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## THE MONTHLY CONFERENCE

## OUR DESTINY AS RELIGIOUS 11

In developing the theme that God is love and he who abides in love abides in God and God in him (I Jn. 4:16) we showed why man is destined to share his life with others even in a purely natural order, for he bears in his soul the image of a divine family whose very life entails a sharing of an infinitely lovable divine nature by a Trinity of Persons. In the supernatural order, God uses man's altruistic love for his fellowmen to prepare him for heaven, which is a kind of participation in the life of the Trinity. No one has seen God, Saint John explains in the same epistle, but if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is persected in us. Man's likeness to the Trinity extends even to the sexes, for as Cornelius a Lapide put it, "God willed, in the production of Adam and Eve, to imitate His own eternal generation and spiration." Uncreated love divided human nature in two so that man and woman might have something to give each other. Through their natural love they were to complement their personalities, putting human nature back together, as it were, thus readying themselves for heaven where there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28).

The better to achieve their eternal destiny hereafter, and already in this life to find that perfection of personality which belongs to those who have put on Christ (Gal. 3:27), religious through their vows, and especially that of chastity, dedicate their persons to their devine Master as first fruits unto God and unto the Lamb that they may follow the Lamb wherever he goes (Apoc. 14:4).

For a woman, this consecration has the character of a spiritual marriage, so that the destiny of the dedicated virgin is, in the words of the Little Flower, "to be your bride, my Jesus; to be, in union with you, the mother of souls."

To the religious brother or priest, however, Christ says as once He said to His apostles: No longer do I call you servants, but I have called you friends (Jn. 15:15). This is no ordinary friendship to may are invited, but a rare and wonderful love which like that I is always the long of reasonable Kings.

for Christ is unique, for after all it is only to a devine Person that we can give ourselves with complete and absolute abandon. And only one who has vowed to Christ all that the normal individual holds dear on earth—possessions, a home and family of his own, his very will—has given himself body and soul to Christ. Such persons indeed experience that spiritual joy Christ promised (Jn. 15:11) and can exclaim with the Psilmist: O taste and see that the Lord is sweet (Ps. 33:9).

As the bride of Christ through union with her divine Spouse "marries-in' to the divine family as it were, so the apostle and intimate friend of Jesus is united through Christ to the entire Trinity. If any man love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will ome to him and make our abode with him (Jn. 13:23). And I will ask the Father and he will give you enother Advocate to dwell with you forever, the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you shall know him, because he will dwell with you, and be in you (Jn. 14:16-17). Here we see the deep significance of Christ's prayer for his first "religious": That they may be one even as we are one, He plead, I have made known to them thy name and will make it known in order that the love with which thou hast loved me may be one in them and I in them (Jn. 17:22,26).

Thus religious by their intimate bond with Christ anticipate as it were the union with the Blessed Trinity that is of the essence of heaven. And by abandoning themselves body and soul through their triple vow, they profes their desire to fulfil to the limit the first and greatest commandment: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with thy whole mind and with thy whole strength (Mk. 12:30).

But the religious state, though it grew out of the virginal or dibate state, according to present-day Canon Law is also a matter the common life. It resains to discuss the role of the religious member of the community.

from their primary purpose of uniting one more closely the triple vows with their allied virtues of poverty, chastity dietice, have also a geondary social aspect. Poverty in praccontains assure us, an be reduced in great measure to living The best means while the essentials of poverty, and of acquiring the spirit of ty, that is to say, a red detachment from temporal possessions and the comforts of life, is to practice life in common. In the canonical sense, community life consists in this that everyone uses the goods belonging to the community and does not possess anything as his own in the manner of food, clothing, and furniture" (Religious Men and Women in the Code, Bruce, 1940, p. 208).

The vow of obedience obviously strengthens and enhances the authority the Church invests in superiors that they may keep the community united. For Francis obedience goes still further. His caritativa obedientia where obedience becomes synonymous with love (Admonitions, n. 3) entails more than subservience to a superior; it implies service to one's inferiors or equals. Writing to his first followers, he said: "Let them in charity of the Spirit willingly serve and obey each other. This is the true and holy obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Reg. prima, c. 5). If obedience is making our neighbor's need our command, then even the faithful in the world can practice Francis' virtue, which is why he could write to them: "We should never desire to be above others but ought rather to be servants and subject 'to every human creature for God's sake." And because this fraternal charity not only unites us to one another but also to God, Francis goes on to add: "And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon all those who do these things and who shall persevere to the end, and He shall make His abode and dwelling in them, and they shall be children of the heavenly Father whose works they do, and they are the spouses, brothers, and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ' (Letter to All the Faithful).

Chastity too makes its contribution to fraternal charity, for in freeing the soul for the exclusive service of God, it enables the religious to ask with Christ: And who is my mother and who are my brethren. (Matt. 12:49). And looking round on those about him, he too can reply, Behold my mother and my brethren (Mk. 3, 34). For if religious truly love God with their whole heart and soul, mind and strength, how can they help but love those who like themselves have left their parents because they knew they must be about their Father's business (Lk. 2:49). At the same time chastity keeps this fraternal love from degenerating into particular friendship and insures the purity of the maternal or paternal solicitude religious may have for their spiritual children. Thus the vows and their kindred virtues not only enable a religious to fulfil the greatest and first commandment, but the second, which is like it, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself' (Matt 22: 3-39). And until the individual dedicated to God has fulfilled this second commandment to the letter, he has not achieved his destiny as a religious.

I

In virtually the same breath as Christ invited the apostles to the intimate friendship and union with Himself, a union like that which bound Him to His heavenly Father, He charged them to love one another. As the Father has loved me, I also have loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love, as I also have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be made full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you (In. 15:9-12).

Christ tells his first "religious community" bound together by the "evangelical counsels" that their unselfish love for one another reflects the love life of the family that is Trinity, and through this practice of charity they will taste something of that divine joy which we said might be called the "nectar of the gods." Well might we ask: Is this not the essence of the hundred-fold we have been promised in this life?

Something of the tremendous impression Christ's new commandment made upon the Apostles can be gleaned from the behavior of those who first followed them to become the infant Church. For we read in the Acts of the Apostles that all who believed were together and held all things in common, and would sell their possessions and goods and distribute them among all according as anyone had need (Acts 2:44-45). Conscious of their brotherhood under God, the first Christians seemingly adopted a kind of community life. They realized with that intuition given to the saints that one can love one's neighbor as oneself only where there is no longer a distinction between thine and mine. Their Christlike charity, consequently, prompted them to what has sometimes been called "Christian communism" wherein each regarded it a privilege to care for the needs of another at his own expense.

This perfect love, so in contrast with pagan attitudes of the day that it became the trademark of the true follower of Christ, has always held a special fascination for founders of religious orders. Saint Augustine, for instance, who not only introduced monasticism into Africa but influenced profoundly the whole ideal of religious

life for ages to come, saw the religious community as the perpetuation of the fraternal love of the infant Church when all believers were of one heart and one soul.

