



Old Catholic Church of the Americas

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What Does It Mean to be a Franciscan in Today's World? Part I: Franciscan Life: An Essay

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"The rule and life of the friars minor is this: to live the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, in chastity, without property, and in obedience."

The Rule of St. Francis

It has sometimes been said that if you meet a Jesuit, you already have some idea of what the next Jesuit you meet will be like; but if you meet a friar, you can expect the next one you meet to be totally different. Leaving aside the question of whether this is true for the Jesuits, it is certainly the case for the friars.

In keeping with this, every friar would probably answer the above question somewhat differently. What follows are some brief reflections on what it means to me to be a Franciscan. Though the next friar will probably tell you something different, there are some common understandings that I believe we all share.

First and foremost, to be a Franciscan means to attempt to **live the gospel** (see the quote from the Rule above). Francis himself probably rolled over in his grave when the order first started being called "the Franciscans." His own title for the community was the "Order of Friars Minor," which is a literal translation of the Latin *fratres minores* -- lesser brothers. Francis recognized Jesus as a poor man who lived in solidarity with the poor, disadvantaged, and marginalized. He wanted to imitate the life of

Jesus as closely as possible, to live as a brother to all people and indeed to all of creation, as expressed in his magnificent hymn the "Canticle of Brother Sun."

The friars take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. These formidable-sounding promises are actually meant to be liberating, not restrictive--although they certainly involve living within certain boundaries! Francis thought that poverty meant living literally "without property." Many friars through the ages have indeed lived poor lives in this sense; and technically, none of us "owns" the things he has -- they all belong to the community. But I think it is fair to say that most friars (myself included) have not lived poverty in anywhere near the way that Francis lived it. **For me, poverty is best expressed in trying to live modestly, in not getting attached to or obsessed with material possessions, and most importantly, in attempting to live a life of generous service to others, putting their needs before mine.**

Poverty is the vow that always worries me the most when I think of my credibility as a friar. Ever since I was a child, I have been fascinated by technology, especially electronics. Becoming a friar did not cure me of this interest, and to this day I have quite an impressive arsenal of audio and video equipment. (The friars who trained me always tolerated this . . . I sometimes wonder if they'd have done me a favor by mak-

ing me get rid of my nice stereo!) The computer age has only increased my technophilia. I am sure that people who see me with all this electronic equipment sometimes say, "This is poverty?" And they have a point.

On the other hand, music and movies have brought a lot of enjoyment into my life, and my interest in the media has helped me to connect with a lot of people, especially my students and the people to whom I preach. In the friary, I have become the unofficial "technological guru," to whom the friars come with their questions about computers, TVs, VCRs, and stereo systems. I ask myself if living in a bare room or depriving myself of these things will really make me a better friar or a better person, and I think the answer is "no." At the same time, I always feel a little uncomfortable with having all these electronic devices. It's probably the ghost of Francis haunting me!

As I said, the most important aspect of poverty for me is its connection to service, particularly service with the poor and marginalized. If there is such a thing as a poverty of time, I have tried to live it, in the sense of making myself available to others and giving up a lot of my privacy. This has been an incredible experience that has revitalized my life as a friar. I have come to believe that I need to stay connected in some concrete way with God's "little ones" if I am to live an authentic Franciscan life. (Continued on Page 2)



Soul of Christ, wounds, hide me
sanctify me, Permit me not
Body of Christ, to be separated
save me, from Thee,
Blood of Christ, from the malign-
inebriate me, ant enemy,
Water from the defend me,
side of Christ, In the hour of my
wash me, death call me,
Passion of Christ, And bid me
strengthen me, come to Thee
O good Jesus, That with the saints
hear me! I may praise Thee
Within Thy sacred forever and ever

AMEN

Cont'd from Page 1:

Chastity is perhaps the most formidable vow to talk about these days, given the recent sexual abuse scandals in the Roman Catholic church.

As a celibate, I have slowly learned to nurture other avenues to intimacy, such as friendship. The friars have always had a reputation of being close to the people, and I have found that my ministry has led me into many wonderful relationships with people who love me, support me, and help me to grow - including the friars themselves, but extending out to every group of people with whom I have ever worked.

