



Conference of National Spiritual Assistants

DAILY CONVERSION OF HEART OUR WAY OF LIFE

By Fr. Kevin M. Queally, TOR



United by their vocation as "brothers and sisters of penance" and motivated by the dynamic power of the gospel, let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the Gospel itself calls "conversion." Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily. – OFS Rule, Article #7

During a recent Regional Visitation, I gave a continuing formation session on conversion as the charism of our common Third Order, both Regular and Secular (now OFS). It seems like this is a good opportunity to share some of this material. In a sense, as the Regional Spiritual Assistant in that Region pointed out, a Visitation is meant to “remind us of who we are.”

In July, during a presentation to the friars of the Province of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus of the Third Order Regular, the presenter reminded us that our charism connects us to the larger Order, and that the charism feeds our spirituality. It helps us to carry out the prescriptions in Matthew 25, for example, moving from prayer to action. In the case of the Third Order of Saint Francis of Penance, this charism might be referred to as “**conversion**.”

An understanding of the word “*penance*” would be very helpful here, enabling us to understand clearly what it is we mean when we use that word. In a little book by Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM Cap., called *The Secret of Saint Francis of Assisi*, published by Zenit, on pages 25 and 26 we see this: “...the Poverello almost always speaks of ‘doing penance.’ Celano tells us that ‘he then began to preach penance to all with such a fervent and joyful attitude. (Prima Vita, 13) ... Francis preached, recommended and begged his hearers to do penance.”

The preacher to the Papal Household since 1980 is reminding us of the early days of Saint Francis’ religious life. He asks the reader to understand what the Saint meant by “penance,” admitting that he himself had misunderstood the meaning for a long time. It refers not only to the sacrament, or to an action. (Fr. Raniero notes that the Saint does not say,

“Do penances” but to “Do penance,” *i.e.*, *poenitentiam agere*.) The root of the word comes from *metanoia*, meaning to turn around, change direction. This is the word in the original Greek which came into the Latin translations as *poenitentia*, which Fr. Raniero says would rightly be translated “be converted” or “repent.”

Saint Bonaventure, in his *Legenda Maior* (“Major Life of Saint Francis”) says the following:

“For set on fire by the fervor of his preaching, a great number of people bound themselves by new laws of penance, according to the *Rule* which they received from the man of God. Christ’s servant decided to name this way of life the **Order of the Brothers of Penance**. As the road of penance is common to all who are striving toward heaven, so this way of life admits clerics and lay, virgins and married of both sexes. How meritorious it is before God is clear from the numerous miracles performed by some of its members.”

Here we see confirmed the historic roots of the Third Order as welcoming all persons, but also, very importantly, its basis in “penance.”

Fr. Raffaele Pazzelli, TOR, in his book *The Third Order and Saint Francis*, notes that the foundations of the Third Order reach far back into history, to the times of the Roman persecutions. Those who denied the faith but later wanted to return to the Church when the persecutions were over were obliged to “do penance.” This included dressing simply and performing the works of mercy. Fr. Roland Faley, TOR, renowned Scripture scholar and former TOR Minister General, said that the “Order of Penance” waxed and waned over the centuries. Those drawn to follow were not only persons returning to the Church, but those who found meaning in continual conversion. There being no active religious life for women at that time, the Order attracted recluses, hermits, widows and many others. He says that Saint Francis initially joined the loosely organized “Order of Penance,” referring to Celano’s account of Francis sending out the friars. Celano says that when the friars asked how they should identify themselves, Francis said, “Say you

are penitents from the city of Assisi.” Of course, he went on to found the “First Order,” but the Order of Penance became what we have known as the Third Order.

In his doctoral dissertation, published under the title *De Illis Qui Faciunt Penitentiam (Concerning Those Who Do Penance)*, Fr. Robert Stewart, OFM, writes on the development of the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order. He maintains that the key to understanding the OFS Rule is to look at it through the prism of the Prologue to the Rule. Remember that the revised *Rules* of both the Third Order Regular (1982) and Secular Franciscan Order (1978) share the same Prologue! In this Prologue, addressed “to those who do penance,” we read that it is also addressed to: “All who love the Lord with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind, with all their strength (cf. Mk 12:30), and love their neighbors as themselves (cf. Mt 22:39) and hate their bodies with their vices and sins, and receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and produce worthy fruits of penance.” The rest of the Rule then makes sense as the penitents (we in the

Third Order) “do these things,” (next line in the Prologue) and strive to produce those **worthy fruits of penance**.

Given all of this, it makes sense that an older, more complete name for the Third Order Regular was *Third Order Regular of Saint Francis of Penance*. We cannot forget our heritage as “penitents” (a sobriquet Brother Bill Short, OFM, used in a presentation to the TOR friars in July). We receive from our predecessors in the Third Order the charism of conversion, the admonition to dress simply, and the call to practice the works of mercy. It is not by accident that so many of the ministries in which we feel called to engage, e.g., soup kitchens and prison ministry, fall firmly within the works of mercy.

I come to an end of my 12 years with the National Fraternity. I thank you all who have been so kind to me over these years. It has almost always been a wonderful, inspiring and life-giving experience. I will continue praying for you all with a very grateful heart.

CNSA Annual Meeting

St Francis Retreat House in Easton, PA, September 13-17, 2015



From left to right, standing: Fr Christopher Panagoplos, TOR, incoming TOR representative; Cyl Maljan-Herbelin, OFS, Executive Secretary; Fr Kevin Queally, TOR, outgoing TOR representative; John Sanborn, OFS, Treasurer.
Seated: Br Robert Brady, OFM, President-in-Turn; Robert Herbelin, OFS, accompanying his wife;
Fr Matthias Wesnofske, OFM Cap.