



THE NATIONAL FRATERNITY OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER - USA

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

National Minister, Tom Bello, OFS

LADY, HOLY QUEEN, HOLY MARY, MOTHER OF GOD, VIRGIN!

"I greet you, Lady, Holy Queen, Holy Mary, Mother of God, Virgin...chosen by the most holy Father of heaven; consecrated to holiness thorough His most holy and beloved Son and the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. In you was and is the whole fullness of grace and everything that is good." St. Francis.

"Mary, mother of Jesus, please be a mother to me now." Blessed Mother Teresa.

Beloved National Family, May the Lord give us Peace!

Please permit me in this last article that I will write as National Minister to focus on the Blessed Mother, my Mother, your Mother, the Mother of our Order, the Fifth Gospel.

Of course, we all know the names of the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

How many of us know the name of the fifth Gospel: Mary?

She is the Gospel written by God through Her life.

We are each called to be living Gospels like Mary.

Mary is our mother in faith. She is the first believer in Jesus Christ, the Son announced to her and conceived in her womb by the Holy Spirit.

Our Secular Franciscan Rule Four calls us devote ourselves "especially to careful reading of the gospel, going from gospel to life and life to the gospel."

As the fifth Gospel, as the first believer, as our Mother, Mary can lead us all into a closer encounter with all the Gospels and with her Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Our Secular Franciscan Rule Nine tells us of the great love our Father Francis had for the Blessed Mother: "She was embraced by Francis with indescribable love and declared the protectress and advocate of his



family. The Secular Franciscans should express their ardent love for her by imitating her complete self-giving and by praying earnestly and confidently."

Blessed Thomas of Celano, whom Franciscan scholars identify as directly knowing St. Francis, supports our Rule when he writes and praises:

"Toward the Mother of Jesus he [St. Francis] was filled with an inexpressible love, because it was she who made the Lord of majesty our brother. He sang special Praises to her, poured out prayers to her, offered her his affections, so many and so great that the tongue of man cannot recount them. But what

delights us most, he made her the advocate of the order and placed under her wings the sons he was about to leave that she might cherish them and protect them to the end.

"Hail, advocate of the poor! Fulfill toward us your office of protectress until the time set by the Father."

Having lost my own Mother just in the last year and facing my own possible loss to this world, I feel myself drawn more and more to the Blessed Mother. I feel her consoling presence and find great peace whenever I pray to her.

I pray that none of you ever has serious surgery requiring total anesthesia. My health had always been good until this past June when my small intestines "telescoped" (in the words of the doctors), and I couldn't process any solid foods through my system. A wonderful female surgeon, a wife and mom and Catholic, removed four dangerous tumors, leaving another ten smaller and less dangerous ones for treatment at a later date, all of which, when biopsied, confirmed what the doctors had feared would be

metastatic melanoma, which had first appeared as just a small dot on my back, easily removed, in 2005.

When I woke in the hospital after the surgery in a groggy consciousness, there was honestly nothing I could do for the next 12 hours except pray the Rosary and talk to my Mother.

Those prayers gave and have given and, I believe, will always give peace.

As we live in the Americas, I have always had a special devotion to our Blessed Mother's appearances to St. Juan Diego, the miraculous image of herself that she left on his tilma as Our Lady of Guadalupe for us, and her consoling words to him and to all.

Much has been written about the history of this appearance, the miracle of this image on the tilma and the conversation between Juan and the Blessed Lady. I would encourage your online or other research for your own personal faith formation and consolation.

More importantly, I would encourage your greater prayer and devotion to the Blessed Mother, our Mother, my Mother. I try always to carry this image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, along with an image of the Sacred Heart, St. Francis and St. Anthony on my person, and if you could come to my bedroom where I am writing you right now, you could find her and them immediately!

I pray to her daily, and she always takes me closer to her Son, closer to Peace.

If you don't want my advice, I give you the advice of one of my favorite 20th Century Franciscan saints, whose shrine, church and museum I have all visited and prayed at in Niepokalanów, Poland: St. Maximilian Kolbe, OFM Conventual, who wrote:

"It is beyond all doubt that Mary's will represents to us the will of God himself. By dedicating ourselves to her we become in her hands instruments of God's mercy even as she was such an instrument in God's hands. We should let ourselves be guided and led by Mary and rest quiet and secure in her hands. She will watch out for us, provide for us, answer our needs of body and spirit; she will dissolve all our difficulties and worries."

Of course, our Mother Mary continues to care and pray for me and you and all of creation. She continues to be that fifth Gospel as she "treasures the entire life of Jesus in her heart," just as Pope Francis shared with us this past Pentecost on May 24, 2015, in

his beautiful Encyclical "*Laudato, Si*" (Praise to You, O Lord) when he wrote at Number 241:

"Mary, the Mother who cared for Jesus, now cares with maternal affection and pain for this wounded world. Just as her pierced heart mourned the death of Jesus, so now she grieves for the sufferings of the crucified poor and for the creatures of this world laid waste by human power. Completely transfigured, she now lives with Jesus, and all creatures sing of her fairness. She is the Woman, 'clothed in the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars' (Rev 12:1). Carried up into heaven, she is the Mother and Queen of all creation. In her glorified body, together with the Risen Christ, part of creation has reached the fullness of its beauty. She treasures the entire life of Jesus in her heart (cf. Lk 2:19,51), and now understands the meaning of all things. Hence, we can ask her to enable us to look at this world with eyes of wisdom."

Permit me to leave you with my undying love, gratitude and prayers this depiction of the conversation between our Blessed Mother and St. Juan Diego that I read when in need, which recently has been frequently:

Know for certain that I am the perfect and perpetual Virgin Mary, Mother of the True God ... here I will show and offer all my love, my compassion and protection to the people.

I am your merciful Mother, the Mother of all who love me, of those who cry to me, of those who have confidence in me.

Here I will hear their weeping and their sorrows ... their necessities and misfortunes. Listen and let it penetrate your heart.

Do not be troubled or weighed down with grief. Do not fear any illness or vexation, anxiety or pain.

Am I not here who am your Mother?

Are you not under my shadow and my protection?

Am I not your fountain of life?

Are you not in the fold of my mantle?

In the crossing of my arms?

Is there anything else you need?