In one of the sermons of the Doctor caritatis, which reveals the Christian rhetorician at his best, we read how Saint Augustine described the substance of the religious life to his people. After becoming Bishop of Hippo he had organized the clergy into a religious community living in the episcopal residence. This aroused comment among the people unfamiliar with his novel combination of the contemplative and active life. And so it was that Augustine came to deliver the two charming sermons on the common life we find among he extant works. "I began to gather brethren of like disposition as myself, my equals, having nothing as I had nothing," he declares. And I sold whatever little I had and gave the proceeds to the poor, did these also, so that we could live in common" (Serm. 355). And then in somewhat dramatic fashion, he called the Deacon Lazarus to read to the congregation crowded in the cathedral this passage from the Acts of the Apostles: Now the multitude of the believers were of one heart and one soul, and not one of them aid that anything he possessed was his own, but they had all thing in common. And with great power the apostles gave testimony to the resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord, and grace was in them . Nor was there anyone among them in want. For those who or deed lands or houses would sell them and bring the price of whatthey sold and lay it at the feet of the apostles, and distribution made to each, according as anyone had need (Acts 4:32-35). Ar when the deacon had finished he carried the book of the Scripture the bishop sitting on the pontifical throne. "I also wish to read the words," explained the saint, "for it gives me greater delight to and them than to speak my own ideas." And having read the passer once more in solemn fashion, he turned to the people saying imply: "You have heard what we wish to do; pray that we may be a to do so" (Serm. 356).

Perhaps national or doctor of the Church was more conscious of the social configuences and implications of the religious life than Saint August. Not only was he by nature a sociable individual, but his whole life was a record of the potentialities for good or evil inherent in social impact. Before his conversion, Monica's son knew the power of false teachers and evil associates. But the

ample of heroic religious also made him realize how shameful was his weakness and gave him courage to attempt a conversion. His owth in spirituality was itself the fruit of community life. The itle philosophical circle that had lived with Augustine and Monica par Milan at the time of his conversion was transformed into a sort lay monastery. Soon the group moved to Tagaste where they wed together "for three years fasting and praying and doing good orks, and meditating day and night on the law of God" (Possidius) sta S. Augustini, c. 3). Ordained priest at Hippo, where he had one to recruit vocations for his monastery, Augustine was given a ece of property near the cathedral for his convent. "There he gan to live with the servants of God according to the manner and "les established under the holy Apostles" (ibid., c. 5). Five years per when he became Bishop of Hippo, he promptly converted his sidence into a monastery, living the common life with his clergy her the "model of the early Church in Jerusalem" (ibid.). He s the first religious founder to combine the contemplative ideal ith an active apostolate among the people, and thus did in a anner appropriate for his age what Francis would repeat in somehat different fashion some eight centuries later.

Far from being contrary to the social instincts of the human part, the religious state for Augustine was human society at its pst, an attempt to recapture the charity of the primitive Church, where true to itself, the monastic community would always be the extome of fraternal love, a living object lesson of what Christ meant when he said: By this will all men know that you are my disciples, whou have love for one another (Jn. 13:35).

Francis too was fully conscious of the community aspects of pligious life. He would not hear of calling his followers hermits, of monks, or canons, but fratres — brothers. Like the Doctor pitatis, whom Christian iconography so fittingly pictures with a pman heart in his hand, the Seraph of Assisi was well aware of prist's new commandment. He too wished his little band to be none heart and one soul so that not one of them said that anything possessed was his own, but they had all things in common (Acts plane). But in another sense, he went further than Augustine. It is another sense, he went further than Augustine. It is another sense that extension of the primitive postolic band, the early Christian community, Francis went back the apostles themselves to whom Christ had once said: And all

you are brothers (Mtt. 23:8). As the sequence for Francis' feast puts it: restauravit lex sanctita, statum evangelicum... tenet ritus datae normae, culmen apostolicum.

Indeed the poverty so dear to the Poverello's heart becomes possible only where perfect fraternal charity exists. As one of his modern sons reminds us (P. Ramstetter, O.F.M., "Introduction to a Franciscan Spirituality," Franciscan Studies 11, 363ff.), if Francis insists on the "sublimity of the highest poverty" whereby his friars "as pilgrims and strangers in this world" should "appropriate nothing to themselves, neither a house nor place nor anything", he immediately adds: "and wheresoever the brothers may be or meet one another let them act towards one another like members of a family. And each should with assurance make known his need to another, for if a mother nourishes and loves her child in the flesh, how much more eagerly ought one to love and nourish his brother in the spirit" (Reg. bullata, c. 6). In his first rule, the saint suggests this perfect brotherly love in a somewhat tentative fashion. "In so far as God gives them grace," he declares, "let each one love and nourish his brother as a mother loves and nourishes her son" (Reg. prima, c. 9). His final rule, however, has no hint of hesitation. No longer is there any question of God giving them the grace. Indeed, this is the very grace of their vocation - to love their confreres with a charity not only as constant as that wherewith a mother cherishes her child, but with a love that surpasses even this paragon of natural For has not God Himself said as much solicitude and care. equivalently: Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? And if she should forget, yet will not I forget thee (Isaias 49:15). And this is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you (Jn. 15:12).

"It is easy to see," writes Ramstetter, "how poverty ceases to be a hardship when brothers treat each other as brothers, when brothers know they can rely upon the sympathy and helpfulness of their brothers, brothers who love each other more than mothers can love their own children" (art. cit. 364). And the same might be said of obedience and chastity. For if out of love for Christ, the religious deprives him of a family of his own, then his community, his order, become "his family" where he may experience and practice that Christian love or charity that is needed for the maturing of his personalise. Obedience, likewise, is not diffcult where superiors

consider themselves ervants and "feetwashers" of the community (Admonitions, n. 4), and receive their subjects "charitably and kindly so that (the subjects) may speak and act with them as masters with their servants" (Reg. bullata, c. 10).

But be he superior or subject, monk or friar, with a fixed monastery or wandering through the world as a pilgrim and stranger, the goal of every religious should be to love his fellow religious with something of Christ's own love for him. This is his raison d'etre, his destiny as a member of a community. And woe to those religious whose conduct be such that anyone should have reason to regret leaving all to follow Christ. He who does not love abides in death (I Jn. 3:14).

Is it not from our brothers in religion that we receive the hundred-fold Christ promised in this life? Are they not our defense against our own weakness, or the attraction of the world? A brother is a better defense than a strong city (Prov. 18:19).

Are we conscious of our own obligations on this score? Is our help and concern for fellow religious limited to material aid? How often do we really pray for them? And then there is that difficult matter of good example. Only on the other side of eternity shall we know how much our actions have been an influence for good or evil in the lives of our confreres. While we ought not to have what is called an "evil eye", ever on the watch for the fault of a fellow religious, for charity thinks no evil, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (I Cor. 13, 6-7), on the other hand we may also have an obligation at times to administer fraternal correction. "If among the brothers," Francis declared, "there should be a brother desiring to live carnally and not spiritually, let the brothers with whom he is humbly and zealously admonish, instruct, and correct him" (Reg. prima, c. 5). As we know from the other writings of Saint Francis, "carnally" means "according to the perverse desires of self-love" and "spiritually" means "guided by the Spirit of the Lord," who is also the Spirit of Love (Cf Esser-Hardick, Die Schriften des hl. Franziskus, Werl, 1951, p. 164ff). One of the characteristics of a good family is that one can be at times very outspoken in such matters, particularly if one has proved in countless ways that the reproof proceeds from true fraternal concern for our brother's welfare.

