

LIVING FRATERNITY

Theme: Our heritage - 800 years of fraternal life ...

In this month of June 2021, we offer for reflection and reading excerpts from a first document on the processing of the *Memoriale propositi*. This first presentation gives us an insight into the historical framework of the Franciscan movement from 1221 to 2021.. We offer it for your personal information.

Good reflection to everyone

Recall: Our monthly meeting should favour *an encounter with Christ*. A spirit of prayer heralds a good encounter, and a good preparation promotes communal experience.

JUNE 2021 MONTHLY MEETING

Opening of the meeting if it happens

The members can offer suggestions for a song to the Virgin Mary. After the chosen song, the prayer according to the Ritual or one chosen by the fraternity starts the meeting.

Introduction

While working through this first document on the processing to the *Memorial Propositi*, we have chosen passages that are meaningful to us as secular members of the great Franciscan Family. It is an introduction in which the International Council of the OFS proposes a look at the development of Franciscan life at all levels, during 800 years.

Our heritage

Have you not at some time started a search for your roots, your origins trying to retrace the ancestors, to learn where they came from, what reasons brought them to settle in this country Also, we have certainly met along our Franciscan journey persons who shared their life story.

Personal reflection:

Our older members in the Order could tell us about their life journey, then if possible, we could start up a conversation with them. We may hear some very interesting things ...

A look at the age of St. Francis

The age of St. Francis (1182-1226) is included in the vast phenomenon of social, economic and religious renewal and rebirth that runs through the XI-XIII centuries, during which the feudal society enters into crisis and slowly a new order is formed, more communal and civil, accompanied by new and interesting religious ferments.

The birth of a new lay spirituality

However the great changes taking place in society after the year 1000 had repercussions also on the way of living the religious dimension on the part of the laity: a new conscience is emerging, a more authentic sensitivity, closer to the primitive Church, which wants to bring the Gospel to daily life, the Church to the world, and the idea that even the laity can live the Gospel message in their daily lives. A truly new thought compared to what believed that it was possible to reach Christian perfection only in the "*contemptus mundi*" (disdain for the world), adhering to monastic or eremitical life, with the rejection of society and worldly concerns.

Personal reflection:

After the reading, note what has special meaning for you in the preceding paragraph.

Continue reading:

The laity towards the "Fraternities"

Reflections of the great economic and social transformations also occurred in the evolution of the "penitential state": no longer an "escape from the world" in individual terms to pursue the Christian ideal, but a "being in the world" putting the Gospel at the center with the purpose to imitate the poor and humble Christ. This tension towards such a high ideal put together many lay faithful, who in some realities gave life to groups or "fraternities" of married and celibate people who, even without necessarily living together, adopted the same commitment to penitential life, the same "*Propositum vitae*" (Cf. Fr. RIVI, Francis of Assisi and the laity of his time, Series TAU / 2, Rimini 2004, p. 64).

The wisdom of Pope Innocent III (1160-1216) to welcome the new lay movements within the Catholic Church, favored the penitential movements: it was him to reopen the case of the Humiliated and to approve them with a letter dated June 1201. It contained the *Propositum* with which the state of life of the Humiliated was regulated: humility, patience, charity, fastings and prayers were its inspiring principles. We can therefore consider the Third Order of the Humiliated, a form of life that somehow precedes the Franciscan Third Order.

It will be the extraordinary human and religious experience of Francis of Assisi that will bring to an end the long process of renewal of the penitential state. "In him it is possible to grasp at the same time the summit of the most authentic human and Christian aspirations of the laity and the most luminous proposal for a solution ..." (Fr. RIVI, Francis of Assisi ... p. 72). His example, his words will nourish an impressive flowering of men and women who, under different forms, will undertake the path of Christian perfection.

Francis penitent

When Francis comes to understand that the seductions of the world (money, the dream of fulfilling himself as a knight, participating in the experiences of the cheerful brigade of his companions ...) are not able to give a profound meaning to his life, he begins an interior journey in search of a new lifestyle that will lead him to discover and live the centrality of the Gospel.

At the beginning of his new religious experience, Francis feels the call of penitential spirituality, as he himself writes in his Testament:

The Lord gave me, Friar Francis, to begin to do penance like this: when I was in sins it seemed too bitter to see lepers, and the Lord Himself led me among them and I showed mercy to them. And as I moved away from them, what seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of mind and body. And after that, I stayed a while and walked out of the century.

But the expression "I came out of the century" should not be understood as an escape from the world to retire to a monastery or to live in a wood or on a hermit's upland: the isolation in which Francis and his first companions live is "generally moving that does not at all exclude the contact with the world ... " and his desire to " model himself according to the form of the holy Gospel could only move him in the direction of an apostolic life, that is, a more active life among the people"(G. CASAGRANDE , An Order for the laity. Penance and Penitents in the thirteenth century, in Francis of Assisi and the first century of Franciscan history, Turin, 1997, p. 238).

Francis was certain of this by resorting to the advice of Friar Silvestro and Saint Claire. But Innocent III also encouraged him to carry on with preaching, as Thomas of Celano narrates (Vita Seconda, 17) who writes:

Then Francis, using the faculty granted him, began to sow seeds of virtue, preaching with greater fervor all around, in cities and villages.

A preaching addressed to all: men and women, young and old, healthy and sick, workers and peasants, nobles and commoners ..., a message of conversion and penance to live the Gospel consistently. The theme of "penance" is central in the life of the Saint and in his preaching. What is its content?

The Letters to the Faithful

The two versions of the Letter to the faithful can be considered the core of his "norms of life and salvation" (A. FREGONA, The Secular Franciscan Order cit., p. 83) which, starting from love for God, become concrete in love of neighbor and enemies, in mercy, charity, humility, purity, simplicity, contempt for the body and its vices, frequency in confession and Eucharistic communion ...

These are indications of life that Francis and his first companions offer in their contact with people, in the preaching that transmits serenity and optimism, capable of increasing a growing number of people,

married and celibate, who choose to live as penitents remaining in their own homes, without giving up their family, their work

Conclusion

The state of voluntary penance, therefore, existed since ancient times and was a form of life that the Church recognized for those lay people who intended to embrace it and which could be expressed in different forms. Different, new and original was the "form of life" indicated by Francis for the laity, which was at the basis of the intense revival of the penitential movement, especially in central-northern Italy: a phenomenon so considerable that it was taken into consideration by the Roman Curia.

Biblical Reflection:

Read the following texts from the apostles Matthew 12, 46-50, or Mark 3, 31-35 or Luke 8, 19-21 they give us an ideas on who Jesus saw his brothers and sisters. Ose a passage and discover how these passages remind us of Article 4 of our Rule.

Take a moment of reflection; then underline words or inspiring phrases ...

Share your thoughts on the gospel: a) How can it be integrated in our lives?

Life-Objective:

In this month of June 2021, as we are still in this pandemic period, let us continue maintaining the links between our members through all possible means.

We also pray for the doctors, nursing personnel and all the people who remain in service. May God give them health and strength. May their devotion inspire thankfulness in us and may we not hesitate in expressing it to them.

At Home

To continue your reflection on the texts presented, go to your bookcase and find the writings of Francis in which you could find the texts for the 2 Letters to the Faithful. You will certainly find links to our form of life,(Rule).

Possible sources are :

Francis and Clare: The Complete Works, published by Paulist Press, New York/Mahwah

In the prologue of the Rule, you will find excerpts from the letters.

Have a good summer and hope that we may soon gather again in fraternity!