



RECOLLECTION GUIDE

Franciscan Province of San Pedro Bautista-Philippines
FEBRUARY 2014



PENANCE

Prepared by:
Fr. Pedro Roberto Manansala, OFM



OPENING SONG

HOSEA (COME BACK TO ME)

Come back to me with all your heart
Don't let fear keep us apart
Trees do bend though straight and tall
So must we to others call

Refrain:

Long have I waited for
Your coming home to me
And living deeply our new life

The wilderness will lead you
To the place where I will speak
Integrity and justice
With tenderness
You shall know.



OPENING PRAYER

(PS. 95 Passsim)

- L Come in; let us bow and bend low;
let us kneel before the God who made us.
A mighty God is the Lord,
a great king above all gods.

R In his hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his.
To him belongs the sea, for he made it
And the dry land shaped by his hands.

L On that today you would listen to his voice!
Harden not your hearts as at Meribah,
as on that day at Massah in the desert.

All Come, ring out your joy to the Lord;
Hail the rock who saves us.
Let us come before him, giving thanks,
with songs let us hail the Lord.



GOSPEL READING

MARK 1: 14-20 (NIV)

“REPENT AND BELIEVE IN THE GOSPEL”

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” At once they left their nets and followed him. When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.



CATECHISM

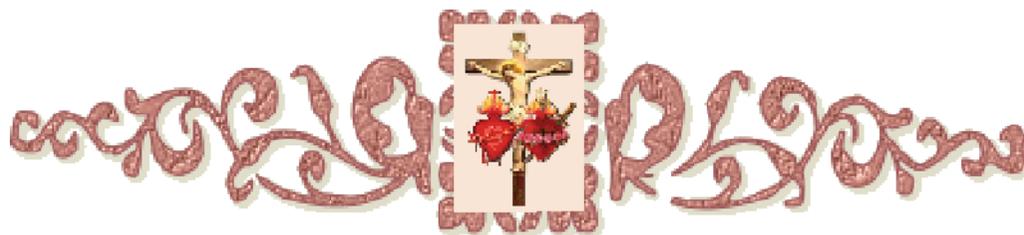
REFLECTION

“THE CHALLENGE OF THE KINGDOM: CONVERSION”

The message of the Kingdom is connected to the words: REPENT and BELIEVE the GOOD NEWS (Mk 1:14). Since the Kingdom is a dynamic power that constantly breaks into this world the call for repentance is a permanent one directed to everyone, not only to the sinners, but also to the righteous who have committed no great sins. What do these words “be converted” and “believe” mean in the proclamation of Jesus’ Kingdom message?

REPENT: TURN AROUND TOWARDS THE NEW REALITY

To CONVERT does not mean, first of all, to RETURN to the Law and to make amendments for one’s transgressions of the Law. Neither does it mean to TURN AWAY, to leave one’s way of life, to leave behind everything that is wrong and sin-permeated. No, to convert means first of all: TO TURN TOWARDS, to respond to a call that reaches me from behind: I am asked to let this new unheard-of-message into my life, to let myself be overtaken by this great news. Of course, such a TURN AROUND towards the Kingdom will include a TURNING AWAY FROM, but what “forces” me to make a negative stand against something is much more forceful positive NEWS of the inbreaking KINGDOM.



BELIEVE: TRUST IN IT, PUT YOUR SECURITY IN IT

To believe does not mean to intellectually accept something as being true. It means, rather, TO TRUST, TO ENTRUST ONESELF, TO FIND ONE’S SECURITY IN. Paul and John never use the word “convert” or “repent”; they always use “believe.” “To believe” means Amen in Hebrew, which originally means: “I know where my security lies” or “to know, to be secure.” (Is 7:9).

What Jesus is asking for is trust in this message. It is something never heard before, something most beautiful, something to which you can entrust your whole being. It is God’s unconditional love for you. It is your final salvation. Conversion is a joyful occasion, not a terrible event of judgment and condemnation. The lost child has come (Lk 15:25), the dead man had come alive again. “This son of mine was dead but he is alive, he was lost but now he has been found” (Lk 15:24, 32). Conversion, therefore, is preceded by God’s action to which we are called to respond. Only his love makes it possible at all. Conversion is a person’s reaction to God’s prior action.

