2013

Sollemnitas Sancti Francisci

Litteræ Ministri et Definatorii Generalis OFM
Let Us Persevere in the True Faith

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

May the Lord give you peace!

On the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi we wish to share with you our life and wish you all the best in God, our Highest Good. We live in a time where change—often used as a category to describe our era—is now also visible in the Church and the Order of Friars Minor.

It is in this climate of innovation that the ecclesial community is experiencing the Year of Faith, while coinciding with the fiftieth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council. The community is further invited to renew itself through the New Evangelization and the witness offered by the lives of believers. As Pope Francis wrote in his Encyclical, Lumen Fidei, that “There is an urgent need, then, to see once again that faith is a light, for once the flame of faith dies out, all other lights begin to dim. The light of faith is unique, since it is capable of illuminating every aspect of human existence” (LF 4).

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(LF 4)

It is our desire to continue to shine the light of faith, following the example of Francis of Assisi, because it is the foundation of our life, the passion in the mission, and the lamp which “opens the way before us and accompanies our steps through time” (LF 8).

Believe truly and humbly

St. Francis, in the Earlier Rule, exhorted to remain in the true faith, stating that we must “persevere in the true faith and in doing penance, for otherwise no one can be saved” (Rnb 23.7). The experience of faith of the Saint of Assisi remains illuminating for our Franciscan vocation; it is an exemplary encouragement to make our own the unique way in which he lived the experience of the Most High God, Trinity and Unity, and the personal encounter with the poor, humble, and crucified Christ, while making the Gospel, the Rule and Life of the Friars Minor.

The same Earlier Rule, in Chapter XXIII, offers us a marvelous and profound profession of ecclesial faith in the form of thanksgiving and praise. Even through it, he invites us to persevere in the faith and believe truly and humbly. Such faith, which expresses itself in honoring and worshiping, is closely linked to the experience of desiring nothing else, wanting nothing else, and delighting in nothing else except our Creator, Redeemer, and Savior, the only true God … the true and supreme good.

For the Saint of Assisi such faith has its foundation both in God’s Word and in the Eucharist, that is, in relationship with these two types of presences of the Risen One. When Francis listened to the Scripture, he recognized it as being addressed to him personally. Like Origen, who said that the Gospel is the Body of Christ, so Francis had a sacramental perception of God’s
Word. For him the word is spoken in the present through the sign of fragile human words. For this reason, in his Letter to the Order, he reminds us of respect and reverence for the Lord’s Body and veneration of Sacred Scripture (cf. LtOrd I.IV).

The Year of Faith invites us to return to this essential part of the faith and of Franciscan life, which is the word of God and the Eucharist, while aware that such an encounter always leads toward the “sacrament of the brother,” the poorest people, and to evangelization, that

“In faith, the aspect of personally deciding to accept the call to follow Jesus Christ acquires more and more importance, while relying on Him and drawing nourishment from his Word. This is what the Gospel of John (Jn 6:60-70) also highlights when it presents the challenges of the Word and reveals the difficulty of the disciples over the statement of Jesus, “The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But among you are some who do not believe” (Jn 6:63-64). Like so many of our brothers and our communities, we are going through issues of faith.

The Gospel reveals that, though belonging to Jesus’ group, some lived without faith in Him, resisting his spirit and life. In fact, the crisis within the Christian community has to do with this question: Do you or don’t you believe in Jesus? The fact that “many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him” (Jn 6:66) is a way of understanding that it referred to the true followers of Jesus.

The choice is as decisive for those who pull back as for those who remain with Him. The group of disciples, then and now, thinned and thins out, but to those who remain Jesus asks a question, “Do you also wish to go away?” (Jn 6:67). The same question is addressed to us who remain in the Church and the Order: what do we want? Are we convinced to remain in order to follow Jesus and live like Him? Of course, it is not possible to live in ambiguity, nonetheless, it is necessary to persevere decisively.

Peter’s response is exemplary, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (Jn 6:68). Those who remain have to do

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so only for Jesus and commit to follow Him. This is the only reason to stay. One of the services

“delighting in nothing else except our Creator, Redeemer, and Savior, the only true God …the true and supreme good.” (Rnb 23)

is, the proclamation of the Kingdom of God to be offered through the our witness of life and words (cf. GGCC 89). In the Eucharistic spirituality, we are called to remember the beginning of our vocation when we encounter Jesus Christ, and through a process of prayer, penance, and conversion, to “return to our first love, the inspiring spark” from which our discipleship came forth (cf. SAFC 22).

Lord, to whom shall we go?

We all know that the Christian faith is not a central aspect of contemporary culture, and “now it happens not infrequently that Christians give more concern for the social, cultural and political conditions of their commitment, continuing to think of the faith as a self-evident presupposition of common life” (PF 2). Our environment is marked by forms of religious indifference and by the seduction of the sacred according to man’s way of measuring things. This reality leads many men and women to “believe” without belonging and closed in the solitude of his own religious experience.
that we can offer to society is to put within the reach of both men and women of today, the person and message of Jesus, to put them more and more in contact with the His Words and less and less with our words.

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We believed

Dear brothers, we are in a moment of grace, moving us to praise with all our being the Most High God, as St. Francis did, saying, “You are our faith” (PrG 7). We are in an favorable era where we can deepen “our faith” in God and entrust to Him both our Consecrated Life and Mission, while sharing it with the laity in the Church and for the world, so that it may be clear that “we believe and know that [He is] the Holy One of God” (Jn 6:69).

As believers and Consecrated Persons, despite the various difficulties in which we find ourselves, we have to answer Jesus’ question: “Do you also wish to go away?” (Jn 6:67). We cannot get used to living a faith to fit our interests and desires. The Lord Jesus renews the call to set out and be on our way with fidelity and perseverance, in order to “to set out to find the One whom we would not be seeking had he not already set out to meet us. To this encounter, faith invites us and it opens us in fullness.” (PF 10).

The Lord comes to meet us in order to overcome the bitterness, the temptation to flee and leave our fraternity, because we feel tired and disappointed in front of the institutional, community or personal problems, confident that “Faith is the channel through which the Lord touches us, cures us of our sicknesses and our inherited burdens, reconciles us and guarantees the existence of things which we hope for and which He sends to us. The life of faith is the absolute source of our joy and hope, our discipleship of Jesus Christ and our witness to the world” (cf. LSR 18).

With the help and prayers of Mary, Queen of the Order, may we encounter everyday God who loves us and on whom we build our lives! As we celebrate the feast of St. Francis of Assisi, we invite you to renew your faith by saying, “Lord, to whom shall we go?” (Jn 6:68). “You are our faith” (PrG 7)

Rome, 17 September 2013
Feast of the Stigmata of St. Francis

Your Brothers of the OFM General Definitory:

Br. Michael Anthony Perry, ofm (Min. gen.)
Br. Julio César Bunader, ofm (Vic. gen.)
Br. Vincenzo Brocanelli, ofm (Def. gen.)
Br. Vicente-Emilio Felipe Tapia, ofm (Def. gen.)
Br. Nestor Inácio Schwerz, ofm (Def. gen.)
Br. Francis William Walter, ofm (Def. gen.)
Br. Roger Marchal, ofm (Def. gen.)
Br. Ernest Karol Siekierka, ofm (Def. gen.)
Br. Paskalis Bruno Syukur, ofm (Def. gen.)
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