

SECULAR FRANCISCAN LIFE TODAY¹ Part IV

By F. Javier Orozco, SFO

Most High,²
glorious God,
enlighten the darkness of my heart
and give me
true faith,
certain hope,
and perfect charity,
sense and knowledge,
Lord,
that I may carry out
Your holy and true command.

**Image Four: “that I may carry
out Your holy and true command”**

As a final prayer, this fourth image really summarizes well what a Secular Franciscan life can be about. Paul says to the community at Corinth that if he has not loved he is nothing more than a noisy gong, a clanging cymbal. What I take him to mean by these words is that above all love is key to a Christian vocation, no matter what particularities our life takes on. Similarly for us Franciscans, our Christian vocation is already mapped in our baptismal waters: who we are and who we become is intimately connected to love in obedience. As Franciscans, we profess publicly that we bind ourselves to a life rooted in the Gospels and a Gospel lived out in our secular vocation. Our Franciscan life today is a ‘loving obedience’ in the sense of right listening or a constant willingness to put ourselves under the life of the Gospel. As Franciscans we publicly profess that our values are different, not because we are better, but because we seek and want to be better. We know from our Church’s teaching that holiness is a universal vocation, open to our particular form of life. So our desire to better our life is simply a manifestation of our ecclesial vocation.

Seeking to be better includes the recognition that we belong to a community within a community. For our Br. Francis this meant - and quite publicly -

putting his earthly life in order; symbolically he did this when he called God his ‘Father,’ and in so doing realigned his personal-familial loyalties. I suspect that for many of us the road to becoming a Secular Franciscan was similar to Br. Francis experience - for some of us less dramatic, but non the less just as significant. Many of us have had to explain to our families, friends and colleagues what exactly we were doing when we professed as Franciscan. While our family and friendship confrontations were not as dramatic as Francis’ and Clare’s, I am sure many of our close companions share a glimpse or two of bewilderment or even confusion—not always sure what we were doing but being supportive of our actions. The reason I am bringing this up is to simply highlight the fact that Franciscan life today, as always, points to a radical commitment to be attentive to the possibility of an alternative lifestyle: one that desires deeply the will of our Abba or Father and Mother.

The prayer says, “that I may carry out your holy and true command.” I take this to mean that as Franciscans we are no longer our own; at least we don’t want to simply be our own. We want to belong and belong to the Kingdom. I certainly cannot speak for you, but I can share with you my own personal feelings here. I know for myself that doing another’s will is never easy; be it God’s will. The world I belong to often tells me that the only way to get ahead is by pushing and advocating for my own rights as an individual; the world I live in tells me that success is measured by my own accomplishments; the world I work in tells me that my curriculum vitae or resume needs to be filled with clear action verbs and projects that reflect how good I am; the world I move in never ceases to tell me just how much I truly deserve for being me! As Franciscans, today, we belong to a community of friendly companions whose responsibility includes reminding ourselves that the values of this world are not always the Gospel values, so we walk together listening to each other on the road we call our Franciscan Way, a via that seek to place God’s voice at the center: “that we may carry out your holy and true command.”

Conclusion:

Secular Franciscan Life Today is both different and the same. It is different because we live in a different world: our world today is a Global community that demands our attention. Our secularity as Franciscans is no longer localized by small town boundaries in Assisi, on the contrary, today, our ‘secularity’ our worldliness is of Global perspective. Brother Francis

¹ This paper was presented at a Chapter of Ministers for the Mother Cabrini Region of The Secular Franciscan Order held on Saturday May 15, 2004.

² *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents; Volume I: The Saint.* Edited by Regis J. Armstrong, OFM Cap., J.A. Wayne Hellmann, OFM Conv., William J. Short, OFM. New City Press, 1999.

and Sister Clare today find themselves in the virtual world of the Internet; they find themselves speaking languages that go beyond the dialects of Italy. A Secular Franciscan Life Today means that we remain open to the world, that is to say, remain being who we are, seculars: in and for the world - no matter how big or small our cosmos becomes. And this is where our similarity or sameness lies. As Franciscans we bring with us the best of who we are, our Franciscan Tradition: Prayer, Dialogue, Faith, Humanity, Joy, Sensibility, and a deep sense of community. We are "Secular." Today more than ever, we cannot abandon our worldliness or cosmic awareness. "Most High, glorious God, enlighten the darkness of my heart and give me true faith, certain hope and perfect charity, sense and knowledge Lord, that I may carry out your holy and true command." Indeed a prayer to live by.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus

By Patrick Mendés, SFO, Minister
Mother Cabrini Region

Franciscans have a long-standing history of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Friar Provinces are dedicated to the Sacred Heart and there is a community of Franciscan Sisters of the Sacred Heart. No Regions are dedicated to the Sacred Heart, but Divine Mercy Region can be included, since devotion to Divine Mercy relates to the mercy from the Heart of Jesus. We have only to look at the image of Divine Mercy to know this.

St. Clare greeted the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament many times each day.

St. Bonaventure, perhaps our greatest theologian, wrote: "Since we have reached the most sweet Heart of Jesus, and it is good for us to abide in it, let us not readily turn away from it. How good, how sweet it is to dwell in Thy Heart, oh good Jesus! Who is there who would not desire this pearl? I would rather give all else, all my thoughts and all the affections of my soul in exchange for it, casting my whole mind into the Heart of my good Jesus." He also wrote: "Who is there who would not love this wounded heart? Who would not love in return, Him, who loves so much?"

When Blessed Baptista Varano, the holy Poor Clare, asked Jesus, how great was the sorrow of His heart, he said, "As great as the love, which I bear toward my creatures."

Jacopone da Todi, the Franciscan composer of the hymn *Stabat Mater*, also wrote a hymn, which refers

to Christ writing the names of devout souls in His heart.

While St. Francis does not refer to the Sacred Heart, specifically, in any of his writings, we can be certain that he was deeply devoted to Christ, poor and crucified and, of course, in all of Francis' life, he mirrored the love and compassion of Jesus.

While devotion to the Sacred Heart is much older than our Order, we find references to the Heart of Jesus in the writings of the early fathers of the Church, throughout history.

Of course, it was St. Gertrude, the Benedictine, who wrote extensively and tirelessly to promote devotion to the Sacred Heart in the middle ages.

Then later, in the 17th Century, St Margaret Mary Alacoque, the Visitation nun, would be called to the chapel by St. Francis, where she would have the first apparition of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and foster the devotion to the Sacred Heart in the manner we now have it.

Called to daily conversion, by our SFO Rule, we have the opportunity to make "reparation to the Heart of Jesus," as He asked. The familiar Morning Offering to the Sacred Heart is a good start for our day and a focus for living our vocations, stemming from the primary virtue of compassion.

May the Sacred Heart of Jesus surround you with His love and fill your lives with His abundant blessings now and especially on the Feast of the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

DEAD SEA SCROLLS

By Dottie Alfred, SFO
Our Lady of Guadalupe Fraternity
Tallahassee, FL

Sifting sands stream relentlessly
seaward in the desert.

Years upon years eroded time
in long-forgotten caves.

The message of the Messiah
had long before entered civilization
through Tradition's pious affirmation.

And then, center-stage,
a lonely Bedouin shepherd found the Scrolls,

Gave civilization treasures beyond art,
Original extant manuscripts from Qumran,
Confirmation of belief unfolds.