



RECOLLECTION GUIDE

Franciscan Province of San Pedro Bautista-Philippines
MARCH 2014

OPENING SONG



CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST

When I look back on what I thought
was living
I'm amazed at the price I choose to pay
And to think I ignored what really
mattered
'Cause I thought the sacrifice would
be too great

But when I finally reached the point
of giving in
I found the cross was calling even
then
And even though it took dying to
survive
I've never felt so much alive

For I am crucified with Christ and
yet I live
Not I but Christ that lives within me
His cross will never ask for more
than I can give
For it's not my strength but His,
there's no greater sacrifice
For I am crucified with Christ and
yet I live

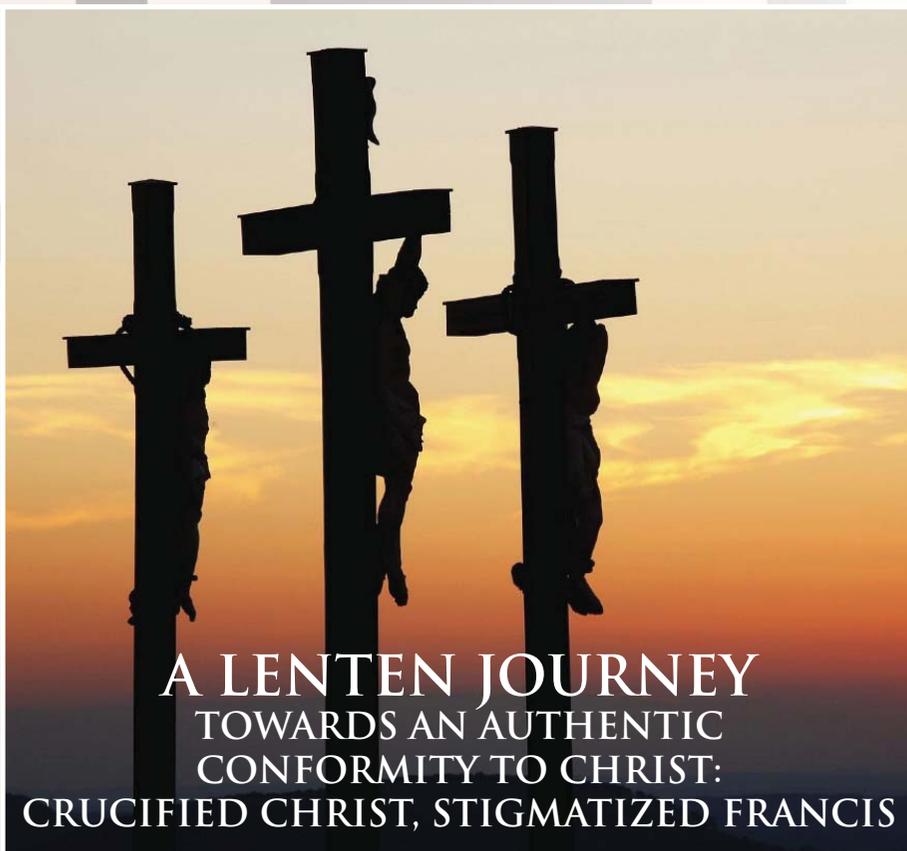
As I hear the Savior call for daily
dying
I will bow beneath the weight of
Calvary
Let my hands surrender to His
piercing purpose
That holds me to the cross yet sets
me free

I will glory in the power of the cross
The things I thought were gain I
count as loss
And with His suffering I identify
And by His resurrection power, I am
alive

For I am crucified with Christ and
yet I live
Not I but Christ that lives within me
His cross will never ask for more
than I can give
For it's not my strength but His,
there's no greater sacrifice
For I am crucified with Christ and
yet I live

And I will offer all I have so that His
cross is not in vain
For I found to live is Christ and to
die is truly gain

For I am crucified with Christ and
yet I live
Not I but Christ that lives within me
His cross will never ask for more
than I can give
For it's not my strength but His,
there's no greater sacrifice
For I am crucified with Christ and
yet I live
For I am crucified with Christ and
yet I live