Where the true family spirit prevails, too, there is none of that despicable jealousy or envy of another's graces, talents, or accom-

plishments. But because religious charity is the fruit of the spirit and not something purely natural, we sometimes discover even in the convent "small souls" who by their ridicule would reduce everyone to the level of their own mediocrity. In fact, as Augustine remarks, "He who has not felt this has not made a single step in the way of perfection. As soon as one starts to improve, to wish to advance, to despise earthly things . . ., to fix thoughts solely on the contemplation of God, . . . behold we see such a one suddenly made the target of the detractor's tongue, opposed in a thousand ways, and what is worse, any and every means is used to drag him from the ways of salvation" (Enar. in ps. 119, n. 3). If the community is to protect a religious, it is not to baby him or deprive him of initiative and a sense of responsibility. As in a family, each member has his own talents and his own tasks. Each receives him own grace from God. And while he should beware of the fault of beginners, of which Francis speaks in his Rule, flaunting his ideas and norms of conduct in the face of others who may not have received his grace, rather than "judging and despising himself" (Reg. bullata, c. 2), at the same time he ought not let a lack of encouragement or appreciation deter him from doing what he knows to be right and good. No religious is mature if he cannot stand on his own feet. On the other hand, he ought to examine himself on his attitude towards his confreres. Has he by his kindly interest and even personal sacrifice furthered their good work? Or, God forbid, is he tainted with invidia clericalis, tearing down and bringing to ruin what God Himself is seeking to build up through the zealous brethren of his order? "Whosoever envies his brother on account of the good which the Lord says or does in him," Francis declares, "commits a sin akin to blasphemy, because he envies the Most High Himself who says and does all that is good" (Admon., n. 8).

But where religious, far from inviting the curse of Saint Francis by such conduct, seek rather through their charity to "edify" in the beautiful Pauline meaning of that term, the community for all the human weakness of its members can become a kind of paradise on earth, the hundred-fold Christ promised us below. To make it such should be the goal of every religious. For not only will they be fulfilling to the letter the second of God's two great commandments, but they will experience that deep joy and contentment that prompted Augustine's rhapsody: "The practice of charity is strength, fruit

and flower, beauty and sweetness, food and drink, nourishment and caresses, of which one never tires. If it enchants us so in this land of exile, what will it be like when we reach our fatherland" (In epist. Joan., 10, 8).

Fr. Allan B. Wolter, O.F.M.

### THE HOLY FRIARS OF SAXONY

#### HOLY BROTHER LIEBHARD

## I. The graces he received.

43. The Most High sometimes reveals to little ones those things which He hides from the wise and the prudent. Recently, that His grace might shine forth radiantly in one of these little ones, He filled a poor layservant in the convent of Braunschweig with great gifts and graces. In this way He showed to all the friars that He does not pay attention to the mere habit and profession, but solely to solid virtue in truly devout men.

At the time I entered the Order there was in the convent of Braunschweig a certain servant named Liebhard (Lefardus) who did menial service for the friars. His virtue and piety were such that because of his holy life the friars received him into the Order and joyfully invested him.

## II. His piety while still a layman.

44. While still living as a layman in the service of the friars, he had dedicated himself totally to devotion and unceasing prayer.

Now the convent Church in Braunschweig is laid out in such a way that the convent servants who sleep in the cloister can enter the choir at any time of the day or night. Our Liebhard, then, as soon as he had finished his kitchen chores in the evening, would hurry to the choir and there he would offer to God his evening sacrifice of most devout and Penetering supplication. But when the time of Matins was approaching go to bed a little while; but only rarely did he take off his clothes, for thus he could more quickly return to choir for midnight. Then as soon as the bell sounded he would arise would spend the rest of the night in prayer until dawn, puld sleep a little. God rewarded his almost uninterrupted ing him to such perfection that he attained to the sweetbus ecstasies while still wearing secular garb.

During the winter when he had to light the hearth, he was very often discovered in a trance, sitting on bended knees, his hands folded, his head bowed, his eyes open, neither seeing nor hearing nor feeling anything. The friars, wishing to find out whether his soul was rapt in the contemplation of heavenly things, sometimes pricked him with a sharp tool or even held burning candles to his hands, all of which left him perfectly insensible and quite unaware that he was being hurt. Only when he returned to consciousness would he complain about feeling pain where he had been injured. Sometimes, too, he was found standing in his cell, his face turned towards the wall, his hands folded. and himself unconscious of all earthly things; his body would be as rigid as a corpse through the whole of the ecstasy. And if his hands were sometimes forcibly gripped and pulled apart, they would immediately and violently rebound with a clap as if two boards were struck one against the other.

HOLY FRIARS OF SAXONY

#### III. His continuous prayer.

45. Once it happened that Friar Liebhard was sent out with Friar Berthold, a laybrother, who at the time was his fellow scullion in the kitchen, to collect the eggs that had been begged in the alms-district of the convent. Now this servant, Berthold, knowing from experience the great devotion of his companion Liebhard, did not risk handing the basket of eggs to him, for he feared that Liebhard would forget all about them should the sweetness of devotion overwhelm him. Since it was thus up to him to carry the eggs, he handed Liebhard a basket full of cheeses. He hoped that if by chance Liebhard should enter into the iovs of celestial visions, he would not have to worry about the safety of the eggs. But while they were returning to the city, the one with his eggs and the other with his cheeses, our Berthold, who was also a man of devotion, began to talk of God to Liebhard. So entrancingly did he speak that Liebhard was enkindled with a holy fire and was carried off into a transport of heavenly contemplation. No longer aware of the heavy load on his back he let it drop to the ground. And exulting in the fervor of his spirit, he ran like a man drunk with spiritual joy through the fields and along the road with such speed that Berthold was hardly able to follow him. Finally after this jubilation of heart he was caught up in an ecstasy of contemplation over those things he had been considering with wonderment of mind, and became as stiff as a corpse. His companion, finding him thus lifted out of himself, had to sit down by the roadside until he returned to consciousness.

# IV. His absentmindedness regarding temporal things, as a result of his frequent trances.

46. In the springtime when the servants had to take care of the garden and plant the seed, Liebhard worked with the others in the garden. But he paid no attention to the useless words of his fellow workers, but instead he thought of how he might please God and offer himself to the Lord as an oblation full of sweetness. Hence, from his deep thought on the future joys, such a flood of devotion would come over him that he would become elated and begin to dance through the courtyard as though drunk; and he would indeed be merry from the sweetness of the interior drink.

In the same way he sometimes became so enrapt in thinking of heavenly things that he forgot the things he was assigned to do in the kitchen. For in this state he could no longer attend to the sauce and fish placed upon the fire, and they became a total loss. Also sometimes while he was sitting at the table the spirit would overcome him and he would heave deep sighs and groans in the fervor of devotion. But if this prevented him from eating and it seemed that he was about to have an ecstasy, he would arise from the table and go away by himself where he could hide in his ecstasy. But more than once he failed to reach such a hiding place and was overtaken on the way by the growing ecstasy. Later he would be found by the others, stiff as a dead person.

In the courtyard near the choir, where he was accustomed to pray at night, his many genuflections kept the grass from growing, and the ground was entirely bare. From this, everyone passing there could see how Liebhard spent his time in prayer and the praise of God.

