

## MINISTER'S MESSAGE

*National Minister, Jan Parker, OFS*

### FINDING JOY IN OUR LITTLENESS

As I write my first TAU article as National Minister, I am thinking about each one of you, my brothers and sisters. So many of you have touched my life and made a difference! In this Advent season one of you in particular comes to mind, and that would be Charlie Markus, OFS.

I met Charlie 30 years ago at St. Crispin Friary in St. Louis. We began formation together and professed together in 1988. Charlie was a Navy veteran and a retired factory worker who spent time every day walking around the city. Many referred to him as "Walkin' Charlie."

During our formation, Charlie impressed me so much. One afternoon we were discussing a chapter from Omer Englebert's biography of St. Francis. Charlie pulled out another book from his back pocket. It was "Francis, Brother of the Universe" by Marvel Comics. He opened that comic book and showed us a page that got right to the heart of the matter at hand. It was a "God-moment" that I have never forgotten.

God touches our hearts in the most simple yet profound ways. When God wanted to be close to us, he got right to the heart of the matter. He became one of us. God became human, stepping into our poverty, our littleness, so he could love us with a human heart. So simple, yet so profound.

When our brother Francis wanted to understand this poverty of Christ, he got right to the heart of the matter as well. He set up a manger scene so we could see "with our bodily eyes"<sup>1</sup> the reality of the birth of Jesus. We look upon the Babe of Bethlehem. We begin to understand, and are filled with wonder. Simple, but profound.

What Charlie taught me that day was a lesson in simplicity and the joy of littleness. I needed his Franciscan example then, and I turn to it now again, so many years later.



Life can get complicated. There are many demands on our time. Every day we are busy! We work hard to prove to ourselves that we have it all together. We strive to live up to an identity that the world would applaud – but that is not who we are.

Jesus shows us another way – a way of poverty, of littleness. He comes to us as a Child, as Bread, so we can touch him, love him, hold him, and know the love of the Father. We, too, must come as little children.

Lord, are we poor enough to be your saints? Have we strived to purify our hearts from every tendency and yearning for power and possession? Can we admit that we do not have all the answers? We truly are poor and in need.

Show us our poverty, Lord! Help us to admit that we are in need of you. Help us open our hearts to Christ, to the Eucharist, to one another. Call us to conversion. Then we shall rejoice in our littleness, for God is at work within us!

It is only in this way - in recognizing our poverty – that we truly become who God created us to be. In our littleness, we are free and at peace. We stop grasping. In our poverty, we embody and reflect the peace, love, and joy of Christ. In our poverty, Christ can be born in us – and born in our world!

Following in the footsteps of St. Francis and rejoicing in his littleness, our brother Charlie knew what Christmas was all about. Charlie was famous for saying, "Every morning is Christmas...and every evening is Thanksgiving," and he was right.

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1. "...see with bodily eyes" is a phrase is from *The Life of St. Francis*, by Thomas of Celano, Chapter 30. Chapter 30 is entitled "The Manger He Made in Celebration of the Lord's Birth." I would strongly encourage you to read this Chapter with your fraternity during the Christmas season. It can be found in **Francis of Assisi - The Saint: Early Documents, vol. 1** by Regis J. Armstrong, on page 254; and in other places.