



Living the Faith

Living the Faith – what is meant by that? What does that mean in an age where the Church, as guardian of the Faith, is losing credibility more and more and when Her believers are being lost to Her? People say, and there are many of them, that Faith is vanishing like dew in the glare of the sun and all that remains is the parched earth, drought-stricken dust that awaits the quickening rain. Yet there are others, the worldly men of action, who are bustling about, building up their world, firm in their belief of a better world – without God. Even the European Union of nation states itself believes it can make its way into a future full of promise, even though it consciously abstains from any reference to God.

Faith is closely bound up with Hope. It leads us into a new land. The logical converse (faithlessness, hopelessness) should therefore lend credence to the idea that we are moving into rather grim and bleak times. At the outbreak of the Second World War, the French author, Julien Green, was in deep despair. The faithful seemed to him to be nothing more than a handful of souls scattered by a storm unleashed by idiots. He thought that the Gospel message had failed. Yet he remembered a shining light that has so enthralled him in his youth, namely, Francis of Assisi, who also thought that *he* had failed. But it was only superficially so. The Poverello of Assisi was convinced that salvation would come through the Gospel. Not necessarily at a stroke and not necessarily at this very moment. For what are twenty centuries in the eyes of God?

Even St Paul himself had experienced this test – the loss of Faith. That Christian community known as the Hebrews had lost its initial fervour, had become lax in its practice of the Faith (Hebr 10,25) and was being

threatened by cabals and intrigues (Hebr 14,14). The Letter to the Hebrews was specifically intended to overcome this critical situation. Paul warns and encourages, he praises and he blames, he implores and he reassures. He sets a mirror before the Hebrews' eyes and tells them what Faith actually means: 'Only faith can guarantee the blessings that we hope for, or prove the existence of the realities that at present remain unseen' (Hebr 11,1). He wants to tell them that 'your hope has a firm support'. Even if we cannot 'prove' Faith, it is something that engenders hope, makes sense of existence and makes life worth living. Faith is not the logic of rationality, but the language of the heart.

Paul points to the great figures of the past, the pillars of the Faith: their life was an example to us of what believing is. The list of these witnesses to the living Faith is long. It starts with Abel, with Samuel and with all the Prophets. They have all known what Faith means, and through their life they have proved it. That is especially true of Abraham and his wife Sarah, true of Isaac and of Jacob. Abraham moves with them into the Promised Land, he believes in the miracle of the Promised City that God Himself has planned and built. Abraham believes in the promise made to him that in spite of his age he would have a son of his body by Sarah his wife, and he would be rewarded for his Faith.

Faith is not a sort of Blindman's Bluff; it is not the result of the absence of knowledge and the lack of education. Faith is the recognition that what the heart experiences goes far deeper and far wider than anything that the senses can achieve. It would really and truly give a jolt to our society if people in it could actually believe in it.

Andreas Müller, OFM

The end of the Clare Jubilee Year

To remember it is to be bathed in a warm beam of light!

O Holy Mother and Sister Clare! Your life is truly a mirror of the Word believed in, meditated on, contemplated and loved in the faith of the Church. We call down your clarity on the whole Franciscan Family and in particular on the Sisters Clare of the whole world, whom we also cover with blessings. May they continue to be, for us, a mirror and announcement of the transfiguration which the presence of the Risen One works in the Church! Amen

The Conference of the Franciscan Family



Africa

From South Africa, from the Vryheid region, Sister Arnulfina Schöbert reports on her meeting. Here is a shortened version of her report.

In the Vryheid region a group of about 30 members meet fairly regularly, all Sisters from various convents and SFO members. The theme for the last meeting was Lesson Unit 11 – ‘The Option for Christ and Universality’.

Using our well-tried and trusted 5-step method, we worked on the topic together in small groups and alone during the periods of silence and quiet reflection. The five steps that we use in that lesson unit are

- First, we seek out passages from the Bible to serve as an introduction to the theme.
- The second step involves finding appropriate complementary passages from the Franciscan source material.
- The third step sees us dealing with the content of the lesson unit and excerpting from it certain sections to form the topic for discussion among ourselves.
- Then we apply the insights gained to our own life.
- Finally, in the fifth step we gather everything together into a unified prayer before God.

