

NEWSLETTER

Padre Pio Fraternity

Secular Franciscan Order of Central North Carolina

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Simplicity and the Spiritual Life

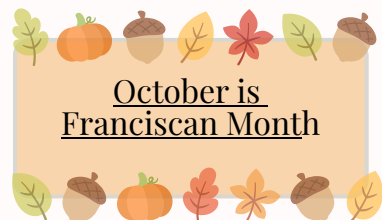
At our September 27 gathering, Deacon Phil Rzewnicki, OFS, led our discussion on The Gift of Simplicity by Brother Victor-Antoine D'Avila-Latourrette, focusing on Part 2, "Simplicity and the Spiritual Life." Deacon Phil shared some of his own insights from the reading, which enhanced his appreciation for the simplicity and fruits of praying the psalms and the power of the Jesus prayer. Additionally, Deacon Phil noted that repentance is not just for Lent--that it's an ongoing work for us, especially as Secular Franciscans who are striving to bring our lives to the gospel and the gospel to our lives.

Following the presentation, we had conversation in the spirit in small groups with the first round focusing on one or two of the following questions:

- How can you exercise (have) the same desire for God as the desert monks and nuns without going into the desert?
- How does praying the LOH, the psalms and sacred readings bring you into the simplicity of God's presence?
- How does praying the Gospels help you bring "the gospel to life and your life to the gospel"?
- How does using the Jesus Prayer affect your prayer life. What is meant by The Work of Prayer?
- How is living the Franciscan life enabling you to live a life of conversion and repentance?

In our second round, we indicated what resonated with each of us as we listened to what our sisters and brothers had shared in the first round. In our final round, we pondered and shared on the following question: What do I think I am being called to do based on what was shared today?

We should make a dwelling-place
within ourselves where he can stay,
he who is the Lord God almighty,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
~Saint Francis of Assisi



A Letter from Our Minister

by Sharon Winzeler, OFS

Dear brothers and sisters,

One line from a talk at the Quinquennial in Lexington, KY, this summer has stayed with me. “By fixing we see the world as broken but by serving we see the world as whole,” Dr. Darlyn Pryds said in her keynote address on caregiving and care-receiving.

She was talking about how Francis served his community and how Lady Jacoba served him in his last days. The vision of her bringing him his favorite almond cookies as he lay dying always conjures the gift of true friendship. Her presence was her way of serving her dear friend.

You may have noticed that the Ongoing Formation Committee has included the names of our homebound brothers and sisters in your Conversations in the Spirit groups so you can pray for them. Some of you asked about visiting them. I highly encourage you to do this.

This newsletter includes an essay on pages 3-5 by Jacob House who recently visited Michael, a former candidate, who suffers from a serious cognitive decline and is in a Cary nursing home. Some of you went through formation with Michael. Although he isn’t with us physically, he remains our brother in Christ.

It may be challenging to visit someone who may not recognize you or remember you. We go because we understand the importance of presence and relationships. We want to serve our brothers and sisters, like Lady Jacob did for Francis.

We have several other folks who can’t attend meetings but would be nurtured by your visits. If you want to know who, contact me, Ellen Ferrone, Lee Cunningham, Maureen Copan, Suzie Nelson, or Gladys Whitehouse. All actively visit our homebound sisters and brothers.

In the meantime, read the essay by Jacob and learn how serving our brothers and sisters touches ourselves as well as them.

Peace and love,
Sharon



“FRATELLI TUTTI”. With these words, Saint Francis of Assisi addressed his brothers and sisters and proposed to them a way of life marked by the flavour of the Gospel. Of the counsels Francis offered, ...he calls for a love that transcends the barriers of geography and distance, and declares blessed all those who love their brother “as much when he is far away from him as when he is with him”.

~ Pope Francis

The Communion of Presence

By Jacob House

Jacob is an active member of The Catholic Community of St. Francis of Assisi in Raleigh, NC, where he serves as volunteer leader of St. Francis' ministry to the Magnolia Glen retirement community.

A few days ago, God put Mike on my heart. Mike is a longtime St. Francis parishioner who served faithfully as a minister of hospitality every weekend at the Sunday 5:30 Mass and was in formation to become a Secular Franciscan. Then, in October 2023, while serving on a mission at St. Francis Inn in Philadelphia, Mike experienced an acute episode related to dementia and has spent the years since in local nursing homes. I hadn't seen him in quite some time, but on Saturday afternoon, he came strongly to mind. I emailed a couple of mutual friends: "God just put Mike on my heart. Any idea how he's doing?"

My friend Dave Shick, who still visits him, told me where Mike was living. Dave warned me there probably wouldn't be much conversation. Mike was mostly quiet now and unable to articulate the loneliness Dave sensed in him. Then Dave gave me one very practical piece of pastoral advice: bring chocolate chip cookies.

