

Francis' Invites Us to Follow in the Footsteps of Jesus Christ

Francis of Assisi received the stigma two years before he died and twenty years since his conversion. After that he endured many illnesses, which for him were a great trial and much tribulation. As with a stone that is destined for the building of the Heavenly Jerusalem, he was trimmed and hammered into shape.

Once there, he lay down, gravely ill as he was yet full of spirit – quite naked upon the bare earth. He desired to show, in accord with the example of eternal wisdom that he had nothing in common with this world.

Stripped of his poor habit, he lay on the ground; he raised his eyes to Heaven, as was his wont, full of expectation of the glories and splendors to come. In doing so, he covered the wound on his side with his hand lest anyone one should chance to see it. Then he asked that they bring him to St Mary's at Portiuncula, so that there where he had received the Spirit of Grace, might be the place where he would breathe forth his spirit to the Creator.

Then he said to the Brothers "I have done what is mine to do: May Christ teach you what is yours (Based on LM XIV, 3 and 2 C 214).

CCFMC Lesson Unit 0 "From the sources"

Francis was a man of Jesus. He dedicated his life to him. To proclaim Jesus' cause, the Kingdom of God became his mission. His principal was God himself. He was so sure about this that he passed on this holy legacy to his Brothers "No one showed me, what I ought to do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me, that I ought to live according the form of the Holy Gospel." (Testament)

What sounds so simple is by far much more difficult. When we strive to understand God's will, we have to – according to Augustine – read two books: first of all the book of life (the signs of the times) and also the bible, i.e. we have to compare the first book (book of life) with the criteria of the bible.

The same applies for the legacy of our founding figures. It is not enough to know the steps of St. Francis and St. Clare. We have to bring them to a correlation with the signs of the times, which means to translate them to our time. This admittedly harbors the danger of making mistakes, but this is the only way to recognize the Franciscan idea and its meaning for our day and age.

The Calling

"Thus did the Lord grant to me, Friar Francis, to begin to do penance, that when I was exceedingly in my sins, to see the lepers seemed a bitter thing to me. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I worked mercy with them.

And when I was fleeing from them, because that seemed to me a bitter thing, it was changed for me to sweetness of soul and body, and afterwards I stayed for a little while and I went forth from the world." (Testament).

In those days

What had happened at this turning point? Leprosy was a widespread disease. Lepers were misshapen, socially deprived and isolated. Francis also had his problems with this fact. "What seemed to me a bitter thing, it was changed for me to sweetness of soul and body. " *Dolcezza* – actually means tenderness, empathy, compassion, solidarity.



Francis starts into a new world, a world of charity, his previous world collapses, the world with top and bottom, with masters and servants. He realizes that this cannot be the real world, the world that God had wanted. He discovers the Gospel as an alternative. It is a reconciled world where the value of humans does not depend on achievement and income; a world in which we can simply make use of the global wealth of God's creation.

Today

What does the world look like today, wanting to bring near Francis' dream again? It is a truly tormented and crucified world: 842 million people suffer from malnutrition according to the latest FAO report. Natural disasters, wars, and Aids are the main reasons for starvation and poverty in the world. 95 % of the 842 million people suffering from starvation live in developing countries. About 40,000 children die from starvation every day (14.6 million per year), 8,000 people die of Aids (2.9 million per year), thereof 2.5 million in Africa alone. In addition, numerous people die due to war, terror, natural disasters, and lifestyle diseases. They die an early, violent death, they are the crucified of our days.

Challenge

Just as Francis discovered his calling in the encounter with the leper, we have to accept the excluded and crucified of today and take a new look at the Gospel from their point of view. This is what Christ teaches us today – the revival of the Franciscan option for the poor.



With this in mind – we would like to wish you a blessed and encouraging Feast of St. Francis

Your CCFMC Center Team in Würzburg

Patricia, Veronica, Andreas, Wolfgang

Bare-footed in the foot-prints of Jesus

The Christ-Experience of Francis and how he followed Him

B. Niklaus Kuster OFM^{Cap}



5 In the footsteps of the Son of Man:

Evangelic Freedom – Part 2

This story also demonstrates how Francis and his early Brotherhood transcribe the Gospel into their own reality. This event probably takes place somewhat later. Francis has returned from Palestine to Italy:

The Poverello once again visits the Eternal City and the Cardinal invites him to dinner. The Bishop and "Signor of Ostia" takes the opportunity to present the meanwhile renowned Brother to his noble kin from the family of the Earls of Segni and also to the closely related prelates. A sumptuous table is laid where the gentlemen meet at lunchtime. Clearly visible for everyone the place of honor for Francis has been set at the side of the host. However, in the company of the noble gentlemen and Excellencies, the modest Brother does not seem to feel too comfortable – or is this caused by the sumptuous table? In any case, he excuses himself for a short while and descends into the alley and sits down with the beggars asking for leftovers for lunch in front of the Cardinal's door. When Francis wooden bowl is also filled with sufficient bread crust and vegetable leftovers, he returns to Hugolin's circle and portions out his gifts to each of the guests and returns to his seat... After the meal, Hugolin takes the Poverello aside, he hugs him and asks him somewhat embarrassed why he had denounced him in this manner with his behavior? "Did I not honor you" –was the reply - "by honoring a greater Master? God himself loves poverty and I want to follow my Master who gave up his wealth and who became poor for our sake".

Poverty as Francis had become fond of in the footsteps of Jesus has a binding force. In contrast Hugolin's wealth has a separating effect. The Poverello conquers the divide between the Cardinal's sumptuous table with his chosen friends and the beggars outside of his door. The „Signor of Ostia", ex officio „Follower of the Disciples", did not know this kind of poverty that gives everything it has. Its benefit has a binding effect and liberates people; it gives life and also rewards the giving when sharing with others - hundredfold. By his symbolic act at Hugolin's house, the Poverello reminds the dignitary at the same time of a parable by Jesus. Even the medieval Rome has a many as poor as Lazarus and rich people living an extravagant life: Blessed are those who are able to conquer the divide as long as there is time.