COMMITMENT TO THE PERSON OF JESUS

Conversion surely means a change of one’s life, attitudes and behavior towards God and fellow human beings. But we have to keep in mind that conversion does not mean primarily a changing of something or a conversion to something. Conversion means a turning to SOMEONE. It means to welcome, to accept Jesus as the center of our whole life. For him and his gospel we subordinate everything else (Mk 10:28), even life itself (Mk 10:32).

Source: Fuellenbach, John. *The Kingdom of God*. Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1989, 57-59

GUIDE QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & SHARING

1. The life of penance is a response to the gift of the Kingdom of God and the offer of definitive salvation in Jesus Christ, the embodiment of the Kingdom. Do I truly receive Jesus and His Kingdom in my life so as to bring me to a life of penance? How do I manifest my being a follower of Jesus, a child of the Kingdom and a person of penance in the way I live my life on a daily basis?
2. What are those that block me from genuinely receiving Jesus and His Kingdom in my life so as to live a sincere and authentic evangelical life of penance? How do I turn away from these so as to turn more and more to the Person of Jesus and His kingdom and to the Gospel way of life?



FRANCISCAN READING

R E A D I N G 1

FROM THE TESTAMENT OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

The Lord granted me, Brother Francis to begin to do penance in this way: while I was in sin, it seemed very bitter to me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I had mercy upon them. And when I left them, that which seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body; and afterward I lingered a little, and left the world.

R E F L E C T I O N

THE BEGINNING OF THE CONVERSION OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

The Testament starts at a high pace. It is the story of a movement, of a journey, of Francis' journey out, his exodus. And it is the story of a change, of a turn-about, of Francis' conversion. It is the Lord who stands at the beginning of that movement, it is he who is the object of that change. In the first part of the Testament (1-13), he allows himself to be known by Francis as the suffering Servant, the Crucified One, who comes to us in the humble form of bread and wine every day (Adm 1:17), and who speaks to us in his most holy Names and words.

Francis sets out in the footsteps of the poor crucified Christ, "who was a poor man and a stranger and who loved on alms, himself and the holy Virgin and his disciples" (RegNB 9:5).

The beginning of Francis' Testament is full of life. The Spirit comes over him and takes him right among the lepers on whom he has mercy. When he leaves them, he tastes sweetness in soul and body. He is to return there often.

Francis turns away from the world and begins to lead a religious life. He describes the change which he undergoes in various ways: it is the transition from a life of sin to doing penance; what was bitter to him turns into sweetness of soul and body; he turns away from the world.

The Lord stands at the beginning of Francis' Testament, as the Lord stood at the beginning of his life in penance. It is the Lord who, time and again, has shown him this life, who has given him the grace to lead this life, who has

given him brothers. From that moment on, Francis experiences his life as a gift from God. He pays to the Lord the tribute due to him: he puts his life in the hands of the Lord of all life. He gives back what he has received: to live in penance is to live without property.

Doing penance was a common term in Francis' days. Penance was what a heretic did who came back into the church, or one who had committed murder and now wished to make amends for his sin, so as to be taken up again into the community of the faithful. But there was also an ever-increasing group of people, who had committed no terrible crimes at all and who undertook this way of life voluntarily; who had heard the gospel and wanted to live more according to that gospel. They joined together in little groups in order "to do penance." They would exchange their usual clothes for a kind of habit or simple material; they would stop taking part in city-politics or commerce; they would no longer attend stage plays or festivals; they would no longer carry arms; they would live in perpetual or temporary sexual abstinence and fast more than ordinary Christians. This movement of penitents grew into a brotherhood here and there, a distinct body; but, generally, there was but little organization. What the penitents had in common was their inspiration, a common fervor.

This is exactly what these penitents began to do. And it was this fervor that Francis joined when he set out to do penance. In the friars minor, the Poor Clares and in the Third Order which gathered around them, this new spirituality found a place within the church. And this was how the rising citizens eventually secured their own place within the ecclesiastical and social order of those days.