I have come to believe that what faithful celibates have to offer the world, especially to American society, is a reminder that sexual intimacy is not the most important kind of intimacy. Our society is so obsessed with genital sexuality that it can charitably be described as oversexed. We've gotten to the point where for many people, sexual activity has become largely divorced from any kind of commitment. People often get to know each other in bed before they even know anything about each other as persons. I find this sad, because it opens the door to people treating one another as objects for their own pleasure. The entertainment industry vigorously promotes this warped approach to sexuality and presents it as normal, implicitly ridiculing those who think that human sexuality is a sacred gift and who believe that ex-

ploiting others sexually is a violation of their God-given dignity.

It would be easy for people to look at this aspect of the Franciscan way of life and find it "more curious than significant," to quote a statement that was once made to a friar. However, a celibate person who is engaged in healthy relationships can provide a powerful and desperately-needed witness to our culture. **Celibacy is not a vow to love less -- it is a vow to love just as much as anyone else, but not to focus that love on an exclusive or physical relationship.** I hope that as a friar I have been able to show love to people in a way that has been uplifting, supportive and healing, especially to people who have been deeply hurt by others, or who have no one to love them.

In short, celibate chastity is about generously sharing love with the people with whom I live and work, and promoting the idea that the deepest kind of intimacy involves reverencing and respecting others as whole persons, not just exchanging bodily fluids.

Finally, we come to **obedience**. There was a time when obedience was defined in a very narrow way. Becoming a friar meant that you gave up your own will, and that you regarded the directives of the community's leaders as the will of God.

I have come to believe that the vow of obedience does not, and should not, mean blind obedience. Even the most

traditional understanding of obedience allowed friars to assert themselves if there was a matter of conscience.

The word obedience comes from a Latin word that means "to listen." All Christians are called to listen to God's word and to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Obedient listening is not just physical hearing; it is paying heed to God's call, pondering its meaning, and being willing to act on it. Unconditional obedience is owed to God alone, but we also need to listen to each other. In the Catholic Church, we believe that we should listen to our church leaders, but also to the prophetic voices that arise from the faithful. Scripture tells us again and again that God's voice does not only come to us through those who hold formal positions of office.

The Franciscan vow of obedience is about giving public witness to the importance of listening and responding to God's call, in whatever form and from whatever source it may come to us.

This can be quite counter-cultural in a society that tends to absolutize the will of the individual and reject any kind of external authority. To put it more simply, the vow of obedience expresses our Christian conviction that "it's not about us." Being a follower of Jesus means dying to ourselves and living for God.

Fr Dennis Tamburell, OFM
Edited by
Fr Anthony Mikusak, TOR

I Go With The Flow, At Last—by Sister Ann Roe, OSB

Summer is here again, in all its fiery glory. I drive home from work and know how glass feels being made. The car feels like a blast furnace. I try to steer using my fingertips, then the heels of my hands, the steering wheel is so hot. I don't think Hell is a pit of fire...it's sitting in a hot car, waiting in traffic for road work that never ends, the air thick with the smell of asphalt forever and ever.

What an extraordinary time this has been. Since my Confirmation, my life has changed so much. Like a stream in the springtime, flowing faster and faster, sweeping and swirling bits of debris, charging over rocks, finding again the

direction it has always known, now gladly dancing and tumbling to its final destination.

Life is not just a series of random events. Everything that I have experienced, good, bad, scary, beautiful, everything, has led me here. To God. To a life dedicated to Him, serving Him by caring for His little ones. He planned it all, and now hindsight shows how each piece of the puzzle fit together.

The timing is perfect. I am now at an age where one chooses to retire from life, letting it dwindle to watching TV and having coffee with a smaller and smaller group of friends...or one choos-

es to open up, to let go, to take a leap of faith and make these years the best.

I remember my Grandma Korzep and her devotion to the Virgin Mary. She was a wonderful storyteller, with a brilliant imagination, and she taught me prayers, Bible stories and songs to the "beautiful Lady dressed in blue." She gave me a statue of Mary that lit up in the dark, with a music box on the bottom that chimed Ave Maria. Many nights in strange new places, I could see Mary from my bed and not be afraid.

I wonder what my grandmother would think. I am going to be a nun.