What we have managed to pinpoint for ourselves are the following few insights from this lesson unit. Francis is a man of his time – but Francis is also important for us today:

1. Francis listens to Jesus and responds to Him in practical terms, as he understands them. Christ is also speaking to us. It is up to each one of us to listen and to respond.
2. Francis imitated Jesus to the full, he followed Him in joy, simplicity and in humility. He inspires us to total devotion; as he did, I too can overcome difficulties.
3. Because Francis was totally imbued with Christ, he wanted this Gospel message to reach everyone and to be spread everywhere. Fulfilled as he is in Christ Jesus, he was able to give up everything, he was able to overcome obstacles in a peaceful way. He lived the Gospel totally. So Francis is encouraging us to live the Gospel with enthusiasm, to conquer weariness and to face up to difficulties without fear.
4. Francis’ option for the Cross, the Holy Eucharist and the Church and his steadfastness in this option is impressive. The Holy Eucharist nourishes the missionary fervour in us.
5. Francis saw God in all the creatures of Creation and he praised Him in all things. Each and every object showed him the way to God. Other religious faiths were included in his love. So Francis is giving us encouragement to be open to and ready to engage in dialogue with other religious faiths and to cultivate the ecumenical spirit.

Latin America

Inés Cau Deriu, the Continental Coordinator for Latin America, the region of the Southern Cone, sends in this report of her experiences – to be shared with all the Brothers and Sisters all over the world.

It has been my wish for many years to devote myself to the promotion of the CCFMC. At first, it was mainly focused on the renewal of the Franciscan-Clarissan spirituality. I wanted to make my contribution towards ensuring that Francis was not just to be seen as a person who preached to animals and to fishes but rather that he should be recognised as a thorough-going reformer who made an impression on people more by example than by words. He was a person who carried out a radical rejection of all forms of possession because in God he possesses everything, and he can therefore commit himself to supporting a more just distribution of this world’s goods to everyone. I know communists who admire his radical attitude and his perseverance!

For me, the CCFMC Course is an instrument of change. A short while ago, a Brother said to me that he was afraid of the Course because it is too revolutionary. Now I do not think the Course is revolutionary, but I do feel that it is the key to a 'new order' of things.

Naturally I am aware that in our rudderless times every attempt to institute a new order will be seen as a threat to the existing system of the time. The voice of the prophet is always a disturbing one. It is like a raised finger that points unerringly at our inner conflicts, our inconstancy and our complicity with the existing disordered state of affairs. Let us look at the text of the Book of Genesis; here God establishes His Order: for Him lack of order (= disorder - chaos) is sin. Jesus points out that 'it was not so in the beginning'.

Francis and Clare were people who wanted to insert themselves into the original order of things, who were fully at one with the whole Creation. The CCFMC is for me a gentle reproach, a touchstone that shows us to what extent the original 'charisma' is being lived by us today. It is highly significant that the Course is the fruit of a cooperative endeavour, that it has been international, intercultural and inter-Franciscan in its gestation. Again and again I feel that the Spirit of God is at work here, renewing Itself again and again in this Course. Let us therefore use this key to the 'New Order' of things.

I am not working with the CCFMC these days just because it is an important and relevant contribution to spirituality. I am working with it because it represents what I have made my option in life: commitment to justice, to peace, to the preservation of the natural world, to the just distribution of the goods of this world, to the defence of human rights. It is a commitment to see that civil society has its part in the decision processes; it is the quest for equality of opportunity for all.

In Paraguay the Course is helping us build up a network of solidarity and brotherliness and sisterliness. It is helping us 'raise the poor from the trash heaps and set before them a table laid out'. Many of those who are working on the Course with us are experiencing difficulties in coping with its uncompromising demands and in acting upon them. They can only manage to achieve this through the continuing support of the Animators from our national team who are expressly trained for this task and capable of doing it. For many of those taking part, the Course and the logical consequences that flow from it pose a great challenge. For all, however, it is true to say that we are learning that true sisterliness and sisterhood is no longer just a matter of coming together for a regular meeting in a specific place, but it is rather a time to share our life with each other.



I bear witness to this and urge upon all the Animators, men and women alike, to continue along the path they have taken with joy and with prophetic hope.

Pace e bene. Inés Cau-Deriu

NOTE

On the occasion of the final stages of the Jubilee Year of Sta Clare, we draw your attention to the article on Clare that is to be found on our webpage:

<http://www.ccfmc.net/e/forum/phpBB2/viewforum.php?f=4&sid=6bab1f0d82a7915cf77b3b0a80e09df8>

and

<http://www.ofm.org/news/0811nwsCHIAR.html>