By entering upon a life of penance, Francis' purpose was to join this penance-movement. Later- after ample consideration – he and his brothers opted for a nomadic form of it, for the apostolic life (1 Cel 34). When asked to which order they belonged, the first brothers would answer: "We are penitents from

Assisi" (AnPer 19c; 3 Comp 7). Penance was a key word, as it is also in the first version of Francis' letter to the faithful, which speaks of "those who do penance" and of "those who do not do penance."

Penance touches the very heart of the Franciscan movement, touches Francis' very own heart; indeed, for him it is a condition for receiving a share in the heavenly glory. To him, penance means more than just a dry list of ascetical practices. When speaking of penance, he usually refers to that which, in his eyes, must be its foundation, namely, the love for the Lord crucified (e.g., Adm 14).

In provisional version of the Rule, we read the following about penance: "We also give you thanks because your Son will come himself in glory of his majesty to send to the eternal fire the cursed ones who have done no penance and who have not known you; and to say to all who have known you and served you in penance: 'Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take the Kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world'" (RegNB 23:4; Mt 25:34).

Could penance not mean "to know the Lord"? And on the basis of this gospel quotation, taken from the parable about the least ones, could we not go further and conclude that what matters about penance is "to know the Lord and to recognize him in the least ones"? This takes us back to the name of the brotherhood which the Lord gathers around Francis: lesser brothers, brothers of the least ones. To Francis, what matters about penance is apparently the original meaning of this word, the evangelical meaning. Both John the Precursor and the Lord himself call us to do penance, that is: to be converted.

Source: G. P. Freeman and H. Sevenhoven, "The Legacy of a Poor Man: Commentary on the Testament of Francis of Assisi," *Franciscan Digest*, Vol. III, No. 1 (June, 1993), 6-9

GUIDE QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & SHARING

1. It is very clear that from the beginning, the life of St. Francis and the early friars was a life of penance. Do I really see and live the Franciscan life as a life of penance? How do I show this in my personal life and witness, in community living and in ministry?
2. Do people see me as a penitential friar? Do they see our communities as penitential fraternities? Do I/we belong to “those who do penance” or to “those who do not do penance”?
3. How do I take the challenge of on-going conversion in my life as a friar minor?



FRANCISCAN READING

READING 2

SAINT FRANCIS' LIFE OF PENANCE

by Madeline Pecora Nugent, SFO

As a young man, Saint Francis was rich and popular, and enjoyed nothing better than eating and drinking with his friends. His road to conversion was a long and tortuous one, which gave birth to the Franciscan Order

Penance, in its traditional definition, means conversion from human ways of doing things to God's ways. During his life, Saint Francis of Assisi passed through certain stages of conversion, common to many spiritual journeys, to a deeper intimacy with God. At any one of these steps, he could have stalled or reversed direction. Instead he continued forward, becoming a saint.

TWELVE STEPS TO HEAVEN



Several obstacles may block our road to God. In order to make our journey towards the kingdom of heaven, we need to identify these obstacles and do something about them. So let's look at these problems and propose some solutions based on Saint Francis' own experience.

STEP ONE: LAX ATTITUDE TOWARD GOD.

The individual believes that God exists. He may pray and attend Mass, but the relationship with God is shallow. Francis Bernardone was born in Assisi, Italy, in 1182. The son of a rich cloth merchant, Francis was named by his father in honor of the nation which provided the family business with some of the finest cloth in Europe. Francis grew into a generous, kind lad who loved good times and parties. He was so free with his father's money that his friends often chose him as king of the many feasts he sponsored.

STEP TWO: DESIRE TO FOLLOW GOD IN HUMAN WAYS

A person wants to serve God better so he begins to do what seems good, humanly speaking, yet the person has not asked what God wants done. As he matured, Francis's love of God deepened and mixed with his dreams of glory and honor. Aspiring to become a great knight, he convinced his father to buy him the finest armor. Then he set out, fighting on the side of the Pope in his war against the emperor. Captured following a bloody battle, Francis kept his spirits high while imprisoned and encouraged other prisoners to be cheerful. Finally, after his father's intervention, Francis was released. Ill, he returned home to recover.