## V. His patience in bearing scoldings.

hen he was harshly scolded for his negligences his only answer was, God mend us all." And he always said this with real modesty and imility. And so that all would know of his utter willingness to submit every insult, he told his fellow-menial, Friar Berthold: "If someon ould strike off my head, or trample me into the mire under his feet would still love him as much as if he had heaped the grandest favor pon me!"

## VI. His charity and obliging ways.

48. Friar Liebhard was also very charitable. For in the evening hen he and his companion had to wash the turnips for the next day inner, he would readily do all the work alone and would urge his artner to go to bed. He was so filled with charity that he would will-

ingly have done all the work of the convent if his absentmindnedness and forgetfulness had not stood in the way.

## VII. His love of poverty.

49. So great was his zeal for poverty that (as a layman) he would never accept any return for his work except the bare necessities of food and clothing. So one day the guardian of that convent, who had to attend the chapter and who expected a change, called the servant to him and said: "Liebhard, you have served the friars long and faithfully without any compensation. Therefore, I would like to give you something now in case I should be changed or you should leave the service of the friars, so that in case of sickness or need you will have some little reserve laid aside." Liebhard answered: "My lord, I have no doubt of God's goodness. For He Who has looked out for me so carefully until this moment, will in His constant clemency also provide for me all that I shall need in the future. For never have I served the friars in hope of temporal gain; He for Whose love I have done it will reward me well in due time." But when the guardian kept pleading with him to accept at least half a farthing, he at last yielded on condition that the money should be given to the Brother Almoner and be used for the necessities of the friars. By no means did he want to take money for his own use in repayment for his services to the friars, lest it should seem that he had served them for wages.

## VIII. How Friar Berthold tested Liebhard's patience.

also a very devout man, once tried the patience of Friar Liebhard, when the latter was being rebuked by his superiors for some carelessness. As if in a burst of anger he addressed Liebhard: "I am afraid that, when our strength fails us because of hard work or old age, the friars will not keep us or feed us anymore, but will put us out without mercy and have us taken in at the hospital dedicated to the honor of the Blessed Virgin." When Liebhard heard this he replied: "If that should happen, we shall the much better off, for while we are now with the Blessed Francis, we shall then be with the Blessed Virgin. In this way we shall suffer no less of grace but rather, because the Mother of God is so high in dignity, we shall find greater gain through her intercession." To such an extent had Liebhard thrown all his cares upon the Lord that he firmly placed all his hope and anxiety in God alone.

## IX. How he held himseff unworthy to be received into the Order and the company of the friars.

52. Friar Corwyth, the Custos, knew of Liebhard's holy life and praiseworthy conduct; and therefore he gladly received him into the Order because of his virtuous life, and with the consent of the friars he sent him after his reception to Wittenberg.<sup>12</sup> After entering the Order, Liebhard began to consider and to think how God had called him to this state through the merits of Saint Francis, to the end that he might serve Him more worthily and laudably. Because of this he soon began to make such progress that all came to realize that his former virtues bloomed forth anew and that by his marvelous devotion, his charity, patience, and humility, Friar Liebhard was reaching the very apex of perfection. And as the custodies of Magdeburg and Halberstadt were at that time but one custody under the Custos of Braunschweig, the latter came to Wittenberg, and observing the actions of Friar Liebhard, he was greatly pleased at his outstanding piety. And when he had observed his transcendent rapture in contemplation and had seen how Friar Liebhard was preparing with utmost diligence and unspeakable devotion for the coming Feast of Easter, the Custos ordered certain friars to keep him under careful observation during the time of prayer until he should pass into ecstasy and become sweetly united to the Lord in blessed union. By doing this, these friars found this very dear friar rapt in fervent prayer, lifted up altogether in heavenly glory and so absorbed in wonderful contemplation that his spirit could not be detected in its earthly dwelling.

## XI. His death and burial.

53. But who can count the times when he passed into the heavenly Jordan "ascending through the desert leaning upon his Beloved; and finding his delights in the Spouse of his soul!" When he had led his life praiseworthy to its end, he died in Wittenberg and there shared his last resting place with his fellow friars.

## HOLY BROTHER ADOLPH

### I. His conversion.

54. In the year of the Lord 1223 the noble Lord Adolph, count of Holstein, Stormarn and Schaumburg, gained, with the help of God and by the aid of the citizens of Luebeck, a great victory on the battle field near Bornhovede.18 This ended the war he had been waging against the King of Denmark, the Duke of Schleswig, and other nobles. Soon, afterwards he celebrated the wedding of his daughter, whom he bestowed upon the Lord Abel, Duke of Schleswig. A few years later this Duke was crowned King of Denmark in the Metropolitan see of that kingdom. But after the marriage the Lord Archibishop Gerard, with many tears, carried out a formal separation between the Lord Count and his wife Heylewyg. Then led by the Holy Spirit the Lord Count took the habit of the Friars Minor in the city of Hamburg and in that Order he served the Lord very devoutly for twenty-four years in voluntary poverty.

II. How the Blessed Virgin appeared to Friar Adolph and foretold his death.

55. After he had entered the Order, Friar Adolph built a chapel in Kiel and embellished its windows with the pictures of those Saints whom he loved best. On one occasion before his death he went into the sanctuary to pray and, behold! the Mother of Jesus appeared in great glory accompanied by the Saints whose likenesses were on the windows. Standing before him, she said to him: "My son, why are you so reluctant to die? Why do you fear? Die in peace, for my Son, Whom you have served so faithfully in the habit of the Friars Minor, will reward you well for all you have done for Him." Lifting up his eyes, he could not gaze upon the Blessed Virgin because of her exceeding splendor. Then the circle of Saints departed with the glorious Mother and Friar Adolph remained in the consolation of the Lord. But he would never say a word about this vision until his last days, and then he made known to his confessor the whole account of what he had seen and heard.

Fr. Ignatius Brady, O.F.M. (Transl.)

12Corwyth, we gather from a remark a few lines below, was Custos of Braunschweig, which then included what later became the custodies of Magdeburg and Halberstadt. Liebhard therefore joined the Order before their separation, which certainly took place before 1260.

18 This date (1223) is manifestly wrong. Adolph John IV (Scouvenberg) did not win the victory at Luebeck until 1238 or 1239; the following year (1239 or 1240, according to different chroniclers) "he left his young wife and two small sons, John and Gerard, and all his wordly riches, to enter the Order of the Friars Minor. In this Order he became a priest, lived for many years in a praiseworthy manner and rested in the Lord in a blessed end" Chronicum Principum Saxoniae, in Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores, XXV, p. 474). Another and later account says he intended to become a lay-brother, but because of his learning was persuaded to become a priest; his First Mass was offered in the Friars' church at Hamburg, which he had built, (Anal. Fran. III, p. 235, n. 7; and L. Wadding, Annales Minorum, an. 1239, n. 14). This latter account adds that as a friar he humbly labored with his own hands in building the convent (and chapel, as our text shows,) at Kiel. Once, when on the quest of milk, he unexpectedly met the knights of his son; after a moment of sudden embarrassment he recollected himself and in humility poured the milk over his head and body. Adolph died in 1261. (See also the Chronicle of the twenty-four Generals, A.F., III, p. 240; L. Lemmens, Catalogus sanctorum fratrum minorum, p. 34ff.)