On Labor Day morning, I went. Sitting in the nursing home parking lot, I felt a little nervous. I've brought Communion to the sick many times, but dementia introduces a different kind of uncertainty. Would Mike recognize me? Would he understand what I was doing when I offered him the Eucharist?

A peek into my inner dialogue before getting out of the car:

"Don't overthink it. Trust God. Just show up and let God lead."

"OK... What will you say when you enter the room?"

"Hey Mike, do you remember me?"

"Seriously? Why on earth would I kick off my visit with a friend suffering from dementia with a memory test?!"

"Good point. Probably best to keep the questions to a minimum."

"What do I hope he'll feel?"

"Joy. Loved. Respected. Safe."

I thought about our mutual friend Dave, whose Spirit-filled joy and contagious smile have always made people feel welcomed and loved. I told myself, "Just try to make Mike feel the way Dave makes me feel." That was about as sophisticated as my pastoral plan got. I walked into Mike's room and said, "Hey Mike, it's Jacob House, your buddy from St. Francis!" His face lit up. He smiled and said, "I know you." Those three words felt like a gift. I told him his parish friends missed him, reminded him of how many people he had cared for over the years, and assured him he was loved and remembered. Mike said simply, "I appreciate that."

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I asked if he would like to receive Holy Communion, and he said, “Yes, please.” I prayed the Our Father, but I sensed I was losing his attention as he scrutinized the pages of my “Communion of the Sick” booklet. I held out the Eucharist. “The Body of Christ.” That moment carried a particular weight for me. Real Presence. Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. What a gift! The Eucharist has never been an easy teaching.

In John 6, when Jesus tells His followers that His flesh is true food and His blood is true drink, many cannot accept it and walk away. And by the grace of God, two thousand years later, I was standing in a nursing home room in Cary holding that extraordinary gift, the Real Presence of Love Incarnate in my hand and hoping to share it with my friend.

Mike took the host, but instead of consuming it, he placed it on his tray. I gently tried to help him understand what to do, but his attention had moved elsewhere. Eventually, I placed the Eucharist back in the pyx and consumed it as soon as I left his room.

I won’t pretend I wasn’t disappointed. I had hoped Mike could receive Jesus sacramentally. But carrying the Real Presence into that room made me attentive to the other ways Christ was encountering us. There was friendship. There was the dignity of a man whose illness has taken so much from him, but nothing from his identity as a beloved child of God. There was what I came to think of as the communion of presence –not a substitute for Holy Communion, but the grace of simply being present to another person in love and respect. We were gathered together in Jesus’s name, and His presence was unmistakable. I had come carrying Jesus in the Eucharist, and Jesus was reminding me to recognize Him in Mike and in our presence together. Mike, by the way, knew exactly what to do with the chocolate chip cookies.

As I drove away, I became unusually emotional thinking about the other people I had seen there. People whose lives once overflowed with families, careers, friendships, responsibilities, laughter, and purpose, who may now spend long stretches of their days waiting, unable to say what’s in their hearts. I felt an overwhelming sadness for their loneliness, but it felt bigger than me somehow – more pure, more full of love. And it wasn’t depressing. It was energizing. It left me with a conviction that I needed to go back, and soon, to see Mike again, certainly, but also simply to offer a smile or a few words to whoever God might put in my path.

Then came what I can only describe as a “God wink.” A Pandora song began playing in my car that I don’t think I had ever heard before: “When I Can’t Speak,” performed by Julie Yardley with music and lyrics by Tyler Castleton. That was the moment my “eye plumbing” broke. There I was driving away from a man whose dementia has increasingly taken away

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his ability to communicate, overwhelmed by the realization that love can speak when words cannot – and this song begins playing. I cried like a baby and laughed in gratitude for God's perfect timing. I had gone that morning believing I was giving something: a little time, a visit, a prayer, the Eucharist if Mike was able to receive it, some chocolate chip cookies. Instead, I received a profound reminder that Christian service does not require eloquence, expertise, or some smoothly executed grand plan. Sometimes we simply have to show up. Sometimes love looks like sitting beside someone who can no longer carry on much of a conversation. And I was reminded to pay attention when someone unexpectedly comes to mind.

There are people who once sat beside us at Mass, greeted us at the doors, served with us in ministries, sang in our choirs, taught our children, or stood beside us at parish events – and then, gradually, they disappeared from view. Illness happens. Age happens. Dementia happens. Life changes. Eventually, we may stop noticing that someone is missing. But the people we no longer see every Sunday have not ceased to be part of our community. They are not forgotten by God. And they should not be forgotten by us.