STEP THREE: CONFUSION OVER THE PATH TO FOLLOW

A soul begins to realize that what seemed reasonable did not bring the intended

results. Questioning follows. Did I do the right thing? Am I on the right track? Francis had been sure that he was to serve God as a knight, but battle, imprisonment, and illness had dimmed his thoughts of glory. Although he thought he had been fighting on God's side in the papal army, he had encountered, in supposedly Christian soldiers, pride, injustice, brutality, and hatred. In the delirium of his illness, Francis pondered eternal questions. What does God want of me? What am I to do with my life?

STEP FOUR: MISINTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WISHES

The soul, not yet seasoned in discernment, may misinterpret the answer received in prayer and thus attempt to carry out a faulty agenda. Francis made a slow recovery. One night he had a dream in which he was in an enchanted castle filled with armor and presided over by a stunningly beautiful princess. All this is for you and your knights, a Voice said. Believing in dreams, Francis again clad himself in armor with renewed joy and set out for battle. But this time, at Spoleto, Francis's illness returned and with it a second dream and the Voice he had heard before. Who do you think can best reward you, the Master or the servant? When Francis answered, The Master, the Voice questioned, Then, why do you leave the Master for the servant, the rich Lord for the poor man? Oh, Lord, Francis breathed, what do You wish me to do? Return to your own place, the Voice said, and you will be told what to do. The dream about the armor must be interpreted in a spiritual sense.

STEP FIVE: TAKING TIME TO DISCERN

Having realized previous errors, the soul begins to pray more fervently and to wait patiently for clear direction from the Lord. Francis shocked Assisi by his return. Was he afraid of battle? Was he crazy? The latter seemed more logical, especially one night when Francis and his friends were reveling in the street and Francis stopped in a trance, struck by a vision of the princess he had seen in the castle. This time she was dressed in rags. I have found my beloved bride, he proclaimed to his sarcastic friends, and she is the noblest, the richest, and the most beautiful bride who ever lived on this earth. He called her Lady Poverty. After this,

he courted her alone, leaving his friends for the solitude of the woods, for a pilgrimage to Rome where he begged for his food and food for the lepers whom he tended. All this time, Francis prayed and waited for God's promised direction. Lord, what would YOU have me do? Finally, in the run-down church of San Damiano, the answer came from a huge, colorful icon of the Crucified Christ. Francis, go and repair my house, which, as you can see, is falling into ruin.

STEP SIX: ACTING ON THE DIRECTION HAS SHOWN

Revelation of God's direction may come in many ways, but, when a penitent is certain of it, he or she acts decisively. With an eager, Yes, Lord, Francis set to work. Taking huge bolts of cloth from his father's store, he set off for a nearby town where he sold both cloth and steed and then walked back to San Damiano where he attempted to give the money to the priest. Explaining that the alms were dishonestly acquired through the sale of Pietro Bernardone's goods, the priest refused the coins. So, legend claims, Francis threw them into one of the windows of San Damiano.

STEP SEVEN: MAINTAINING DIRECTION DESPITE OPPOSITION

Set on a path of conversion, the convert soon encounters misunderstanding from those whose spiritual position he has left behind. The soul will either move forward despite opposition or will wither under it and fall backwards. When his father learned what Francis had done, he hauled him before the bishop and demanded that Francis restore the money obtained for the goods. Since the priest had not used the money, it was easily returned. However, Francis recognized a spiritual crossroads. Disrobing in front of the assembled populace, he gave his clothes to Pietro Bernardone and cried out, "Up until today I have called Pietro Bernardone my father. For the future I shall say, 'Our Father who art in heaven...'"

STEP EIGHT: CONTINUANCE ON THE PATH OF CONVERSION

The soul intent on serving God continues to do so joyfully despite hatred, mockery, and opposition. Alienated from his family and dressed in a workman's tunic, Francis followed the direction given him by God. He walked the streets of Assisi, begging for stones which he carried down the steep hillside to tumble-down churches in the valley below. He continued to tend lepers, even washing their wounds and eating from their bowls. His father thought him mad. His mother pitied him. Children pelted him with rocks and mud. To all he grinned, Pax et bonum, "Peace and all good."