### **AMECAMECA**

Turning off to the right from the road to Puebla and heading toward Cuautla, we reach Amecameca, about forty miles from Mexico City. Here there is a small hill rising to the height of some five hundred feet, known as Sacro Monte from the shrine it harbors.

The history of this shrine goes back to the very beginnings of Mexico's colonization by the Spaniards. There were already five Franciscan Friars in the land when the famous thirteen Franciscans arrived in 1524. Their spiritual background derived from the reform movement of the great Cardinal Cisneros—responsible, among other things, for the Polyglot Bible—and more immediately from the severe reform of Juan of Guadalupe, in several respects similar to the later Capuchin reform. His followers made a practice of preaching an austere and simple Christianity to the neglected peasants and townsfolk of the western provinces of Spain, according to the terms of the Bull issued by Alexander VI in 1496 that they might "throughout the world among the faithful and the infidel, preach the world of God and the holy Gospel." Such was the preparation of these Franciscans of so remarkably strict an observance for the enormous missionary work in New Spain.

There, in general, they were to set the forms in matters of administration as well as in apostolic zeal for the other mendicant groups who shortly joined them in their work among the Mexican Indians. When the only roads were hardly more than footpaths, they penetrated to the most remote settlements over a vastly extended territory and succeeded, after some years, in erecting churches wherever they went, many of magnificent architecture and nearly all of them of excellent taste and charm. By their humble way of life and their sincere preaching, the friars won the Indians' respect and admiration; acceptance of the Christian faith soon followed. Their labors in behalf of education and their defense of the native population against enslavement and exploitation by the conquerors is an essential part of the story of the emergent pattern of colonial culture in Mexico. Not even the modern secularist who professes no interest in such things, attempts very much to discredit their tremendous achievement.

The leader of this first apostolic band of the sons of Saint Francis was Fray Martin de Valencia, who had taken the habit in the convent of Mayorga in the province of Santiago and was the second provincial of the custody of San Gabriel in Extremadura, founded in 1516, when the call came in 1522 to proceed to the New World. Later he was guardian convent of Tlalmanalco (today, together with its open chapel, of the New Morld in 1533 he retired there to end his

earthly life the following year, he was but a few miles distant from Amecameca. It was at Amecameca that he made an oratory in a hillside cave where he was accustomed to withdraw occasionally for periods of prayer and penance. From this cave he could look out upon the snow-covered peaks of Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl, and who knows what profound considerations may have filled his soul or what divine discourse took place as he contemplated the majestic scene and thought of the legends of the gods and giants of those mountains and of the Christian truths he had brought for the first time to so many multitudes. This cave remains, after four centuries, sacred to the memory of one of the truly luminous figures of Mexican history, whose enduring greatness lies in the fact that he cared nothing for himself or his future fame but only for the glory of the God who had made him.

However, the narrative of Amecameca does not stop at this point, for in the sacred cave is to be found a holy image well worthy of veneration. The story of how it got there is interesting. It seems that one day a mule team was passing by burdened with boxes containing various statues destined for churches in more distant places. After a short rest, the muleteers, when ready to resume their journey, discovered that one of the mules had disappeared. Searching with some difficulty the wooded region about, they finally found the animal in Fray Martin's cave. Though the drivers used all their resources to urge it forth, the mule refused to move. Thinking that perhaps this was due to the weight of the box that burdened it, they unfastened the box and set it on the ground. The mule was free to move, but now they found they could not lift the box from the ground. To see what might be the reason for this phenomenon, the men opened the crate and viewed within, as they expected, a carved figure of Christ representing him as he lay in the tomb. Reverently they removed the image and placed it upon their cloaks and mantles alongside its erstwhile coffin. But when they attempted to replace it in the crate in order to go on their way, they found to their astonishment that in no manner could they budge it. By this time the reason for the prodigy began to dawn upon them-the image of the dead Christ had selected this site as its final resting place.

From that day to this the statue has reposed in the cave already made holy by Fray Martin de Valencia, the object of veneration of the inhabitants of the neighborhood as well as of pilgrims from distant parts who go there to pay homage and present their requests. At the beginning of Lent the statue in its glass case is taken to the parish church of Amecameca—began by the Dominicans in 1547—and is returned to the Sacred Mount on Good Friday.

Those who are not accustomed to the representations of the dead

And be extinct!

How swiftly dust returns to dust:

How quickly carefree worlds can crumble, crash,

suppliants have returned home they may well be aware that something wist which are found in many of the churches of Mexico may come has happened to them, or to the persons for whom they have prayed, or Pon them with something of surprise, if not outright revulsion. The to the difficult circumstances which demanded solution. If this taxes crefaith in some other countries, especially to the north, is certainly less dence, go to Amecameca and put it to the test. gaphic, but many Mexicans would find it rather stultified and colorless. Such comparisons aside, however, there is no doubt that these images of our Lord in the tomb are quite vivid. And why not? After Christ died on the cross, his body was taken down, prepared for burial, and placed in the thub. Saint John, whose Gospel is most descriptive of what happened tells how Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate to let him take away the bod Ilesus and how there was brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes and how they took Jesus' body, then, and wrapped it in winding cloths with the spices and laid it in a new tomb in a nearby garden. These carved CONVERSION: MARGARET OF CORTONA fores closely follow the Gospel description. They usually have a white

One brigand's brutal blow was all! the shoulders on either side. The stillness of the lacerated body, the pall A hound howled. Then silence . . . of the bruised countenance, the closed eyes, testify that the work of redemption is finished, the sacrifice complete, that the Son of Man has Your lover lies alone, Margaret. become like unto other men in all thing save sin, even to death. The A dog's insistence drew you to this place. swathed body is, moreover, confirmation of the words: In the world you The Hound of Grace tugged at your skirts find only tribulation; but take courage, I have overcome the world Until you came upon his handsome face of it is this same body that will rise transfigured in glory. Those who Half-hid in mud and framed in blood. pas by with squeamish shudders and averted head may be turning away. from much more, spiritually, than they realize. Scream, woman! The problem here at Amecameca—but certainly not exclusively here. Sound the siren of your terror! is to see beyond the immediate appearance and to overlook a great deal, But do not be too prodigal with cries and tears. that naturally goes against the grain. For it must be said, and no doubt Rather, save them: ought to be said, that the approach to this shrine, up the cobbled way, Store them in the fragments of your shattered heart. that leads past the Stations of the Cross, is dirty and dilapidated, that Spill them later from the housetops of your penitence the buildings are in bad repair, and that the chapel itself is extremely 3wdry. These conditions, unfortunately, are in keeping with the general Like nard upon Cortona's feet. - Fr. Pierre Van Grott, O.F.M.Cap. of Amecameca which is typical of those Mexican towns, drab and

This is particularly regrettable in view of one more important aspect of Sacro Monte. The image of the dead Christ is really remarkable and possessed of extraordinary qualities. The saying is that whoever PProaches it with humility-willing to overlook certain distasteful exthior elements—and with the proper dispositions present their petitions, find that they have not gone there in vain. Not that they will experience a miracle on the spot-there is no need for that. But when such

distressful, which modern progress has not yet reached.

sheet or a scarlet or purple velvet coverlet drawn up over the entire body.

