

Week 1, October 3 - 12: The thought for this week is **Prayer**. Article 8 of the OFS Rule begins: “As Jesus was the true worshipper of the Father, so let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do.”

Prayer is first and foremost in our lives as followers of Jesus. Everything we do and say must be embodied in a spirit of prayer. Author Henri Nouwen wrote, “When we sit down to pray, we enter the presence of the God of peace who disarms our hearts, he said. We make our peace with God, and God gives us the gift of peace.”

In the life of prayer, our wills and God’s grace act together. When we pray, we must surrender to the will of God and not our own wills and wants. This can be difficult especially when we want our own way. Yet, we must remember that God wants what is best for us and His ways are greater than our ways. Only God can see the big picture.

At the very beginning of Francis’ conversion, he is living with a poor priest at the chapel of San Damiano. His parents do not know where he is, so his father goes around the city inquiring about his son. When he learns where Francis is, he calls together his friends and neighbors and goes down to San Damiano.

Francis is still new in the service of Christ; so when he hears about his pursuers and knows they are coming, he hides from his father’s anger by creeping into a secret cave which he has prepared as a hiding place. There he stays for a whole month. He eats food brought to him secretly and prays continually with tears that the Lord deliver him from persecution and grant him the fulfillment of his desire to serve him alone.

He fasts and prays unceasingly, not trusting in his own strength but relying wholly on God; and God fills his soul with unspeakable joy and a wonderful light until, glowing with an inner radiance, he leaves the cave, ready to face his persecutors. Light of heart, he climbs the road to Assisi.

When his friends and relatives spy him, they smother him with insults, calling him a fool and a madman, and they hurl stones and mud at him.

But Francis, who has become God’s servant, pays them no heed. Indifferent to their insults, he thanks God for everything.

Initially, Francis hides from his father’s anger by creeping into a secret cave which he has prepared as a refuge. Like all of us at the beginning of the emergence of the true self, he fears his father’s anger, he draws inward and hides, and he prays for the wrong thing because he does not as yet have the courage to become himself. He prays that the Lord *will deliver him from persecution and grant him the fulfillment of his desire*. He does not know as yet that the fulfillment of his desire involves persecution.

But because he perseveres, the Lord fills his soul with light, and he leaves the cave where he is hiding and faces the insults and blows of his persecutors. In overcoming his shame, he discovers his true self and is unmoved by persecution. And he thanks God for everything, not just for what is pleasant, such as his misguided desire to be delivered from persecution. In acting, in facing the consequences of his commitment to Christ, Francis learns to pray correctly. [From *The Way of St. Francis* by Murray Bodo, OFM]

Psalm Fragment:

*“The Lord has heard my supplication;
The Lord will receive my prayer.” ~ Psalm 6:9*

Reflection Question: Do you pray for your will alone or for your will to meet God’s grace?

This week: Pray that your will and God's grace will always meet – making you an instrument of the Lord's peace.

Prayer for the Week: The Peace Prayer

*Lord, make me a channel of your peace;
where there is hatred, I may bring love;
where there is wrong, I may bring the spirit of forgiveness;
where there is discord, I may bring harmony;
where there is error, I may bring truth;
where there is doubt, I may bring faith;
where there is despair, I may bring hope;
where there are shadows, I may bring light;
where there is sadness, I may bring joy.*

*Lord, grant that I may seek rather to comfort than to be comforted;
to understand, than to be understood;
to love, than to be loved.*

*For it is by self-forgetting that one finds.
It is by forgiving that one is forgiven.
It is by dying that one awakens to eternal life. Amen.*



Week 2, October 13 - 19: The thought for this week is **Empathy**. It has been said, “People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

Empathy is the ability to imagine oneself in another's place and understand the other's feelings, desires, ideas, and actions; putting yourself in the shoes of the other. Instead of empathy, we tend instead to have a strong urge to give advice or reassurance and to explain our own position or feeling. Empathy, on the other hand, requires focusing full attention on the other person's message. We give to others the time and space they need to express themselves fully and to feel understood.

There was a time at the very beginning when Francis and his brothers lived at a place near Assisi called Rivo Torto...

At Rivo Torto they fasted and did penance with all the enthusiasm and sometimes the imprudence of novices in the life of the Spirit, as the following story shows.

One night, as they all lay sleeping soundly, a loud cry broke into their dreams: "I am dying! I am dying! Help me!"

And the brothers, startled for their sleep, saw St. Francis already at the side of the terrified brother. "What is it, brother? Tell me."

And though he was now embarrassed, the brother overcame shame and said: "Forgive me, Father Francis; but I am dying of hunger."

Then St. Francis immediately ordered the brothers to light a torch and go out and gather some herbs and vegetables and whatever else they could find for all of them to have a good, nourishing meal. He said this so that the poor brother would not have to be humiliated by eating alone.

