



National Formation Commission

The Rest of the Story

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Traveling around the Regions helping with *For Up to Now* “FUN” workshops, I can say I have spoken a lot about the basis of Franciscan Spirituality, namely relationship and kenotic love.

As a refresher, kenotic love is the nature of the Father made visible through the life of Jesus and the actions of the Holy Spirit. Kenosis is literally “self-emptying,” or perhaps easier to understand, complete “self-giving.” What a love we have in our God, who gives Himself for love of us and out of a desire to be loved by us in return.

We speak of this great self-giving when we speak of Incarnation, Passion and Eucharist. These are the actions of God, (the original intention for creation), whereby God becomes one of us, for us, one of us, forever with us, and one of us, for love of us. We speak of the process of God constantly giving Himself away (kenosis) to fill us. And it is our re-filling of us we do not speak so much of. The giving is sacrificial, penitential, somehow appropriate for a fragile, broken and sinful creature, but it is only half of the story — the other half is what mystics speak of, and maybe we should too!

This second half of the story, the other part of the kenosis mystery, is *theosis* or in English divinization. We ask for it at every Mass offered by the Church: **“By the mystery of this water and wine, may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled Himself to share in our humanity”**. Though not often said out loud, it is pronounced during the preparation of the gifts, as the water and wine are mingled, becoming one.

In the workshops, I often use the Icon called the Rublev Trinity. If you look closely or at a larger print, you will notice a small box in the table between the Father (red) and the Holy Spirit (green). Several years ago, I was able to speak to an Orthodox monk about this beautiful visual prayer (Icon). Though neither of us had seen the original, we shared ideas about the box, his being the idea of a door, mine, (from various readings), a mirror. Both images work exceptionally well, but I like mirror better. As a pilgrim might approach a holy relic to venerate it, he/she would normally assume the posture of a penitent, a slow reverent approach on bended knee, not just out of sorrow for personal sins, but in the mind of one seeking a deeper understanding and participation in both truth and mystery.



What is sought is not only forgiveness, but a change in perspective, change of heart, transformation, so that the words of the Gospel are no longer hidden in the parables of antiquity. The Gospel becomes NOW!

So in this prayerful, meditative approach to the "Trinity" one begins to see a reflection in this little mirror, and yes it is a door — a door into the very table fellowship or Life of the Trinity. *How about that for a personal invitation from our God!* I hold to my idea that it is actually a polished mirror, because as we draw closer the image of self becomes more evident. The image of a broken fragile human being, a finite contingent creation, me, and I/we are being invited to recline at this table. We are being invited to the table of God, not in some imagined heaven of soul space, but in the here and now and in our fullness or emptiness. The image in the mirror is each of us, and we are shown entering life in the Trinity. Accepting God's personal invitation!

If you read Bonaventure's *Itinerarium (Mind's Journey into God)* you will notice that Bonaventure is leading us on a path much like the Icon of the Trinity, a path that leads us to the conformity Francis and Clare speak of as imitation of the Christ. Imitation not to just be a copy, but imitation in the medieval understanding, to be transformed into. We are called in our vocation to become, like Francis, an "*alter Christus*," another Christ. Allowing ourselves to lose ourselves and to be transformed is to enter the Trinity, or the mind of God, or the imitation of Christ — this is the crux of our profession — to finally be not just for God, but to be God's own!

The final words of *The Journey of the Mind into God*, read in the light of St Bonaventure's theology of the Cross, are a clear and realistic expression of Franciscan spirituality:

"If you seek in what manner these things occur (that is, the ascent towards God) interrogate grace, not doctrine; desire, not understanding; the groan of praying, not the study of reading... not light, but the fire totally inflaming, transferring one into God" (*Itinerarium* VII 6).

Bonaventure's theology of the Cross, must lead us to understand Francis own love for creation and his joy at the beauty of God's creation. The whole creation speaks loudly of God, of the good and beautiful God; of his love! That is the whole purpose of *theosis*, to enter into the mind and heart of God, to be transformed into love and beauty (God), and to place this incredible gift into the mission of the Church.

Here transformed in Love itself, we can fully realize the charge given us by Pope (now Blessed) John Paul II in his audience for the Secular Franciscan Order:

"The Church expects from the unique Franciscan Secular Order a great service to the cause of the Kingdom of God in the world today. . . . so as to present yourself to the world as a "community of love" (SFO, Rule, art. 26). John Paul II 22 November 2002.

Let us then and with one mind fulfil our charge

- ❖ **"Make present the charism of Saint Francis in the life and in the mission of the Church (Rule of the OFS, Chapter 1: #1)**
- ❖ **Become sacraments of Christ and make visible the Father's Love**
- ❖ **Evangelize - to build a more just and fraternal world (Rule Chapter 2 #14) *The Church and the world are waiting for a courageous and effective response from us.***

*Many Blessings to all,
Fitz*