kaving only the head exposed. Under the chin there passes a broad linear

and around the wounded head is another—for the crown of thorne

has been removed—and the hair, washed and brushed, falls gracefully to

Gordon Bodenwein

#### THE EXHORTATION TO MEEKNESS

Like every founder of a religious order, congregation or society, Saint Francis became obsessed with the desire to imitate the example of Christ's life and so to graft the gospel to his daily conduct as to lose his identity in his Divine Master. That, as a consequence of loving God and faithfully keeping His word, Christ would make His abode with him and reveal Himself to him, his soul quivered with a consuming, yet humble, ambition to fulfill the requirements for the great visitation. Appreciative of his abysmal unworthiness of divine recognition: "Who are you, O God, most dear, and who am I, your worthless little worm of a servant;" nevertheless, he was enraptured by the embryonic possibility. "Please, O Lord, let the fiery, honeyed force of your love lap up my spirit from everything there is under heaven so that I may die for love of love for you." (Op. 125) During the course of his conversion, the qualities of Christ gradually narrowed into focus and His virtues took the form of a particular model to be imitated and embodied in him. That Christ had done all things well was a gospel fact, but particularly how and why He did so was to be resolved by a personal diagnosis of the Master and by a resultant emphasis upon special virtues which, to Francis at least, best mapped the way that followed his Lord. Thus Francis could say. when he was striving to formulate a rule of life that would render his followers Christ-like, "I wish you not to speak to me of any other rule, not of Benedict, nor of Augustine, nor of Bernard." Not that one contradicted the other, nor that one's focus of Christ rendered all others' blurred; but rather that inasmuch as each one embraced Christ entirely with the motive of loving Him completely, each also was drawn to one or more particular virtue, which, for him, demanded special attention and necessitated acquisition thereof if he were to become Christ-like.

It is in this light that certain virtues may be called "Franciscan," for they are the ones which Francis believed to have been predominant throughout the diverse circumstances of Christ's life. Indeed, Christ had done all things well, but for Francis there had always been evidence of meekness, peacefulness, humility, and gentleness. Of such virtues was the beginning of Christ's life: the stable, a manger, the unprivileged shepherds, poverty, humble and self-effacing Mary and Joseph. Of such virtues was the end of that life: a cross, nakedness, a borrowed tomb. And throughout the three public years there was the repeated evidence of Christ's own words: I am meek and humble of heart (Matt. 11:29). As Francis paged the gospels, ploughed and harrowed their lines to cultivate a rich crop of truth and virtue, the meekness and humility of Christ held his eye, like the silver ribbon of the moon's reflected light

across the dark, mysterious ocean. So it was that he wrote in his rule: "I counsel, admonish and exhort my friars in the Lord Jesus Christ, that when they go about in the world, they should not quarrel, argue, nor judge others; but they should be meek, peaceful, modest, gentle, and humble" (Rule III). It was elementary logic that he should so exhort his followers, for Christ had said of Himself that He was meek and humble of heart. So, then, must Francis be; so, then, must be his followers. Nor was this to be regarded as a lesser virtue-optional, so to speak; for Francis exhorted, urged, that this virtue of meekness be especially evidenced in the lives of his disciples, who were at all times to be harbingers of peace. "Peace be to this house." Unless the kindly warmth of meekness permeated their entire being, they would not truly be called Fratres Minores nor would they be said to be "following the teaching and footsteps of Our Lord Jesus Christ," (Op. 25), as Francis counselled, admonished, and exhorted. They would be lacking in one of the essential ingredients of Christ-likeness, according to the Franciscan ideal.

The particular beauty and magnetic attraction of the Franciscan way of life spring from what may be termed, "the silent virtues;" and it is in this perspective that the axiom, "silence is golden," has its truest and most profound meaning. It is evidenced particularly in meekness, which holds anger in check and locks the tongue so that no quarrel or vituperation may escape to disrupt the peace or sear the heart of one's fellow man. This quiet virtue steers attention to humanity, specializing in the recognition, appreciation and understanding of its qualities, charactoristics, ideals, foibles, day-to-day difficulties, likes and dislikes expressed or patently implied in one's daily word or conduct. Seemingly unoccupied, the disciple is engrossed in mental observations to increase ways and means to foster concord, to avoid even the conception of a trial or pang within his neighbor. Meekness is an examining physician of human frailty, seeking how to lessen it; it is a probing spectator of the human race, seeking how to help it. In the realm of world affairs it is the discerning diplomat at the conference table; it is the pleasing personality that disperses discomfort and uneasiness, and makes one feel in place and wanted; it is the palliatory business director who magically causes accounts to multiply. "And they indeed that they may receive a corruptible crown; but we an uncorruptible one. (1 Cor. 1X, 25).

By means of his habitual, unnoticed observation of his co-existants, the disciple increasingly realizes that the thoughtless word or deed can be a thrust of a dull, jagged knife; that frequently what is summarized as an unintended hurt or sorrow is in reality a lack of consideration, concern, and consciousness of another's over-all make-up; that the over-

worked rejoinder, "I'm sorry," or, "I didn't mean it," has as its foundation an uncultivated sensibility for our fellow man's peacefulness. Meekness has no hand in fashioning man-made crosses, for it is concerned not with self, but with others; it prefers to listen than to talk, to be the audience rather than the performer who gains the plaudits; it is happy to applaud, to console, to help even, if necessary, without recognition, to waive what is due, and to estimate values in relation to eternity. It allows for considered opposition to a viewpoint expressed or of an action performed, but never to the exclusion of reined emotions, so that a clear evaluation of benefit or futility prevails at all times. Futility of conversation is quickly recognized, and then the priceless wisdom of mortification stems the possibility of erupting passions. Meekness possesses as one of its many facets the pervading awareness of the existance in man of human defects and of countless personal idiosyncracies, which, in their over-all insignificance, nevertheless have the potency to ignite in another the spark of impatience, temper, uncharitableness, spreading discord, hurt, and inner turmoil. The disciple is perpetually on guard against the sudden display of another's imperfections and weakness, and, therefore, is seldom if ever surprised and propelled into exhibitions of equal frailty. Patience, understanding, and a prevailing spirit of forgiveness are his ever accessible tools, in whose use he labors unceasingly for mastery. "Blessed is the person," said Francis, "that puts up with the fraility of his neighbor to the extent he would like his neighbor to put up with him if he were in a similar plight."

In order to render this virtue more keen and sensitive in practice, the disciple is reined by moderation. He resists talking too much or without cause, for too often the wagging tongue renders inaudible the sage whisperings of common sense, balance, altruism and tact. He thinks well before speaking, and, like the diplomat, he thinks twice and then says nothing, for the unweighed word, once expressed, betimes falls heavily upon another's heart. He laughs genuinely but not without sobriety. Like words, unbridled laughter can rankle, disturb, annoy, bore, and even wound. He is conscious of the fact that man does not convey or transmit his inner thoughts, emotions, and reactions by word alone, but also by his tone, his gestures, his facial expressions. These, too, must be studied by the disciple and controlled, for, while the tongue is silent, the eye may trumpet anger, impatience, and dislike as loudly as a verbal explosion. He realizes, too, that silence is not always wise nor most fruitful, but that at times it may prompt discomfort, embarrassment, and even resentment within his neighbor; and so there will be situations which will elicit from him a few well tempered words in order to ease a

tense or uncomfortable situation, and set everything in proper balance and value.

