

# Faithful Living

## Letters for homebound Secular Franciscans and others

By Tom Bello, SFO  
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*From our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI:*

Despite the fact that illness is part of human existence, we never manage to get used to it, not only because sometimes it comes to be burdensome and grave, but essentially because we are made for life, for complete life. Precisely our "internal instinct" makes us think of God as plenitude of life, and even more, as eternal and perfect Life. When we are tested by sickness and our prayers seem in vain, doubt wells up in us and, filled with anguish, we ask ourselves: What is God's will?

It is precisely to this question that we find an answer in the Gospel. For example, in the passage of today we read: "He cured many who were sick with various diseases, and he drove out many demons, not permitting them to speak because they knew him." (Mark 1:34) In another passage from St. Matthew, it says: "He went around all of Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom, and curing every disease and illness among the people." (Matthew 4:23)

Jesus does not leave room for doubt: God - whose face he himself has revealed - is the God of life, who frees us from all evil. The signs of this, his power of love are the healings that he carries out: He thus shows that the Kingdom of God is near, restoring men and women to their full integrity in spirit and body. I refer to these healings as signs: They guide us toward the message of Christ, they guide us toward God and make us understand that man's truest and deepest illness is the absence of God, who is the fount of truth and love. And only reconciliation with God can give us true healing, true life, because a life without love and without truth would not be a true life. The Kingdom of God is precisely the presence of truth and love, and thus it is healing in the depths of our being.

Thanks to the action of the Holy Spirit, the work of Jesus is prolonged in the mission of the Church. Through the sacraments, it is Christ who communicates his life to the multitude of brothers and sisters, as he cures and comforts innumerable sick people through so many activities of health care service that Christian communities promote with fraternal charity, thereby showing the face of God, his love. It is true: How many Christians all over the world - priests, religious and laypeople - have given and continue giving their hands,

eyes and hearts to Christ, true physician of bodies and souls!

Let us pray for all the ill, especially for those who are most grave, and who can in no way take care of themselves, but depend entirely on the care of others; may every one of them be able to experience, in the solicitude of those who are near to them, the power of the love of God and the richness of his grace that saves us. Mary, health of the sick, pray for us. *His Angelus Address on Sunday, February 8, 2009.*

## THE APOSTOLATE OF SUFFERING

By Delia Banchs, SFO

### *The way of perfection passes by way of the Cross.*

Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2015.

Brother Francis' apostolic experience continued from the very beginning of his conversion until his death, and for him, the whole world was the "theatre" of his apostolate! Following closely the example of the apostles, Francis sought personal holiness, giving glory to God and preaching conversion wherever he went. During the early years of his apostolate, Francis began by announcing peace, doing penance, fasting, serving the lepers and rebuilding churches. As the fraternity of friars grew, Francis' apostolate, like that of St. Paul (1 Thes.), became a service of ordinary work for his daily bread, of assistance to the poor, of continual prayer, and of suffering. This service or apostolate of suffering, due to lack of rest, illness, persecutions and interior spiritual anguish, began early in Francis' call to conversion.

During his imprisonment in Perugia in 1203-1204, Francis had his first serious illness. After his conversion, the itinerant life and malnutrition left him more susceptible to tuberculosis, anemia, stomach ulcers, liver and gall bladder problems. During his trip to Spain in 1215, he suffered from fevers, inability to speak for 3 days and a general physical collapse. After a series of eye infections beginning in 1219, Francis suffered from glaucoma and cataracts, which eventually left him totally blind by 1224. Francis was plagued by recurrent severe fevers from 1220-1221, possibly caused by malaria. In the fall of 1224, bearing the wounds of the Stigmata, Francis returned to Assisi giving thanks to God for granting him the grace to endure the constant pain and total blindness.

Often bedridden "by sister infirmities," his general declining health and bouts with depression, Francis had to depend more and more upon his faithful brothers Leo, Angelo, Rufino, John and Masseo. Despite his poor health, Francis continued to be faithful in his vocation, taking an active interest in the wellbeing of the Order and its ministry.

"I worked with my own hands, and I am still determined to work; and with all my heart I want all the friars to be busy with some kind of work..." The Testament of Francis, 1226

**The Canticle of the Creatures**, written during Francis' final years, give testimony to his strength of will to persevere and dwell in a climate of grace - his perfect joy!

*"All praise be yours, my Lord...through those who endure sickness and trial.*

*Happy those who endure in peace; By you, Most High, they will be crowned."* The Canticle of the Creatures, 1224

St. Clare and St. Anthony, contemporaries of Francis, also endured many years of severe illnesses. Clare, bedridden for many of her final years, continued to be involved in the administration of her Poor Ladies, and received papal approval of her Rule just prior to her death in 1253.

*"I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."*

St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, 12:1

All of us will experience times of difficulties and illness during our lives. Illnesses may even prevent us occasionally from active participation in fraternity life, yet, as Franciscans, we can take solace from the examples of Franciscan life as lived by the many blessed before us. We can offer our very selves and our sufferings to our Heavenly Father as our spiritual worship. If like our Brother Francis, we can compose a canticle of praise with our lives, whatever our circumstances may be, we will experience a climate of grace and perfect joy.

*"Praise and bless my Lord, and give him thanks, and serve him with great humility."*

The Canticle of the Creatures St. Francis of Assisi

Further reading: St. Francis & the Cross by R. Cantalamessa, OFM Cap. and Cardinal C. M. Martini, SJ

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### Quotes:

*"Blessed is he who expects no gratitude,  
for he shall not be disappointed."*

William Bennett

*"I don't want to achieve immortality by making the Hall  
of Fame. I want to achieve immortality by not dying."*

Leo Durocher