



Office of the Passion

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Francis strove his whole life to love Christ and to imitate his love. Ultimately, Christ's love had its most profound showing in the Crucifixion. It is here that we meet an image of Christ that held so much meaning for Francis. Christ's ultimate act of love was an act of total self-giving. "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13). Francis' vocation begins and culminates in the Cross. He first heard the call "to rebuild my house" as he was praying before the San Damiano Crucifix; his vocation culminated in his receiving the stigmata on La Verna. The power of the Cross held a unique place in Francis' journey. He began from it and constantly journeyed toward it, but he never did so alone. He always walked the journey with his Lord, the poor Crucified One. Nowhere is this more apparent than a meditative reading of Francis' Office of the Passion. We are aware, from Celano, that Francis prayed the Divine Office every day. In addition though, he also prayed the Office of the Passion. What is it? The Office of the Passion consists of fifteen "psalms," prayers of the heart that Francis wrote to commemorate different events of Jesus' life.

For Lent, we will focus on the first seven of these "psalms." In them, Francis tries to accompany Jesus, as best as he is able, from his agonizing hours in the Garden of Gethsemane to Calvary and through to his Resurrection. He tries to enter into each of these spaces where Jesus is communicating with his Father. Francis chooses, from the psalms, particular verses to give voice to his comprehension of what Jesus might have been praying to his Father. Francis evokes what he felt were the emotions of Jesus as he faced his final hours, the disbelief of human betrayal and his impending death. He tried to imagine Jesus' anxieties, Jesus' desires, Jesus' fears, Jesus' frustrations, and ultimately, Jesus' complete trust in the Father.

Francis' Psalm One deals with Jesus' agony in the Garden; here we encounter Francis' comprehension of what transpired between Jesus and the Father.

Francis' Psalm Two supposes Jesus' thoughts when he was with the Sanhedrin; there is no one to support him.

Francis' Psalm Three portrays Jesus' thoughts as they might have been, as he entered into the morning of his death, praising God for this new morning.

Francis' Psalm Four recounts Francis' conception of Jesus' thoughts during his trial before Pilate; not only his enemies revile him, but even his country men.

Francis' Psalm Five encounters Jesus on the Cross, his thoughts of near hopelessness, his recognition of how he is perceived by others, his plea to the Father for aid.

Francis' Psalm Six speaks of Jesus' last words with his Father, his most intimate; here we encounter the Transitus, Jesus' passing from Death to Life.

Francis' Psalm Seven has Francis addressing all peoples and creation, praising God for the wonders that have been accomplished by Jesus' death.

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By praying this Office, we are given a unique opportunity to enter into Francis' personal relationship with Jesus at this most profound period of Jesus' human existence. We are praying with the words Francis actually chose for prayer. We are entering into his spiritual journey.

