

HAPPY FEAST OF ST. FRANCIS

Among the many saints throughout history, Francis of Assisi is quite popular and who still attracts attention. His influence spreads beyond Christianity. He appears “like a flower bud that has blossomed early,” giving a glimpse of a humanity that yearns to bloom in each of us. “It seemed he was a new man, a man of the age to come,” wrote his first biographer, Thomas of Celano (1Cel 82).

It is not surprising that, in contemporary society, many turn to him to ask him to seek wisdom. Francis gave to the world a total presence that is human as well as evangelical and cosmic – the gift “of converting all hostility into fraternal tension, within the unity of creation” (Paul Ricoeur).

What then was the secret of Francis of Assisi? In his *Testament*, Francis himself recounted the radical change that came over him: “The Lord granted me, Brother Francis, to begin to do penance in this way: While I was in sin, it seemed very bitter to me to see lepers. And the Lord himself led me among them and I had mercy upon them. And when I left them, that which seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body.”

Although the issues of justice, peace and ecology are often considered to be “secular,” Francis has gives us an example of how to approach these as people of faith. Prayerful reflection on texts dealing with these issues is of importance, as we seek to discover and implement God's plan for creation. Prayer to the Holy Spirit is necessary, for the Spirit is always the principal agent in the whole work of evangelization.

On this Feast of St. Francis we remember that the example of St. Francis has so much to offer us in meeting the most critical social challenges of our times; Francis was truly the “Father of the Poor” (1Cel 76), whose early brotherhood was known as a “Delegation of Peace” (1Cel 24) and who considered himself the Brother of all Creation (Canticle).

Our commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation today is necessary in a time marked by so many conflicts and social, economic and environmental inequalities.

*From the Minister General's Homily on the Feast of the Stigmata of St. Francis
La Verna, 17th September 2008*

Today's feast fills our spirit with emotion and joy. But it also makes us feel the need for Francis. Yes, Brother Francis, we still need you. The world needs you.

We need you, you who teach that there is no wisdom, that there cannot be knowledge of God or of the things of God, without a personal relationship with Christ.

We need you who believed in love so as to conquer the signs of death present in the world, in your time as well as today.

We need you to rediscover the dignity and the greatness of our body, a body made in the image of God, a body assumed by Christ, a body crucified to give life, eternal life.

We need you, the faithful disciple, "the first after the only One", to confirm our 'yes' to the discipleship of the poor and humble Jesus each day, and to follow Him for love.

We need you, Brother Francis, the stigmatised of La Verna, to bring to the men and women of today those credible signs of the crucified Love, of the unloved Love, of the Love who gave Himself to all, of the Love which converts, regenerates and transforms.

We need you to bring to every creature the meaning of existence and to find again our vocation to be a praise of the Creator. We need you, Brother Francis "as an icon of the crucified Jesus", because, like you, we need love, we need Christ.

Source: Eloi Leclerc OFM and Charles Finnegan OFM
OFM JPIC Resource Book <http://www.ofm-jpic.org/handbook/index.html>

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