STEP NINE: EXUBERANCE OF A NEW BEGINNING

Opposition begins to fade as conversion persists. New friendships develop. God seems continually nearer. For two years, Francis labored alone, restoring three country churches. Meanwhile, some of the townsfolk were touched by his persistent fervor and courtesy. In 1208, Bernardo di Quintavalle and Pietro Catani, two prominent citizens of Assisi, asked to join Francis. Others followed. Silvestro, Giles, Rufino, Clare, the daughter of a respected knight of Assisi who, with the women who followed her, were housed at San Damiano which Francis and others had enlarged into a cloister. Eventually Francis took his band of twelve men to Rome where the Pope authorized them to preach repentance.

STEP TEN: CONVERTING OTHERS TO THE WAY

With the support and encouragement of like-minded friends, the convert begins to evangelize. Francis and his friars minor (lesser brothers) fanned across Italy in groups of two, preaching a simple message of conversion to Christ. More friars joined Francis; more sisters joined Clare. Lay people wished to do penance so Francis laid the foundations of a lay Order called the Brothers and Sisters of Penance. Francis himself was preaching, going even to the Moslems.

STEP ELEVEN: EMBRACING SUFFERING

Once an individual is solidly on God's path, his faith is often tested by suffering which, if borne with trust in God's wisdom, perfects belief. In Egypt Francis contracted a painful eye disease that eventually blinded him. As his health deteriorated, he was plagued with headaches and stomach pains. Unable to govern the friars, he turned the Order over to others who began to mitigate the poverty embraced by Francis and his first followers. Depression set in. In 1224, while deep in prayer, Francis was branded in his hands, feet, and side with the stigmata, the painful wounds of Christ. Unable to walk, he who forbade his friars to ride horseback had to use a donkey himself. Step twelve: Finding joy in whatever life may bring. The penitent realizes that all that happens is in God's will and for his spiritual good. Thus, with trust and faith, the soul joyfully surrenders to all God's actions. Blind and ill, Francis wrote what is perhaps his most famous piece, The Canticle of Brother Sun. The song praises creation and the Creator and ends with an ode to death.

In the early evening of October 3, 1226, death came for Francis at the Porziuncola, the little restored church which he wished to be the headquarters of his Order. Francis had asked to be laid naked on the ground for as long as it takes to walk a mile unhurriedly, so that he could meet his Creator as he had entered the world - with nothing. As if to announce his entry into eternal life, a flock of skylarks flew over the little cell in which lay his still warm body. People come to know and follow the Lord by many different routes, but some paths are common to many journeys. Back in the little, tumble-down church of San Damiano, when Francis was trying to determine what God would have him do, he had prayed a prayer of personal surrender to God. Lord, what would YOU have me do? This was the prayer of Christ in the Garden. Not my will, Lord, but yours, be done. When we can sincerely pray that prayer, or something like it, then our own conversion adventure will have begun.

(Source: 2014 - Il Messaggero di S. Antonio Editrice)

GUIDE QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & SHARING

1. What thoughts, insights and feelings come to me after reading and reflecting on Madeline Pecora Nugent, SFO's article "Saint Francis' Life of Penance?" Do I also personally see these steps in St. Francis' life and process of conversion as far as my knowledge of him serves me?
2. Do I see these steps taking place in my own life as a Franciscan friar called to an evangelical life of penance? Which particular steps resonate with my personal experience of conversion? What challenges does the article pose to me?

QUOTE: "My teacher Eliezer told me that only one rule was required by a Jew if he wished to live a good life. 'Repent the day before you die.' And since no man knows when he shall die, he is prudent if he lives each day a life of true repentance." (James Michener)



CLOSING PRAYER

All: "You have been told, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: Only to do right and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Mic 6:8). O Lord, your call to conversion is ever-present in my life. For me, it is a haunting summons to truly repent, and at the same moment to have confidence and joy in your strengthening power. Keep me, O Lord, as the apple of your eyes; hide me in the shelter of your wing. For all my heart goes out to you, my God; I trust in you, do not belie my trust. Give me your blessing in Christ your Son, my Lord. Amen.

(Brother Charles Reutemann, FSC, Let's Pray/2, 23).