**A LENTEN JOURNEY
TOWARDS AN AUTHENTIC
CONFORMITY TO CHRIST:
CRUCIFIED CHRIST, STIGMATIZED FRANCIS**

*Prepared by:
Fr. Pedro Roberto Manansala, OFM*

GOSPEL READING



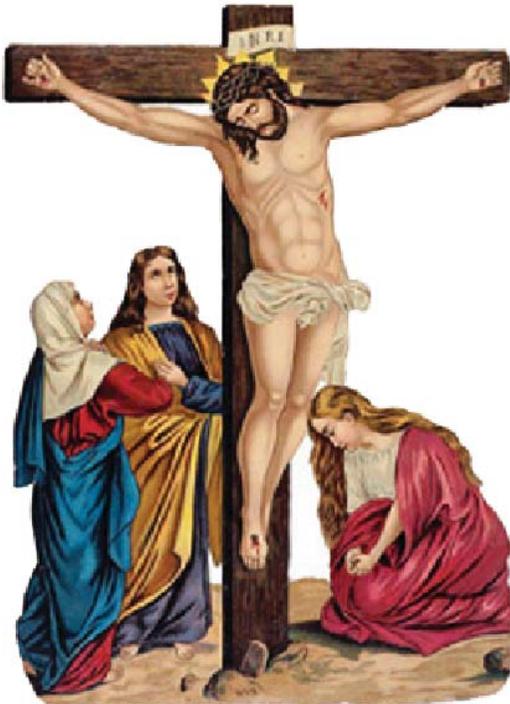
(THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS) JOHN 19:25-34

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and the mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son." The he said to the disciples, "Behold your mother." And from that hour the disciples took her into his home.

After this, aware that everything

was now finished, in order that the scripture might be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I thirst." There was a vessel filled with common wine. So they put a sponge soaked in wine on a sprig of hyssop and put it up to his mouth. When Jesus had taken the wine, he said, "It is finished." And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit.

Now since it was preparation day, in order that the bodies might not remain on the cross on the Sabbath, for the Sabbath day of the week was a solemn one, the Jews asked Pilate that legs be broken and they be taken down. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and then of the other one who was crucified with Jesus. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs, but one soldier thrust his lance into his side, and immediately blood and water flowed out.



By: Fr. Roberto Manansala, OFM

GUIDE QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTIONS

1. The heavenly Father has gives a definitive seal of his love for human beings and all of creation with the death of his Son Jesus on the cross. Do you really see Jesus on the cross as the definitive expression of the Father's love for us? What does the Crucified Jesus evoke in you? How do you respond to the gesture of stupendous love of the Father in and through the Crucified Christ?
2. As we start another Season of Lent, which culminates with the Easter Triduum, we are again confronted, among others, by the reality of the cross of Jesus. The cross of Jesus challenges us to faithful discipleship that is ready to go all the way to the foot of the cross and even on the cross to be crucified with Jesus or to be crucified like him. What can you do during this Season of Lent to help you in this journey towards becoming a better follower of the poor and Crucified Jesus?
3. The Blessed Virgin Mary shows herself as a perfect and faithful disciple who follows her Son Jesus to the foot of the cross. How can the Blessed Mother help you to also be a faithful disciple of her Son especially during this Season of Lent?

FRANCISCAN READING

Source: William J. Short, OFM. *Poverty and Joy: The Franciscan Tradition*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 1999, 101-107.

"BY YOUR HOLY CROSS, YOU HAVE REDEEMED THE WORLD"

One prayer particularly dear to Francis was modeled on the liturgy for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (14 September).

We adore you, Most Holy Lord Jesus Christ, in all Your Churches in the whole world, and we bless You, because by Your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

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He included the text of this prayer in his *Testament*, recalling the 'great faith in churches' that the Lord had given him. His devotion to Christ's life-giving death on the cross is a central component of the *Office of the Passion* he composed for his own use and that of his brothers, and one which they recited daily in addition to the Divine Office. What this *Office* reveals to us is Francis' deep identification with Jesus that allows him to speak from what we might call Jesus' point of view through the words of the psalms. Francis has set out deliberately to follow an inspiration: 'to follow the footsteps of Our Lord Jesus Christ'. He did this in his actions, in showing mercy to the sick and the suffering, in his preaching repentance and conversion to the gospel, in the way he went away to deserted places to pray. All of these actions resembled external events in the life of Jesus as told in the gospel accounts. But the *Office of the Passion* reveals a deeper dimension to this 'following': Francis has learned to 'put on the mind of Christ', and gives every indication of having changed internally, now seeing the world around him from a new point of view, that of the Lord he has been following.