Wisely, then, did Francis urge his followers to be meek; it is Christlikeness as described by Christ Himself; it is the product of temperence, patience, fortitude, and charity; and it is proof positive that virtue and sanctity can be attained only by a vivid and studied awareness of the countless opportunities provided by daily living wherein the practice of virtue is repeatedly paged. Affability, which is the manifestation of meekness, is an essential quality to the maintenance of, or introduction to, peace, and of all the positive and substantial qualities in man, affability is the one most difficult to acquire, because the bloodstream of meekness flows from all other virtues. "Meekness," wrote Saint Jerome in his Commentary on Galatians, 5:20, " is a mild virtue; it is kindly, serene, gentle in speech, gracious in manner; it is a delicate blending of all the virtues." And the saint goes on to pinpoint the virtues even more precisely; "Kindness is akin to it, for, like meekness, it seeks to please; still it differs from the latter in that it is not as winsome and seems more rigid, for though equally prompt to accomplish good and render service, it lacks that charm, that gentleness that wins all hearts."

As the adult is humored and enchanted by the innocence of a child, so the countless failings of mankind are overcome by the winning virtue of meekness. For good reason, then, all have been directed by Christ to become as little children, for of such is the kingdom of heaven. In his insistence on meekness there was a keen realization in Francis of the tragic possibility and flagrant contradiction of a man of prayer and dedication, self-centered, of volatile temper, bombastic, inconsiderate, harsh, uncouth: a man of chapel spirituality, blind to its fulfillment in a world riddled with trial and weaknesses, wherein the kind hand of virtue is meant to paint beauty where frailty detracts from the nobility of man, "For my part," said Francis, "I want just this privilage from the lord, never to have any other privilage from anybody than to do reverence to everybody and by obedience to the holy Rule to convert everybody by example more than by word" (MP 50).

To Francis, spirituality was not so much something to own as something to give; something by which others were to be helped, lifted up, assuaged, and restored to peace. It was a tender bloom to be watered and nurtured privately, but to be displayed publicly so that its sweet scent might fill the air. Meekness, in its delicate blending of all the virtues, looked out on a vista af limitless spiritual horizons: "I became all things to all men that I might save all." (I Cor. 9:22). In his daily study of his Master, Francis must have noted what Isaias prophesied of the Messiah: "The bruised reed he shall not break, and the smoking flax he

shall not quench" (Is. 13:3). This was how the Savior was to be recognized. Francis observed his Lord with His apostles: how He bore with their faults, their ignorance, even their rudeness; how He was patient when impatience seemed justified to hurry the slow process of their education. He heard his Lord preach meekness unceasingly. His apostles must be simple as doves, meek as lambs, and they must forgive seventy times seven times. To walk in the footsteps of Christ meant, for Francis, to be meek, for then would the soul be emptied of self and filled with Almighty God.

Fr. Celestine Regnier, O.F.M. Conv.

THE CHRISTOLOGICAL CONTENT OF THE SERMONES OF SAINT ANTHONY. Juniper M. Cummings, O. F.M. Conv. Padua: 1953. Distributed in the U.S.A. by Bede's Book-Nook, Chaska, Minnesota. Pp. X-8-143. Paper. \$2.00

This study is an excellent presentation of the Christology of Saint Anthony. based on the Sermones, the only writings believed to be authentically his. The Evangelical Doctor built his sermons upon the liturgy, arranging them around the Gospel, Epistle, second nocturn lessons of the breviary, and the Introit. In this, of course, Saint Anthony was following the practice of his own day; but his use of the liturgy as a means of imparting doctrine is wholly in harmony with our modern liturgical movements, and also gives evidence of the traditional Franciscan reverence for, and influence upon, the liturgy of the Roman Church.

Father Cummings' study shows that Saint Anthony's Christological doctrine was unusually rich and quite traditional. Here we can find a source for such devotions as to the Holy Face, the Holy Name, the Holy Eucharist, the Sacred Heart, and the Precious Blood. Most important, perhaps, for the average reader, is the Anthonian doctrine on the spiritual life. Truly and thoroughly Christocentric, Saint Anthony offers a spiritual-

ity that is based neither on the training of the will nor on the training of the mind in the grasp of abstract thought, but rather on a total following of Christ Who is the Way, a seeking of Christ Who is the Truth, and a living in Christ Who is the Life. It is interesting to note, in passing, that Saint Anthony stresses several aspects of Christology that other Doctors treat rather sketchily: for example, the importance of the devil in soteriology, and Christs role in the beatatude of angels and men.

On the whole, Fr. Cummings has produced a highly useful study of the Christology of Saint Anthony, and has presented his marterial is a manner suitable to the untrained reader as well as to the theologian. Those who are concerned about footnotes, however, will no doubt be annoyed at the extremely abbreviated method of reference—the only flaw in an otherwise thoroughly competent treatment of deeply interesting subject.

SMF

ANSELM WEBER, O.F.M., MISSION-ARY TO THE NAVAHO. Robert Wilken, O.F.M. Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1955. Pp. x-255. \$4.50.

Here is a factual and realistic picture of the Franciscan endeavor among the Indians and the Anglos of the Southwest from 1898 to 1921. The author has made no attempt to dramatize or glamorize the labors of the first three friars who laid the foundations of the Navaho mission, nor does he attempt to conceal or palliate the stupidity and narrowness and prejudice of those who created heartbreaking difficulties for the struggling missionaries. The weaknesses of the missionaries themselves are frankly stated, and their mistakes as well as their triumphs are all recorded. The complete picture is hardly a testimonial to human wisdom and charity, but rather a striking testimonial to the power of God working derough defective human instruments.

The stary is well told in vigorous narrative style, and comfortably supplied with sources and documents. It is a story of struggle and heartbreak, of beauty and tragedy; but above all, it is a story of authentic American mission life, and because of this, it is genuinely and deeply inspiring.

SMF

LIVING THE LITTLE OFFICE. Sister Marianna Gildea, R.S.M. Dallas, Pennsylvania: College Misericordia, 1955. Pp. xv-167.

Sister Marianna has attempted here to provide a running commentary or meditation on the Psalms of the Little Office. The purpose is not to give the reader anything like a learned discussion of the Psalms nor of the construction of the Office, but rather to offer helpful thoughts for those who may find the Psalms difficult to understand.

SMF

#### LYRE

Thy hand upon the lyre of spring Has plucked so lightly at the air That we are wakened unaware Of light and music quickening.

Robert Lax

## OUR FRANCISCAN VOCATION U

I

The set and life of the Friars Minor is this, namely, to observe the holy Gospel cour Lord Jesus Christ, by living in obedience, without property, and in setity. (II Rule)

#### REFLECTION

In the few words our holy Father Saint Francis summarizes the way of life chose for himself and for those who would follow him. It is to live a see according to the holy Gospel of Christ. Originally, Francis did no even want to write out a set rule of life for his followers. He

simply wanted them to put into practice what our Lord teaches in the Gospel. As for the three great counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience, these were to be whole-heartedly accepted by means of the usual dedication of oneself to God in public vows.

