



INSTRUMENTS OF PEACE

“Mindful that they are bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly, they should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon.”¹

As Secular Franciscans, we talk a lot about peace. We aspire to it, we pray for it (Francis’ Peace Prayer) and we work for it in our apostolate and for social justice. However, I think we frequently miss it. We are so busy “do-ing” peace that we miss “be-ing” peace!

Let’s take a closer look at what our Rule says we should do. It says that we are “bearers of peace” and that we should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue. In other words, we try to effect a reconciliation and healing in our work with others. But, how many times do our efforts end in failure and frustration? How many times do we get caught up in the anger, recriminations, and blame?

In order to be an instrument of peace, we need to “be” at peace first, which is not just an absence of interior discord.

How can we “become peace” and how can we stay in that peace during negotiations or even when we are attacked?

Our Rule says that we need “to let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all [we] are and do.”² How much time do we spend in contemplation before entering into a conflicted situation?

Can we sustain the peace of contemplation in our dealings with others? Can we stand back, see as God sees, become the peace of God, and not let ourselves and our own attitudes get sucked into the situation?

As you are aware, contemplation changes us. As God enters into our lives more, He becomes greater and we become lesser. He takes over. As in the words of the song it is “No longer I, but Christ who lives within me.”³

Richard Rohr, OFM, identifies this as the “Indwelling of the Holy Spirit which is realized by surrender and trust of a divine union which is already given.”⁴ Christ takes over the negotiations for peace and we become bystanders. We begin to look at the situation with the mind of God and not take things personally. It is His work, not ours! Therefore, we are not committed to a specific resolution. God is present in the situation, and it is His love that transforms, reconciles and pardons.

Contemplation also brings us to a place where we do not prejudge – for we have experienced the mercy of God for our own sins. As our father Francis puts it: “we should be firmly convinced that nothing belongs to us except [our] vices and sins”⁵; everything else is God’s. Our mind is freed to see as God sees...to see even our enemies as a beloved child of God. In the words of our Rule, we are able to “trust in the presence of the divine seed in everyone.” Everything is no longer black or white. It is the love of God which transforms.

It has been said that all peace is relational.

Peace is made between individuals.

There can be no peace when there is injustice between people.

There can be no peace when arrogance exists or attitudes of “I know better than you” are present.

Peace comes when mutual respect and love exist and when understanding and compassion overrule anger and hatred... God’s peace heals and reconciles.

Practically speaking, however, seeking unity through fraternal dialogue is never easy. It tries our soul and challenges us to conform to Christ. Didn’t Francis say: “Our friends, then, are all those who unjustly afflict upon us trials and ordeals, shame and injuries, sorrows and torments, martyrdom and death; we must love them greatly for we will possess eternal life because of what they bring us?”⁶

There is an exercise which I use to help me realize the divine seed in everyone. When faced with discord with another, I intensify my prayer life.

I throw myself at the feet of God and ask Him for the grace to forgive and to be freed from feelings of anger and resentment. I then imagine God holding the other in His embrace, loving him and caring for him. I think of the good qualities of the other person and I am reminded that indeed, that person is beloved by God just as I am. I pray that I can see with the eyes of God, instead of my own. With prayer, my relationships improve because my attitude has changed. God transforms through His love and pardon.

God's wisdom surely is the wisdom of St. Francis' Peace Prayer: for it is by dying (to self) that we are born to eternal life (unity with Him)!

REFERENCES:

- 1 SFO Rule, 2 #17
- 2 SFO Rule, 2 #8
- 3 Music & text, Bob Hurt,
"No Longer I" 1990.
- 4 Richard Rohr, OFM,
*The Naked Now:
Learning to See as the Mystics See*
New York Crossroad, 2009, 138.
- 5 Early Rule, Ch. XVII, 7
- 6 Early Rule Ch. XXII, 3-4