A certain pedagogy is at work here, first in Francis, then practiced by his followers, and one which will

mark the Franciscan tradition in its later development as well. Francis does what he sees Jesus doing in the gospel, and from the repetition of the actions, gestures and words of Jesus, he comes gradually to think, react, speak, and even pray 'as if' Jesus. This 'conformity to Christ' begins to characterize not only the gestures of Francis, but even his thoughts. In later Franciscan texts, this conformity of Francis to Christ finds its classic expression in meditations on the stigmata, leading to the portrayal of Francis as alter Christus, 'another Christ'.

In Francis' prayers, we see him brimming over with gratitude to God for all good things. He is deeply aware of how little he can give back in return. He sings over and over again of the Love that has been revealed to him, a Love that moves him frequently to tears, especially when he thinks of the suffering that Love endures. He finds in his own suffering (his physical illness, anxiety for his brothers, inner darkness and doubt) a way of participating in the experience of Love. He discovers in this sharing of the life of Love a deep joy in the midst of suffering. That joy comes from 'being with' his Beloved.

THOMAS OF CELANO AND MYSTICISM OF THE PASSION



The high point of the experience comes in 1224: this is the famous event of the vision of the 'man like a seraph' on the cross, and the appearance of the stigmata, later immortalized by Giotto on the frescoes of the Basilica built over Francis' tomb. According to the *Life* by Thomas of Celano, Francis was staying in hermitage on the mountain of La Verna. While he was there he saw above him 'in a vision of God' a man 'like a seraph' with six wings, hands outstretched and feet joined, fixed to a cross. In this account, Francis does not understand the vision's meaning, but is filled with a mixture of delight and sadness. He was delighted because of the 'beauty and kind expression' the figure showed him; he was saddened by the suffering of the crucifixion. Francis, confused, continues to ponder the vision 'without any clear understanding'. And later, there begin to appear in his hands and feet 'marks of nails', like the ones he had seen on the crucified man-seraph in the vision.

Thomas then describes in greater detail these marks: like 'heads of

nails' on the inner part of his hands and the upper part of the feet, with 'small pieces of flesh' like the bent ends of nails on the opposite side. His right side 'as if pierced by a lance' was covered with a scar, and leaked blood on his clothing.

Francis himself does not mention this experience in any of his writings, not even in the *Testament* he composed toward the end of his life. Thomas of Celano, in his *Second Life of Francis*, speaks of a 'thick veil' with which he covered the marks, and his care in hiding them from observers, even his own brothers, though at least two are mentioned as having seen them during his life. In the account of his death and funeral, the stigmata play an important part as his body is shown to Clare and her sisters at San Damiano, and is then venerated by the people of Assisi. The marks are hailed as 'a new miracle', something they had never 'heard of or read in the Scriptures'.

We cannot say what these marks on his body meant to Francis, since he does not tell us. And even with his great enthusiasm for the 'new miracle' of the stigmata, Thomas of Celano, who seems to report the funeral ceremony as an eyewitness, leaves us with the impression that Francis himself did not understand the vision or its consequences. What impressed observers later was that Francis had died as

one 'conformed to Christ'. His compassion for the suffering Christ, like his compassion for the sick at the hospital in San Lazaro, his tender compassion for creatures, made him seem 'like a man of another age'. From being the lesser brother among his companions, he now became the 'saint'. And Saint Francis would, from this point, play an important role as the model, the exemplar of 'Franciscan spirituality'

And here we begin to pass from the spirituality of Francis to Franciscan spirituality, because the stigmata became immensely important to Francis' followers immediately after his death.

BONAVENTURE



What we may call a 'mysticism of the cross' serves as an organizing principle for Bonaventure's Major Life of Francis. He speaks of the

'seven visions of the cross of Christ' that marked the different stages of Francis' life. Following the structure that is also found in The Soul's Journey, Bonaventure sees the first six of these as preliminary steps, leading to the summit of La Verna. The greatest of these is the vision of the Seraph and the impression of the marks of the stigmata.