And so all the brothers set themselves eagerly to the task of preparing a meal and then they all sat down with the hungry brother and ate a midnight supper. [From Tales of St. Francis by Murray Bodo, OFM]

The key ingredient of empathy is presence: we are wholly present with the other party and what they are experiencing. This quality of presence distinguishes empathy from either mental understanding or sympathy.

Francis was not just sympathetic, but he empathized with the brother and gathered all the brothers so as not to let this hungry brother be humiliated by eating alone.

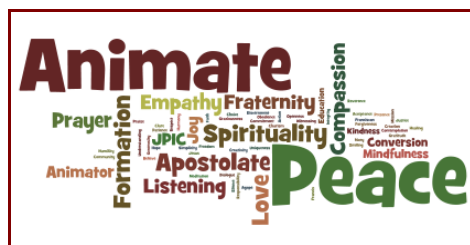
Psalm Fragment:

*“You will show me the path of life;
In Your presence is fullness of joy;
At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” ~ Psalm 16:11*

Reflection Question: When someone is in need, do you offer them your presence or your advice?

This week: Offer to be a minister of presence to someone who is hurting or in need and seek first to understand them.

Prayer for the Week: *“Lord, grant me the spirit of patience to be present to someone who is hurting or in need. May I be Your presence to them. I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.”*



Week 3, October 20 - 26: The thought for this week is **Active Listening**. When we hear, we hear with just the ears. When we listen, we listen with the whole body – ears, eyes, heart, posture, mind – open and empty.

Many people wrongly assume that listening is a passive process of being silent while another person speaks. We may even believe that we are good listeners, but what we are often doing is listening selectively, making judgments about what is being said, and thinking of ways to end the conversation or redirect the conversation in ways more pleasing to ourselves.

So when [Joseph and Mary] did not find Jesus, they returned to Jerusalem looking for him. Now so it was that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. [Luke 2:45-47]

The work of active listening takes place up in your head; requiring a disciplined effort to silence all the internal conversation while attempting to listen to another human being. It requires a sacrifice, an extension of oneself, to block out the noise and truly enter another person's world – even for a few minutes. Active listening is attempting to see things as the speaker sees them and attempting to feel things as the speaker feels them. This identification with the speaker is referred to as *empathy* and requires a great deal of effort.

Our Lord Jesus was an active listener, just as his mother. It took great discipline to listen to the words of the angel Gabriel. Mary did not hear what she wanted to hear; she listened to the words, asked a clarifying question, then gave her fiat – her yes to God. You must truly listen in order to properly respond.

Psalm Fragment:

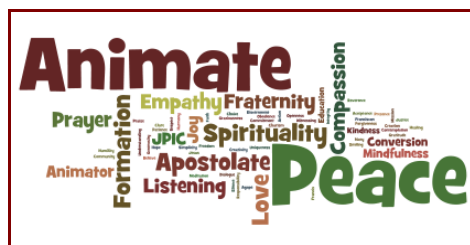
*“Oh, that My people would listen to Me,
That Israel would walk in My ways! ~ Psalm 81:13*

Reflection Question: When was the last time you sat down in quiet and listened to God speak to your heart?

This week: Be mindful about listening to the conversations you are engaged in – without interrupting or distractions. Then, spend some quiet time actively listening to God in the Scriptures.

Prayer for the Week:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,
Because He has anointed Me
To preach the gospel to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;
To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. [Luke 4:18-19]*



Week 4, October 27 – November 2: The thought for this week is **Compassion**. Author Robert Wright said, “In the beginning there was compassion.”

Compassion is the recognition of another person's suffering accompanied by the disposition to alleviate that suffering. Compassion is a type of feeling where you tend to feel for the person concerned. You strongly feel sorry for the state of a person without attempting to know what is there in his or her mind. Without even understanding the intensity of his or her problem or predicament you simply feel sorry for a person; which is different from empathy. But compassion has a second component: to alleviate that suffering. You witness the suffering of another, and your heart is moved to do something about it. You move from empathy to compassion; from the feeling to the action.

“But when Jesus saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.” [Matt 9:36]

“So Jesus had compassion and touched their eyes. And immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him.” [Matt 20:34]

Compassion moves us from something to something else: from empathy to action. Jesus was moved with compassion and he did something about it. Being a bearer of peace, it is not enough to be your brother’s or sister’s keeper; you *are* your brother and your sister. They belong to you and you belong to them in the Kingdom of God.

Mother Teresa said, *“If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.”*

Psalm Fragment:

*“He has made His wonderful works to be remembered;
The Lord is gracious and full of compassion.” ~ Psalm 111:4*

Reflection Question: When was the last time you were moved with compassion? What did you do about it?