Stop Whatever It Is You Are Doing—by The Very Rev Gus H. Thompson

The theme of the readings for the 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time about our willingness to stop what ever it is we are doing and to make a conscious and active decision to be a follower of Jesus. They are about making the decision to follow Christ, and to do so, without thinking about the cost or consequences of that decision. It is all about making radical decisions based upon faith in order to better commit our self to following Jesus. We are call to stop looking back or holding on to our former ways but to start looking forward and to step out in faith as we answer the call of Christ in our life.

Being a follower of Jesus is not something that we can do in our spare time or just when it is convenient. Being a follower of Jesus means being willing to move in a new and radically different ways of thinking, acting and believing. Being a follower of Jesus requires an active and ongoing commitment to listen to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Being a follower of Jesus begins when we abandon our old ways and actively walk away from those things that bind us to the past. Following Jesus begins when we become actively engage in the present and embrace the unknowns of the future. We truly begin to follow Christ when we become willing to go anywhere and do anything he would lead us to.

I, like most humans, like consistency and predictability. I don't enjoy the thought of not being in control of my life and to some extend I even want to be able to control the lives of those around me. As Christians we are not called to be the one in control but rather to surrender control and to become followers of Christ, as we are lead by the Holy Spirit.

Early believers where called followers of "THE WAY" because they took seriously the called to surrender control of their lives to Christ on a ongoing and daily basis. They abandoned their prejudices, and understanding of how they thought things were supposed to be and willing surrendered themselves to the leadership of Christ through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. They embarrassed the unexpected and the unknown and trusted totally upon the leading of the Holy Spirit. History teaches us that it was this abandonment of self and surrender to the will of Christ that was the single biggest witness of the power of the Gospel in the Roman world.

In the Luke 9:51-62 Jesus is very clear about what is required of us to follow him. If we are to follow him, if we are to be followers of "The Way", if we are to become actively engaged in the work of building the Kingdom of God here in this place and in this community, we have to leave the past behind us. We have to set our faces forward and firmly fix our eyes on the labors set before us. We are being called to become active participants in bringing about the Kingdom right here, right now, in this place. What is in the past must remain in the past because we are being called into a new future that is the Kingdom of God.

As Catholics is important that we remember that the Catholic Faith is not about looking to the past it is about being in the present and striving towards the future. This fact is no better illustrated in the single most significant act of worship in our church, the Eucharist. The Eucharist is not about looking to the past. It is extremely important that we understand that the Eucharist is not an act of remembrance. It is instead an act of anamnesis. The Eucharist is an act in the present. It is a proclamation, not about the past but of the future that is yet to come. There is no looking back in Eucharist worship but rather a call to embrace the present and to move forward boldly into the future. It is a call to proclaim the faith of Christ to a lost and dying world.

In the Eucharist, Christ becomes real and present to us and to the world right now, in this time and in this place. In the Mystery of Faith we proclaim to the world the future reality that Christ will come again. This is our message. Christ has died, Christ has risen, CHRIST WILL COME AGAIN.

Each Sunday, we, the church, the incarnation of Christ here on Earth, come to celebrate the Eucharist and to proclaim to the world through worship and action the message of the Gospel.

Each Sunday, must be seen as an opportunity to refocus our efforts of life and faith towards the future and to the call of Christ to stop living in and looking to the past.

Each Sunday we are called to stop looking backward and start looking forward. Let us each make a commitment to let go of the past and begin to seek out that future into which Christ would lead us.

Scripture teach us that there is no life in the

past only death. In I Kings 19:16, 19-21 and in Luke 9:51-62 (The Lessons for the 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time) the principle images are of death in both readings are to illustrate consequence of refusing to embrace the future and to remain living in the past.

Elisha killed the oxen he was using to plow the field, cooked them and fed them to the people. He had to kill that which bound him to the past. Elisha killed the oxen he used to plow the field thus ending his connection to his former life as a farmer and began his life of ministry by feeding the hungry around him. He let go of his past and went to follow Elijah.

Jesus in turn tells the new would be disciple to "let the dead bury the dead". The image is of leaving behind those things that bind us to our past loyalties. Jesus is so bold as to suggest that we should not even take the time needed to bury the dead but rather to leave them to the dead to bury and to follow him.