*When the true love of Christ
had transformed his lover into his image
(2 Corinthians 3:18)
and the forty days were over
that he had planned to spend in solitude,
and the feast of St. Michael the Archangel
had also arrived, the angelic man
Francis came down from the mountain,
(Matthew 8:1)
bearing with him the
image of the Crucified,
which was depicted not on tablets of stone
(Exodus 31:18) or on the panels of woods
by the hands of a craftsman,
but engraved in the
members of his body
by the finger of the living God.
(Exodus 31:18; John 11:27).*

*Because it is good to
keep hidden
the secret of the King, (Tobit 12:7)
Francis, aware that he had been given a
royal secret, to the best of his powers kept the
sacred stigmata hidden.
Since it is for God to reveal for his own glory
the wonders which he has performed,
the Lord himself,
who had secretly imprinted those marks on
Francis, publicly worked through them
a number of miracles
so that the miraculous though hidden
power of the stigmata
might be made manifest
by the brightness of divine signs.*

Rather than Francis who points toward the cross of Christ, here the tradition points toward Francis himself as the one bearing the marks, signs or image of Christ. This is part of a wider phenomenon

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in the Franciscan tradition, that of Francis as the way toward the Way who is Christ. In fact, Bonaventure uses his understanding of the stigmata even as the organizing principle of The Soul's Journey into God.

ANGELA OF FOLIGNO



Angela, Bonaventure's contemporary, testifies to both of these currents in the Franciscan tradition: devotion to Francis and devotion to the

Crucified Christ. The description of her earliest ecstatic experience may help us to understand how Francis and Christ were related in her perception. She had gone with a group of companions on a pilgrimage from Foligno to the great Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi, his final burial place. After an initial visit to the church, she returned, as she recounts:

Then, on this second time, as soon as I had genuflected at the entrance of the church and when I saw a stained-glass window depicting St. Francis being closely held by Christ, I heard him telling me: 'Thus I will hold you closely to me and much more closely than can be observed with the eyes of the body.'

Paul Lachance, in his study of Angela's mysticism, says, 'Angela's passionate love affair' with the 'suffering God-man,' the crucified Christ, is the central and organizing principle of her journey. In her Memorial she uses the language of tenderness and affection to describe this love affair. Her mysticism, like that of other Franciscan mystics, speaks from the heart, and seems to echo that mixture of joy and compassion that others noticed in Francis.

Angela describes another experience of union with the crucified, which seems a fulfillment of that promise she earlier received in the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi.

Once I was at Vespers and was gazing at the cross. And while I was gazing at the cross with the eyes of the body, suddenly my soul was set ablaze with love; and every member of my body felt it with the greatest joy. I saw and felt that Christ was within me, embracing my soul with the very arm with which he was crucified... At times it is a source of great joy and delight; it is indeed such a joyful experience to move into Christ's side that in no way can I express it and put words to it.

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GUIDE QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTIONS

1. "Conformity to Christ" is a key term in Franciscan spirituality. St. Francis' devotion to the cross and the passion of Jesus expresses his following of "the footsteps of Our Lord Jesus Christ" and of his heart's desire to be truly conformed to the Crucified Christ? As a friar minor, how devoted are you to the cross and the passion of Jesus as an expression of your following of Jesus and as a way to being conformed more and more to Christ? How can the journey of forty days of Lent help you in this challenge of being more and more conformed to Christ?
2. The stigmata of St. Francis are definite marks of the height of St. Francis' conformity to Christ. In your case, what marks of conformity to Christ can you show? What wounds can you show as marks of your being a faithful and sacrificing friar minor?
3. What is the place of the cross and passion of Christ in your prayer life, your community living and in your ministry? What challenges does the "mysticism of the cross" pose to you? Do you really allow the Crucified Christ to lead you to those who are suffering in the world? How can the Season of Lent lead you not only to the Crucified Christ but also to God's "crucified people"?

FRANCISCAN READING

Source: Noel Muscat, OFM, "Francis of Assisi and Bonaventure's Theology of the Cross"

The episode of the stigmatization is the apex of the experience of union with Christ Crucified in the life of Saint Francis. Bonaventure presents the episode as a *transitus*, a paschal experience, in which

Francis participates in the same *transitus* of Christ in His passion. The experience of mystical union is presented as an ascension into ecstatic levels of experience, which Bonaventure expresses with

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a specific Latin word: *sursumactio*, which we already meet in the Itinerarium. The stigmata are described as a *sacramentum Domini* (the Lord's sacrament), which operates in the body of the *Poverello*. In the episode of the death of Saint Francis, the stigmata are no longer seen as a sign of suffering, but one of glorification, of a participation in the joy of the resurrection of Christ, who carries the signs of the passion in His glorified body. The stigmata are the definite seal of Christ on the body of Francis. Christ confirms once and for all the pontifical seal on the *forma vitae* of the Gospel embraced by the Friars Minor.