Mother Church tells us Franciscans today that under pain of sin we are obliged to observe these vows and also the items of our Rule which she has declared to be of strict obligation. But is it the mind of the Church that we should forget the ideal of Saint Francis? No, as Franciscans we should be ardent lovers of Christ. We should strive to the best of our ability to observe the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Gospel is not just a book to be placed reverently on the shelf. The Gospel is not just a part of the Mass. The Gospel is not just some stories about Jesus. No, the Gospel is rather the very life of the Friars Minor.

#### II

I, little brother, (Francis) wish to follow the life and poverty of our most high Lord Jesus Christ and of his most holy Mother and to persevere in it until the end. And I beg you, and advise you, always to live in that most holy life and poverty. And guard yourselves carefully, lest in any way you ever depart from it through the teaching or advice of anyone. (Letter to Saint Clare)

#### REFLECTION

It is not enough for us Franciscans to fall in love with the Gospel ideal of Saint Francis and wish to follow the life and poverty of our most high Lord Jesus Christ. We must also be able and willing to persevere in it until the end. And that is easier said than done. For human nature tends to grow discouraged, lazy, and lax. That is why Saint Francis says, "Guard yourselves carefully." Check yourself to see whether you have given in to this natural tendency to slacken off in effort to follow the Gospel life of Francis. Another reason why perseverance in our ideals is so difficult is because the teaching or advice of the world and false brethren tend to persuade us to depart from the Franciscan ideal. We must not listen to them but to the pleading voice of our Father: "I beg you, and advise you..."

Saint Clare, to whom Saint Francis first addressed these words, stubbornly refused to give up her ideal as she had learned it from him. Are we equally determined always to live in that most holy life?

#### III

Let all the brothers strive to follow the humility and poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ. And let them remember that we ought to have nothing else in the whole world, except, as the Apostle says: "Having food and wherewith to be covered, with these we are content" (I Tim. 6:8). (I Rule)

#### REFLECTION

To join Saint Francis in the following of Christ means to leave behind the world and all its trappings and allurements. If we wish like Francis to attach ourselves to the Savior, then we must detach ourselves from the creature comforts in which human nature delights. When we chose Christ as our love by entering a religious order, we shook off the world. But this same world continues to woo us with its charms. Therefore we must really strive, that is, put real effort in our work of following the humility and poverty . . . of Christ.

Meditations on death and judgment will help us to realize that there is no eternal value in the riches and pleasures of this life. Then nothing will remain except the amount of grace and merit we have treasured up for ourselves in heaven. When Christ judges us we will see how truly nothing else in the whole world matters except our love and service of him

Do we remember these things? Do we really strive to follow the humility and poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ by giving up all unnecessary things? Do we use materials sparingly in the spirit of poverty? Or do we acquire and hoard up things superfluous? Do we always want the newest and finest in clothing and materials? Do we desire what we cannot have? Is it really true that "having food and wherewith to be covered, with these we are content?"

#### IV

All of us brothers should keep a very careful watch over ourselves, lest under the guise of some reward, or work, or assistance, we dissipate or separate our mind and heart from the Lord. (I Rule, 22)

#### REFLECTION

All religious must keep a very careful watch against the wiles of the devil, who seeks to separate our mind and our heart from the Lord. When Satan can no longer lure us away from God with worldly temptations, with human vainglory, bodily pleasures, and such like, he then tries other methods.

Under the guise of some reward, or work or assistance, that is, under the appearance of something good, he proposes some scheme to us. The reward may be some advantage for ourselves or our community. The work may be some worthwhile poject. The aid may be some help to our neighbor. Yet the thing propsed, or the manner in which it is carried out, is contrary to obedience the true religious spirit. This seemingly good object or activity sooloccupies all our attention; it becomes uppermost in our desires. It intreres with fraternal charity, regular observance, and the spirit of recilection. Thus it causes us to dissipate or separate our mind and heart from the Lord. On the contrary, if we stay with what obedience prescribs and our Rule of life permits, then we shall be of one mind and heart with Christ.

#### V

I warn and exhort in the Lon Jesus Christ that the brothers beware of all pride, vainglory, envy, avoice, the care and worry of this world, of detraction and complaining. II Rule, 10)

#### RELECTION

Saint Francis wishes to warn win the Lord Jesus Christ, that is, to remind us that someday Christ willcome to judge us, as the Gospel for the First Sunday of Advent tells us. Then we will have to account for the pride...envy...detraction, and other vices in which we may have indulged.

Our seraphic Father also exhorts... in the Lord Jesus Christ, that is, he appeals to our love for Jesus. He asks that we avoid all the above-mentioned sins and faults because they are displeasing to our Savior.

The sins enumerated here by our holy Father Francis are not the gross, external crimes such as murder robbery, and adultery. Rather they are the more hidden, insidious sins of the soul, of the heart, of the lips. Only too well do we know that these are often found among us religious — at least to some degree. Because they are not so external and visible to the eye, they all the more easily creep through the cracks of the cloister and into our lives. Saint Francis therefore admonishes us to keep our conscience on the watch and beware of these sins.

### ÝΙ

Let them note that this is what they must desire above all things to possess the spirit of the Lord and his holy activity, always to pray to him with a pure heart, in persecution and sickness to retain humility and patience, and to love those who afflict, reproach, and contradict us. (II Rule, 10)

#### REFLECTION

We have already heard Saint Francis counseling us to accept the Gospel with its poverty, chastity, and obedience. He further urged us to detach

our hearts from the things of the world. Then he warned us of sins of the heart.

Now in the above passage the Poverello becomes very positive. He wants us to EMPTY our heart of the world and of sin, in order that we may FILL it with God, with the indwelling presence by grace of the most holy Trinity. He desires us to possess the spirit of the Lord, to be temples of the Holy Spirit. "You however are not carnal but spiritual, if indeed the spirit of God dwells in you" (Rom. 8:9). "He abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us" (I Jn. 3:24).

Let us keep ourselves in the state of grace, that we may not lose this precious treasure of God dwelling in our heart. Let us be more conscious of this "sweet Guest of the soul", not forgetting or ignoring him. Attentively let us listen to his voice, Generously let us cooperate with his inspirations. Thus the Spirit of the Lord will live in us by his holy activity, helping us to practice Christian humility and patience.

#### VII

Let us guard ourselves against the wisdom of this world and the prudence of the flesh for the spirit of the flesh greatly desires and strives for the posession of words, but very little for the work; it does not seek religion and interior sanctity of spirit, but wishes and desires a religion and sanctity appearing outwardly to men. And these are the ones of whom the Lord says "Amen, I say to you, they have had their reward" (Matt. 6:2). (I Rule, 17)

### REFLECTION

Formalism consists in performing external ceremonies without the proper interior spirit. Hypocrisy is an attempt to appear better than we really are. Both are here condemned by Saint Francis. He wants in his followers sincerity and true inner spirit.

But the wisdom of this world goes all out for hypocrisy, sham, artificiality, and formalities. The wrapper is more important than the contents; the label counts more than the product. Our fruit is often artificially colored to make it look riper and sweeter than it really is. A man's name is more important than his character. The world also desires... words. Millions are spent freely on press and advertising; work, however, is shortened and avoided wherever possible.

Is our life mainly a religion and sanctity appearing outwardly to men? Fingering a rosary, paging through pious books, quoting lives of the Saints or Scripture: these things do not always spell holiness. Interior sanctity of spirit is our goal.

Martin Wolter, O.F.M.

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