



Sisters of the Faith
By David Lindsley

Fraternity: Holy Unity

By Francine Gikow, SFO

“Secular Franciscans, therefore, should seek to encounter the living and active person of Christ in their brothers and sisters, in Sacred Scripture, in the Church, and in liturgical activity. The faith of Saint Francis, who often said *“I see nothing bodily of the Most High Son of God in this world except his most holy body and blood,”* should be the inspiration and pattern of their Eucharistic life.”¹

Did you notice in the Rule, that as a means of encountering the living and active person of Christ, the “brothers and sisters” are listed *first* even before Sacred Scripture, the Church and liturgical activity? Maybe it was placed there because many of the early Franciscans were illiterate. Maybe, as the old saying goes, “charity starts at home.” However, it should cause us to pause in the way we consider living in communion with Christ.

Franciscans have always been encouraged to live in “Holy Unity.” Celano speaks about the early fraternal Franciscan practice of holy unity, of mutual charity, in unity of spirit: “...as living stones, gathered so to speak, from every part of the world they *grew into a temple of the Holy Spirit*. How ardent their fraternal love was...a real explosion of their spiritual

affection...Having despised all earthly things and free of any selfish love, from the moment they turned all their heart’s affection into the bosom of the community, they tried with all diligence to give even themselves to meet all the needs of the brothers.”²

The early Franciscans’ love for others, and their expression of it, grew out of their love for God and their unity and love for each other within their fraternities. This spirit of love in the early Franciscan fraternities attracted others to Christ - the early Franciscans not only preached the message of God’s love, they lived it! How attractive this must be for others! How convincing a message of God’s love!

We also see this “Holy Unity” referenced in the prologue to the Rule of the Poor Clares, given to them by Father Francis, when the rule is confirmed by Cardinal Rainaldo, as “According to [this form of life] you should live together in unity of spirits...”³ The Poor Clares are to show in the unity of their cloistered life with each other, the same unity of the Trinitarian love among Father, Son and Spirit which we share in our life with God.

As Pope John Paul, in *Vita Consecrata*, writes: “*Fraternal life, whereby consecrated persons strive to live in Christ with one heart and soul, is put forward as an eloquent witness to the Trinity. It proclaims the Father, who desires to make of all humanity one family. It proclaims the incarnate Son, who gathers the redeemed into unity, pointing the way by his example, his prayer, his words and above all his death, which is a source of reconciliation for a divided and scattered community. It proclaims the Holy Spirit as the principle unity of the Church, wherein he ceaselessly raises up spiritual families in fraternal communities.*”⁴

Yes, Pope John Paul was speaking to us, also! As professed Secular Franciscans, we are consecrated to God with the same consecration as our religious brothers and sisters! Our consecration should witness the unity of the Trinity to others. We, too, must strive for this “holy unity” in our fraternity life.

Therefore, we are not just called to be united with Christ interiorly or even with those we serve, but we are also called to be united with this same Spirit with our brothers and sisters in fraternity. It is through this unity of Christ’s love in our own fraternities that we are able to convincingly go out to share God’s Spirit with others.

² 1Celano 38-9.

³ Prologue to The Form of Life of St. Clare of Assisi, in The Lady: St. Clare of Assisi: Early Documents edited and translated by Regis J. Armstrong, New City Press, New York, NY, 2006.

⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, 37.

¹ Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order, Ch. 2 #5.