In both cases the image of death is clearly telling us to let go of that which is in the past and to set our sights on following Christ.

The questions we each must ask is how willing are we to follow Christ?

Are we going to continue to live in the past and to hold onto those things that would stop us from following him and be where there is only death or are we willing to leave behind any and all things that would hinder us from doing the ministry he has called us to do, to step out in faith, be among the living, and do the ministry he has set before us.

AMEN.

If you wish to have an article or news item included in OCCOA Newsletter, please contact Bishop Jim Morgan or Mr. Minott Gaillard. This is just an attempt to share with each other and give us a chance to "promote" each other when someone does something good that we'd like to copy—or tries something that doesn't work—and we won't try that—bottom line, we'd just like to open communication channels—share lessons learned—share our blessings. Minott is at wmg937@aol.com. Please submit articles no later than the 15th of the month.

I Believe—Help My Unbelief—by Rev. Mother Rachael Christian

“Be not afraid, I am with you,” I hear these words as I am battling within myself with major life decisions. For the most part, I didn’t know if I am coming or going. Then I hear, “Peace be with you, Child, I am here.” Again I think to myself, really Lord? You’re here, right now, than take these burdens from me. They weigh too much on me, and all I can think of is I want to run but to where I cannot decide and to what I cannot imagine. So, I waited. And I waited. And I am still waiting. Life is so like that for me, the “major” decisions that seemed so important in their time, but God says, “Be still and know that I am God”. And the waiting increasing, I stumble over my own decisions, again. I fight my own way through the storm to wake up soaking wet with tears on my pillow and my bed drenched in sweat. Then, like all things that He does, the Lord comes, holds out His Hand and says, “Be not afraid. I am with you. I will never leave you.” And humbled by His mercy, I give in.

“Who is that even the wind and seas obey Him?” How can it be that the Lord would come to me, that He would de-

sire a relationship with me? I used to wonder, does God really understand what He is doing, seeking me to do this thing? I mean, seriously, be a Nun, establish and run an Order, when most days I am stuck in mire of my own mess and stomped down by the desire to help others, I become like straw under their feet and I feel less alive than I did when I awoke to the wonders of morning and bright stars. Then I hear yet again “, the will of my Father is that you do what He says, and that you believe what He has said. And that work is this: believe in the One whom He has sent,” for He did not send Jesus to condemn the world but to save it. Okay, I can grasp that, but what I cannot always understand is, how is He saving me, when day after day, I fall, sin, get up, get stung, weep and stand up again, only to be knocked down by the tsunami wind of discord, hate and indifference in the world. Jesus wept. If He; who is God, has shed tears for us, then it is okay for me, I finally come to see, to learn to hold His Hand, to trust in His Mercy, to expect compassion in His correction and to know, Love. And that

is it in the core of it all: to Love God first with all I am, then to love my neighbor as myself. The rest is fluff and stuff and will blow away in the breeze

God’s amazing love has no whistle it blows, no loud booming ensemble, but a still calm voice that simple and easy as the dawn breaking the mountains, with the sun streaming light and heat to the hills and my heart, a little message; “before you were formed in your mother’s womb, I knew you and had a plan for your life. A plan to do good to you and not evil”. Don’t be like the world my Child, be in it but not of it, for there is nothing constant it contains, but my love is forever, and it is a love without limit as to race, creed, nationality, sex, orientation, child or adult. My love is for everyone for I made all people in our image and likeness, it is only human-kind who look on the outside. I look at the heart. And that is when I found peace to begin my day. Would that every day we all had a chance to begin our days this way, Amen.

The Fourth of July—by Rev Timothy Johnson II, OCOP

On July Fourth, we had a legitimate opportunity to ask ourselves, as Christians, how it is that we who have a personal understanding of the meaning of freedom from oppression can participate with people everywhere in a discussion of the question how our slaveries can be set behind us and all of us can be affirmed as members of the family. This is an enormous challenge for people everywhere and there are surely many ways to go about it. Knowing what we know about freedom from oppression in Jesus Christ, however, we may not/cannot use our freedom to tell others when and where they agree with us at the expense of having military or economic pressure placed upon them.

