is and detest it. Through prayer we will receive strength to overcome temptation and gain every virtue. We will realize that God is our Father and that Christ is our Brother. We will judge and love from his point of view. It is through prayer that we will be Christ-centered and Christ-conscious. We will be vitalized by our sharing in and spreading Christ's life and love. We will be sensitive to dynamic Christianity. We will come to realize that we must give Christ another human nature to use—that he wants to use our hands, our tongue, and our heart to spread his love, his kindness, and his patience to each person we meet. A person of prayer will live in the love and peace of Christ with a happy heart! He will live the life of a person in communication with Christ in the spirit of Saint Francis!

Universal changes within the Church, of course, can only come from the magisterium. And they are coming, in that slow, steady stream that characterizes wisdom born of long experience. It would hardly be farfetched in these circumstances to assert that there exists a serious obligation on all of us to seize with calm fury what the Holy Spirit, through the Church, and in particular the present Council, is giving us, a serious obligation to get in line with the mind of the Church.

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