



Dear Sisters and Brothers:

Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed!

I hope that you and your fraternities and your families have enjoyed a powerful and spirit-filled Holy Week and an Easter of incomparable joy.

Well, this certainly has been a time of great change and newness for our Church. The resignation and retirement of Pope Benedict XVI and the subsequent election of Pope Francis has certainly proven that the Holy Spirit is present in power in our church and that she is filled with surprises! What a wonderful gift Pope Francis is showing himself to be! In the spirit of our holy father, St. Francis, whose name he has chosen, he has moved quickly to heighten our sense of the gift of simplicity and the embrace of the poor. He is teaching by example the idea that for the Christian, leadership is about humble service and not about distinctions-- that the church is most in tune with the vision of the Gospel when she embraces the poor and becomes poor herself.

It has become clear as we have all learned about the previous ministry of Jorge Mario Bergoglio, now Pope Francis, that this embrace of simplicity and poverty is not something which is new to him. Rather, it comes from the core of his being, his integrity and his life-long vision. We know he opted as Archbishop of Buenos Aires, to live simply in an apartment among the people and cooked for himself instead of living in the Archbishop's house with a retinue of servants and took public transportation instead of using a chauffeur-driven car. What an example of genuine ministry and servant leadership! And he has continued in the same vein since his election to the papacy. His choice of living quarters, his choice of simple vestments, his going to a youth prison to celebrate Holy Thursday Mass and wash the feet of Muslim and Christian boys and girls, his choice of preaching standing and without wearing a mitre, all of these are reminders to us of the saying attributed to St. Francis: "Preach the Gospel at all times and, if necessary, use words."

We have all made a public commitment to live the Gospel in the manner of St. Francis with our profession of the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order. How have we simplified our lives? How do we witness our option for the poor and the marginalized? How do we witness to simplicity and humility by the choices we make? How do we witness to peace? Pope Francis challenges us to be Franciscans of integrity. May the Lord bless our new Pope Francis with many healthy years of ministry among us and bless his leadership of the Church. May he, like St. Francis, rebuild the Church which is always in need of renewal. May Pope Francis' inspirational and authentic discipleship and his model of service inspire us to lives of simplicity, poverty and humble service

May you continue to enjoy the blessings and live in the joy of the Easter season.

Faternally,

Ron Pihokker, OFS  
Regional Minister