Mike was once one of the people taking care of everybody else every weekend. Right now, he needs other people to remember him. That is something beautiful about being the Body of Christ. At different moments in our lives, we take turns carrying one another. We come forward together – young and old, healthy and sick, strong and struggling – and receive the one Body and Blood of Christ so that we can become more fully what we receive: the Body of Christ for one another and for the whole world.

We rarely know how far the witness of our own lives will travel, either. Dave probably never realized that his smile and his way of making people feel loved would someday accompany me into a nursing home room. But we form one another that way. One person's faithful presence becomes the courage for another person's faithful presence. I don't know why God put Mike on my heart last Saturday afternoon. But I am so glad I listened.

The question I am left with is for each of us: Who has God put on your heart?
Maybe that person's name has already appeared in your mind while reading this.
Call them.
Visit them.
Find them.
Bring cookies.

You don't have to know exactly what to say. You don't have to know exactly what to do. Just show up in love. And don't be surprised if you go believing you are bringing Christ to someone else, only to discover that Christ has been waiting there to meet you.



Fraternity Events

Gatherings: Oct. 25, Nov. 22

Oak City Cares: Oct. 24, Nov. 28, and Dec. 26.

Transitus: October 3 at 7 pm in the St. Mary of the Angels Chapel at St. Francis of Assisi. Join this special commemoration of the 800th anniversary of Francis's death. Sign up to help [here](#).

Traveling Mass - October 18 at 11:30 am Mass at St. Bernadette's, [1005 Wilbon Road, Fuquay-Varina](#). Char Witosky, who is coordinating the event indicates seating will be in the section by St. Jude and the Baptismal Font, rows 3-5. Please try to arrive 20-30 minutes early so regular parishioners can use seating we don't need.

Annual Retreat: Dec. 3 beginning with 9:30 Mass in the Chapel. The theme is The Poverty of the Crèche. After mass, we'll move to Founders Room for coffee and talks. There will be sharing at tables, time for quiet reflection, lunch and a prayer experience. For more information, contact Gladys Whitehouse.

St. Francis of Assisi Parish Invites You to...

Franciscan Convocation - Oct. 17th, 8:30 am to 2 pm, "Journey Together: A Franciscan Mission for Today. Following the footsteps of St. Francis into the future of the Church."

[Parishioner Registration HERE on Realm](#) | \$15 Fee includes lunch
[Non-Parishioner Registration HERE](#) | \$15 Fee includes lunch

Elevated Parish Mission - Oct. 25 to 27, a 3-night experience to help you encounter the transforming love of Jesus Christ and discover the joy of living as His disciple. Register [here](#).

Around the Diocese

Hispanic Heritage Mass

Saturday, October 10 at 11:00am
Holy Name of Jesus Cathedral

Respect Life Mass

Friday, October 30 at 10:00am
Holy Name of Jesus Cathedral

Mass for Deceased Clergy

Wednesday, November 4, 11:00am
Our Lady of Guadalupe, Newton Grove



HAPPY Birthday

October 16 - Dorothy Ann Pribish, OFS
 October 17 - Vicki Jack, OFS
 October 18 - Deacon Phil Rzewnicki, OFS
 October 26 - Courtney Cantrell, OFS



Anniversary Blessings



Ida Irwin, OFS professed 10/9/55
 Marie Bianca, OFS, professed 10/13/84
 Jeannette Cottone, OFS, professed 10/20/04



Fraternity Council

Spiritual Assistant:

Minister:
 Sharon Winzeler, OFS

Vice Minister:
 Rachel Bongiorno, OFS

Formation Director:
 Gladys Whitehouse, OFS

Treasurer:
 Janette Perez, OFS

Secretary:
 Mary Cockrill, OFS

Councilors:
 Fran Acosta OFS, Area 4
 Travis Bongiorno, OFS, Area 5
 Lee Cunningham, OFS, Area 5

BSSF Region Minister:
 Ellen Ferrone, OFS



God revealed a form of greeting to me,
 telling me that we should say,
 “God give you peace.”
 ~ Saint Francis of Assisi

Apostolates

JPIC:
 Theresa Flynn, OFS

Oak City Cares:
 Mary Cockrill, OFS
 Marianne Norris, OFS

CPO & Fraternity Library:
 Maureen Copan, OFS

On-Going Formation:
 Mercedes Cooley, OFS

Prayer Requests:
 Deacon Phil Rzewnicki, OFS

CPO & Fraternity Library:
 Maureen Copan, OFS

Website:
 Sharon Winzeler, OFS

Sunshine:
 Laurie Wilburn, OFS

Facebook:
 Rachel Bongiorno, OFS

Hospitality:
 Valorie Davis, OFS,
 Debra Marisa, OFS,
 Maria Marge, OFS
 Barbara Redzich, OFS
 Ann Wester, OFS

Newsletter:
 Lori Zagiba