

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As I write this, we are deep in winter and Ash Wednesday is right around the corner. It is a wonderful time to take stock of ourselves and who we are as Secular Franciscans and members of the Franciscan Family.

In addition to being your Regional Minister, I am also a local Formation Director. Not too long ago a candidate said to me that she was concerned because she felt that she did not have "enough devotion" to St. Francis. My answer to her was that St. Francis is not generally a saint to whom we pray for a miracle or to find our keys. A novena to St. Francis may help us to honor him, but chances are we are not seeking a particular favor. The fact is, the kind of *devotion* we have to St. Francis is, or needs to be, more of a **desire** to follow the **EXAMPLE** he sets for us.

St. Francis was in awe of and devoted to the **Incarnation**: the birth, life and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ as he found it in the Gospels. As Franciscans, and especially as Secular Franciscans who live in the world, **we are called to show that the Gospel can be lived**. This is the **great gift** and **challenge** that our Seraphic Father has left us. He truly showed that it was possible to live the Gospel, and **we have inherited that call**.



OK--so, **how are we doing?** How are we living up to the challenge? I ask *myself*:

- When was the last time I read our Rule **during my prayer time**? I mean **read and meditated** on the Rule?
- When was the last time I **prayed** the Rule? **Praying the Rule** puts the action on another level. By doing this we are asking that the **Holy Spirit** help us to **transform ourselves** by means of the words of our Rule. (You can **get started today!** See **Pray the Rule** by Liam McCarthy, OFM, found elsewhere in this issue.)
- When was the last time we **read the Rule out loud** as a **fraternity**? We get very caught up in all of our ongoing formation programs, but we should include a **"Reading of the Rule"** every year! Make it special. Take turns, read it out loud, pray over it--**once a year!** Someone from a local fraternity once said to me that they had "covered" the Rule a few years ago. Now they wanted to do more "advanced" things. Is our Rule of Life that boring? Is what it asks so simple that we don't need to review it?

Oh my! Many of us (*myself #1*) need to ruminate on the **basics of our Franciscan life** as often as possible so that **we don't forget what we have professed**. **Formation directors**, please, never forget how **important it is for your candidates to understand what they will be promising!** Back when I was professed (more than 35 years ago) this was not stressed enough.

A good place to start thinking about our Rule **right now** (in addition to the piece on "Pray the Rule") is also found in this issue of the Troubadour. Our newly appointed **Regional Chair for JPIC** (*Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation*), **Chris Leone, OFS**, has written an **excellent article**. In it he mentions **five articles of the Rule**. Please get out your copy of the Rule and take the time to **read those articles prayerfully**--(Articles **4, 14, 15, 18, and 19**). They tell us **what we have promised at profession** with regard to the **Gospel** and our call to be **peacemakers, seekers of justice** and **lovers of all creation**.

What did I promise on the day of my **profession**? I don't remember exactly the **words of what I promised** on that day. Do you? Oh, I've heard others say them many times, but have I really thought about them? Let's take a look.

Since everyone does not have a copy of the brown Ritual at home, here are the words we say and agree to at the time of Profession. I plan to think about them often, how about you? (**Bold** letters are mine.)

Minister: _____, God has consecrated you with water and the Holy Spirit.
What do you now ask of God, the Church and the Franciscan Family?

*We (I) ask to be admitted to **profession of the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order** and to **make a permanent commitment to the gospel life**. The experience during our (my) time of formation has strengthened us(me) in the conviction that **the Lord is calling us(me) to observe the holy gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ by following the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi**.*

*Celebrant: Before this fraternity and the other members of the People of God gathered here, I ask you to **express your will. Do you wish to embrace the gospel way of life by following the example and words of St. Francis of Assisi, which are at the heart of the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order?***

*Candidates, replying all together: **Yes, this is what I want.***

*Celebrant: You have been called to **give witness to the Kingdom of God and to build a more fraternal world based on the gospel**, together with all people of goodwill. **Do you wish to be faithful to this vocation and to practice the spirit of service proper to Secular Franciscans?***

*Candidates: **Yes, this is what I want.***

*Celebrant: You have been made **members of the People of God by your Baptism and strengthened in Confirmation** by the new **gift of the Spirit**, in order to **proclaim Christ by your life and your words. Do you wish to bind yourself more closely to the Church and to work intently to rebuild the ecclesial community and fulfill its mission among all people?***

*Candidates: **Yes, this is what I want.***

After the Prayer those to be professed read the formula for Profession:

I, _____, by the grace of God, *renew my baptismal promises* and *consecrate myself to the service of his Kingdom*. Therefore, *in my secular state* (or, when appropriate, as a member of the diocesan clergy) *I promise to live all the days of my life the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ* in the Secular Franciscan Order *by observing its rule of life*. May the grace of the Holy Spirit, the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and our holy father St. Francis, and the fraternal bonds of community always be my help, so that I may reach the goal of perfect Christian love.

*(From the **Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order**, Benet A. Fonck, OFM, St. Anthony Messenger Press. [Also available on Amazon.com])*

I pray that, through our **Rule** and our **love of the Gospel**, we, along with St. Francis can say, "**This is what I want, this is what I long for with all my heart.**"

Please continue to pray for your Regional Council. We are praying for you.

Many blessings for a fruitful Lent and a joyous Easter!



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