Members of the family don’t act that way over against one another, and those of us who have learned this, must call our government to account which it fails us in this regard. It is not that our government is expected to be Christian, per se, but that those who hold dear our own emancipation from sin to serve the greater needs of human kind, can call our government to an exercise of those standards which treat people everywhere as our equals.

July Fourth is an interesting day on which to gather to remember heritage and enjoy the company of family and friends. It is also an opportunity to remember that the understanding of oppression and free-

dom is rooted in a personal experience we have had with those concepts. Jesus is calling us to share the bold, yet gentle joy, the caring and serving love, which comes from such experience with all the members of the human family. May such insights lead to dialogues and debates, discussions and seminars, everywhere. May the meaning of oppression and freedom captivate us all. May terrorists and soldiers, housewives and businessmen, sit at table together. May war not be an option to resolve suspicions, anger, or aggression. May we discover together what it means to be freed to be free.

The Role of Deacon—by Deacon Darren Hayes

A Deacon has many roles. Servants present to serve and minister to those in the community also to serve God and just like our priests and bishops we need to be willing to take the Masses that we experience, the readings and the Gospel, the homily, even the Eucharist and go out into the community beyond our church doors and share are experiences and our believes with others. To plant a seed and let those that don't know of Christ, and those that have become lost from being mistreated or turned away, or those that fell away for other reasons that there is a place for them at the Lord's table and that they are very much still loved and welcomed. Of course in the end of the day this should be something that we all should be doing as part of the Body of Christ. Interesting enough this came as a big opportunity to share messages and get in touch with others through social media like twitter and Facebook and hopefully soon through instagram as well, to be able to share pictures of events and worship in a way that we have not been able to before.

Before coming to Glory to God I actually had a group of friends that I interacted with on a daily basis. I was unsure of how this group would take it when I told them that God had chosen me to become a part of ministry and wanted to use me to teach His Word. That I also had decided that I was going to be a part and follow what God was asking me to do. I was delighted by their positive attitude and the questions that they started asking some I knew the answers some I didn't know and either had to ask or in some cases give them resources to find out on their own. I will never forget how positive they all were and still are to this day though I don't get to talk to them as much. I do notice that they still have great things to say about what is shared through both media's and this includes sharing our newsletter to those that aren't on a mailing list or can't pick up a copy at one of the locations that have them available.

To be able to share and to be able to use these new methods can be an amazing and great thing. It can be a great feeling to know that in some cases God's Word is being presented to people who are in other states and in other countries. It is also great when someone who is right in front of you and is taking the personal time and step to ask the things that they wish to know or to be able to have a dialogue on things and to expand and learn more about the things they are trying to discover more about.

We as Deacons are here to help on behalf of our Priests and Bishops, to help complete things around the Parish from the simplest tasks on licking envelopes and stapling papers to performing weddings, baptisms, and Deacon Masses when the need arises. We are here to be able to perform the duties that we have been asked to perform, some of them simple others can be more tasking and sometimes even hard. Sometimes there are tasks that are even given to us that may make us have to face our fears. In a lot of ways we our scene as spiritual leaders and are spiritual leaders. People look to us to see the way we are behaving in situations, watch us to see how we react, what we do during the Mass and to see our level of enthusiasm towards the Mass and the things we teach and learn.

In many cases your emotions can be on so many different levels when you are ministering during a Mass regardless of what area you are ministering in. From singing, to ringing the bells, being an acolyte, ministering and serving the Blood of Christ. So many emotions can be felt during this time. Even after the prayers are said before hand, it can be a world full of feelings in every area. We need to make sure that we take the time to bring ourselves to a place that is focused on our task at hand, so that we can focus on the worship that is taking place and not allow the days worries to build as we are doing so. That way we can serve God

with joy and love, and give him thanks and praise, making him the full focus of the Mass. Something that is both wonderful and fulfilling. It is great to know that we are able to bring people to a place where they can be in a relationship and greater understanding of God. It is a great thing to be able to serve God and to be able to help in the planting of seeds to watch those seeds begin to grow and to see where it takes individuals in the Church and in fact much like other individuals who we are speaking and reaching out too. We also must continue to grow ourselves to learn and to develop through our journeys. It is definitely a beautiful thing.

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