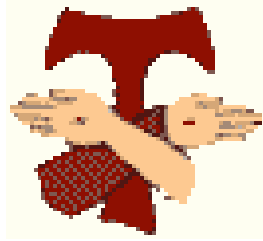


What is Conversion for Third Order Franciscans?



Fr. Kevin Queally, TOR

One of my joys in working with the members of the Secular Franciscan Order has been the sharing of life with my sisters and brothers. There is a wonderful bond based on following Christ in the same way as Saint Francis did. However, there is more.

For the first few hundred years of the existence of the Third Order of Saint Francis, there was no juridical distinction between those who lived in community life (regular) and those who continued to live in their homes (secular). We were separated into two Orders after a few hundred years, yet we still share much, such as the same introduction to our Rules from the Letter to the Faithful; our common patron saints, Louis and Elizabeth; our common call to conversion of life.

In the SFO Rule #7, we read: "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 calls 'conversion.'** Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily." Similarly, the TOR Rule #2 says: "With all in the holy Catholic and apostolic Church who wish to serve the Lord, the brothers and sisters of this order are to persevere in true faith and penance. They wish to **live this evangelical conversion of life** in a spirit of prayer, of poverty, and of humility. Therefore, let them abstain from all evil and persevere to the end in doing good because God the Son himself will come again in glory and will say to all who acknowledge, adore and serve him in sincere repentance: 'Come blessed of my Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world.'" (Mt. 25:34) (Bold added.)

There continue to be parallels in our Rules. It might be good to look at the parallels and connections during formation! (If you don't have access to it, the TOR Rule is available on the web: <http://www.franciscanfriarstor.com/theorder/Holy%20Rule/index.htm>) We all look to our Rules for inspiration and guidance. I have suggested, in a few visitations around the region and around the nation, that we read and study the Rule more regularly. One practice might be to read one number of the Rule for each day of the month and then reflect on how I am living it out. It works better for the SFOs, since there are 26 paragraphs in the SFO Rule. The TOR Rule

has 32 paragraphs! In any case, the remaining days of the month could be used for reading the prologue and reflecting on it.

As you probably know from your formation process, all active Franciscan sisters have the TOR Rule. Additionally, many groups of Franciscan brothers follow the TOR Rule. Putting together these groups with the TOR friars and all the SFOs, we have the whole Third Order. Together also, we must reflect on how we live out this call to conversion of life, how we make it manifest in our lives, in the Church, and in the world around us by means of our apostolate or out-reach. The SFO Rule has quite a few ways to do this right within it. I will give one example and try to make a parallel with the TOR Rule. In the SFO Rule # 19, we read: "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." The TOR Rule #30 says this: "As they announce peace with their lips, let them be careful to have it even more within their own hearts. No one should be roused to wrath or insult on their account, rather all should be moved to peace, goodwill and mercy because of their gentleness. The sisters and brothers are called to heal the wounded, to bind up those who are bruised, and to reclaim the erring." Perhaps you can see a parallel here, and, additionally, the words of the TOR Rule may resonate within you. Surely they start with something from Francis, but they show ways in which the Third Order can find commonality.

Human nature makes it difficult at times for people to accept change. For us, change is our calling. At times we must uncover the areas in our lives where we need conversion if we are to be true to our calling. This is a difficult process. None of us likes to admit that we were wrong, headed in a wrong direction or had an erroneous way of thinking. However, if we are true Third Order members we must push ourselves toward that growth, that change of heart.

As this is being written, our great season of conversion, Lent, is coming to an end. We have spent the weeks of Lent in an attempt to prepare for the joy of Easter, the celebration of the Resurrection. Our hearts have been challenged to repent and to grow. This attitude is one which we as Franciscans take with us through the Church year. May the blessings of the Easter season fill your hearts and carry you through the years to come with courage to repent, to convert, to grow, to change! May the Lord give you peace!