

FRANCISCAN LIVING

The RULE: Our Ministry, Our Mission

By Francine Gikow, OFS

“Oh, how happy and blessed are these men and women when they do these things and persevere in doing them, because ‘the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon them’ and he will make ‘his home and dwelling place among them’...”¹

Our Rule! Our life! Our call to holiness through community and prayer. Our mission: to bring Christ to others by our life and our words.

In his encyclical letter *Gaudete et Exsultate* Pope Francis states “At its core, holiness is experiencing, in union with Christ, the mysteries of his life... our holiness stems from the stature that Christ achieves in us, to the extent that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we model our life on his.”² As we go “from gospel to life and from life to the gospel,”³ we model our life on His as well. That is our ministry.

Our Secular Franciscan Rule is our guide for holiness and ministry. Through the elements of our Rule and our own perseverance in living it, we slowly turn toward Christ and allow, by meditating on His life, union with Him and His Way of living. By penance (or conversion) we turn our focus to God alone by stripping from our life that which restrains us from more perfectly following Christ. By humility, we know who we are as children of God: no more, no less. Poverty allows us to become aware that everything we have has been given by God for His use and that we do not “own” anything by ourselves. We open ourselves to holiness.

Pope Francis states: “Do not be afraid to let yourselves be guided by the Holy Spirit. Holiness does not make you less human, since it is an encounter between your weakness and the power of God’s grace.”⁴ I think we all hesitate to let go of our will and allow the Holy Spirit to work through us. Does God really want *me* to do this? Why me? Pope Francis continues: “...though it may seem obvious, we should remember that holiness consists in a habitual openness to the transcendent, expressed in prayer and adoration.”⁵ When guided by the Holy Spirit, discernment comes in handy. Discernment is a grace.⁶ It “must be born of a readiness to listen: to the Lord and to others, and to

reality itself, which always challenges us in new ways.”⁷ Prayer, listening, and discernment should be the core of ministry.

As Franciscans, however, we are not called to be alone; we are called to live this life in community (or in Franciscan terms: fraternity). Pope Francis describes this well when he says, “Growth in holiness is a journey in community, side by side with others.”⁸ “Each community is called to create a ‘God enlightened space in which to experience the hidden presence of the risen Lord.’”⁹ “A community that cherishes the little details of love, whose members care for one another and create an open and evangelizing environment, is a place where the risen Lord is present, sanctifying it in accordance with the Father’s plan.”¹⁰ Does this sound like your fraternity?

Our Rule is our “handbook” in living the Secular Franciscan spiritual journey. Secular Franciscan living is not about “me,” however. It is evangelical in nature, reaching out to the world to influence and encourage others in the ways of Christ. Like Francis, are we also rebuilding God’s church by our ministry?¹¹

Pope Francis encourages us by saying: “You too need to see the entirety of your life *as mission*. Try to do so by listening to God in prayer and recognizing the signs he gives you.... May you come to realize what that word is, the message of Jesus that God wants to speak to the world by your life. Let yourself be transformed. Let yourself be renewed by the Spirit, so that this can happen, lest you fail in your precious mission.”¹²



We are called by our Rule to ministry.

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Do we listen?

*Can you see ministry in what you do
and how you act?*

*Can you envision your life as "mission"
and as sent by God to the world?*

*For as Jesus prayed to the Father: “As
you sent me into the world, so I send
them into the world.” (Jn 17:18)*

Live in His love!



¹ Letter to All the Faithful: 5.

² *Gaudate et Exsultate*, 20-21.

³ OFS Rule II, 4

⁴ *Gaudate et Exsultate*, 34.

⁵ *op. cit.*, 147.

⁶ *op. cit.*, 170.

⁷ *op. cit.*, 172.

⁸ *op. cit.*, 141

⁹ *op. cit.*, 142

¹⁰ *op. cit.*, 145.

¹¹ OFS Rule, II.6.

¹² *Gaudate et Exsultate*, 23-24, emphasis added.