This Week: Keep in mind that we belong to each other and let compassion guide your day.

Prayer for the Week: *“Most High and glorious God, lighten the darkness of my heart and give me sound faith, firm hope, and perfect love. Let me, Lord, have the right feelings and knowledge, so that I can carry out the task that you have given me in truth. Amen.” ~ St. Francis, after the Crucified Lord told him to repair the Church.*



Week 5, November 3 - 9: The thought for this week is **Evangelical Love**. St. Bernard the Abbot stated: *“Love is sufficient of itself, it gives pleasure by itself and because of itself. It is its own merit, its own reward. Love looks for no cause outside itself, no effect beyond itself. Its profit lies in its practice.... For when God loves, all he desires is to be loved in return; the sole purpose of his love is to be loved, in the knowledge that those who love him are made happy by their love of him.”*

Unconditional love, or agapé, rooted in behavior toward others without regard to their due is the love with which Jesus loves and speaks; Gospel love: agapé. This is the love that expects nothing from the one loved. It is the love of deliberate choice.

Jesus left us two great Commandments: Love God and love our neighbor as ourselves. So, the greatest commandment is to love. It does seem a little silly to try to command somebody to feel a certain way for someone else. But Jesus is saying that we ought to *behave* well toward them. I cannot always control how I feel about other people but I am in control of how I behave toward other people.

Saint Francis went about loving the brothers and sisters of Assisi. He greeted each one with “Pace e bene!” “Peace and good!” When you can greet another with the greeting of peace, then you will not have malice in your heart.

Thomas Merton wrote, “*The beginning of love is to let those we love be perfectly themselves, and not to twist them to fit our own image. Otherwise we love only the reflection of ourselves we find in them.*”

Psalm Fragment:

*“The Lord opens the eyes of the blind;
The Lord raises those who are bowed down;
The Lord loves the righteous.” ~ Psalm 146:8*

Reflection Question: How many people have you acknowledged today with a greeting of peace?

This Week: I will love as Jesus loves – expecting nothing in return and only wanting the best for the person loved. Journal how this experience affected you.

Prayer for the Week:

*“I will extol You, my God, O King;
And I will bless Your name forever and ever.
Every day I will bless You,
And I will praise Your name forever and ever.
Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;
And His greatness is unsearchable.” [Psalm 145:1-3]*



Week 6, November 10 - 16: The thought for this week is **Mindfulness**. Author James Baraz said, “*Mindfulness is simply being aware of what is happening right now without wishing it were different; enjoying the pleasant without holding on when it changes (which it will); being with the unpleasant without fearing it will always be this way (which it won’t).*”

Mindfulness is not thinking, interpreting, or evaluating; it is an awareness of perception. It is a purposeful, nonjudgmental state of mind which does not anticipate the future or reflect back on the past. Any activity can be done with mindfulness – talking on the telephone, cleaning your home, driving, working, and exercising. Being mindful, you are fully present to this moment – which is the only moment you have – being focused on what you are doing, knowing why you are doing it.

“As I practice mindfulness, I am not undertaking my own spirituality. I am not forsaking the world or turning my back on action for justice and peace. On the contrary, I am helping the nonviolent transformation of the world led by the spirit of peace.

“The world does not need more chaos. The world needs peace. We cannot offer peace to the world if we lack inner peace ourselves, and mindfulness is a key ingredient to daily inner peace.

“Whether in a hermitage, a busy office, a crowded subway, a prison cell, or a war zone, mindfulness can help us experience in the present the peace we long for.... In a mindless world of violence, mindfulness makes all the difference. It transforms our inner peace into radiant public action. In this light, we see enough to take the next step, and walk forward in our war-torn world offering the wisdom of peace.”

~ From **Living Peace** by John Dear, SJ

Psalm Fragment:

*“The Lord has been mindful of us;
He will bless us; He will bless the house of Israel;
He will bless the house of Aaron.” ~ Psalm 115:12*

Reflection Question: Are you mindful in each of the daily tasks you undertake? Or, are you distracted and allow your mind to wander?

This Week: Practice being mindful in every activity you undertake. Avoid multi-tasking and focus on mindfully attending to one activity at a time. Notice how you are feeling as you are being mindful. Journal your experience.

Prayer for the Week:

God of Peace, thank you for the gift of your great love and all that you give to me. Grant me the grace and the courage to live a life of mindfulness so that I may be faithful to the Gospels and to the mission of peace. Holy Spirit, help me to be an instrument of peace and love to all I come in contact with. Guide me along the way of mindful nonviolence and disarm my heart that I may be more like your Son, Jesus; in whose name I make this prayer. Amen.

Justice Peace Integrity of Creation
Prayer Education Action