We have noted that the aim of the prologue of the *Legenda Maior* is that of presenting to the brothers the icon of Francis who becomes a living representation of Christ

Crucified. Bonaventure goes beyond the historical contingencies of the Order of Friars Minor, in order to present Saint Francis who is a perennial model, a strong and indisputable point of reference for the following of Christ of the brothers. Departing from this representation Bonaventure could then construct models of conduct which present Francis united to the mystery of the cross of Christ during all stages of his life.

The meeting of Francis with the leper becomes the first step in the school of the Crucifix. Bonaventure presents the leper as an icon of Christ on the cross, who, according to the expression of the prophet Isaiah, appeared "despised as a leper." There is a real contact, which I would also call a physical contact, with the mystery of suffering. The

GUIDE QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTIONS

1. St. Francis' stigmata, for St. Bonaventure, are a *sacramentum Domini*, the Lord's sacrament. They are the Lord's sacrament of St. Francis' conformity to the Crucified Christ and of his glorification and participation in Christ's resurrection. In this light, do you agree that the life of a friar minor can also only become a *sacramentum Domini* if it is marked with the cross of Christ, with an authentic and credible conformity to Christ? How can your life as a friar minor be a true *sacramentum Domini*? How can the Season of Lent help you in this challenge?

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same Christ, who according to Bonaventure, appears to Francis fastened to a cross, appears to him in a very real way in the person of the leper, whose body becomes a sacrament of Christ Crucified, of him who ut *leprosus apparuit* (appeared despised as a leper).

The sacramental aspect of the signs of the passion in the stigmatized body of Francis is connected with this representation of the leper. When Francis comes down from Mount La Verna, although his body was very weak, it becomes a living sign of the power of the Word of the Cross. Bonaventure presents Francis in the following terms: "Now fixed with Christ to the cross, in both body and spirit, Francis not only burned with a seraphic love into God but also thirsted with Christ crucified for

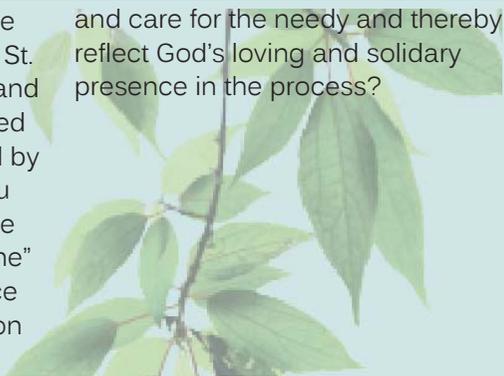
the multitude of those to be saved. Since he could not walk because of the nails protruding from his feet, he had his half-dead body carried through the towns and villages to arouse others to carry the cross of Christ."

For Francis and the first brothers, the cross of Christ becomes the book of liturgical prayer of the fraternity. This is how Bonaventure describes the prayer life of the first brothers at Rivotorto: "They did not yet have liturgical books from which to chant the canonical hours. In place of these they had the book of Christ's cross which they studied continually day and night, taught by the example and words of their father."



2. As the sacramental nature of the passion of the stigmatized St. Francis is connected to his love and passion for the poor, the neglected and the suffering, as represented by the lepers in his time, how do you as a friar minor manifest your love and care for "the lepers of our time" as a sacrament of God's presence in the world? How can the Season of Lent help you in showing love

and care for the needy and thereby reflect God's loving and solidary presence in the process?



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CLOSING PRAYER & PETITION



L. O Christ, my Lord, which for my sins didst hang upon a tree, grant that thy grace in me, poor wretch, may still engrafted be.

Grant that thy named hanging there may kill in me all pride and care of wealth, sith thou didst then in such poor state abide.

R. Grant that thy crown of pricking thorns, which thou for me didst wear, may make me willing for thy sake all shame and pain to bear.

Grant that those scorns and taunts which thou didst on the cross endure may humble me, and in my heart all patience still procure.

L. Grant that thy praying for thy foes may plant within my breast such charity as from my heart I malice may detest.

Grant that thy pierced hands, which did of nothing all things frame, may move me to lift up my hands and ever praise thy name.

R. Grant that thy wounded feet, whose steps were perfect

evermore, may learn my feet to treat those paths which thou hast gone before.

Grant that those drops of blood which ran out from thy heart amain may meek my heart into salt tears to see thy grievous pain.

L. Grant that thy blessed grave, wherein thy body lay awhile, May bury all such vain delights as may my mind defile.

Grant that thy going down to them, which did thy sight desire may keep my soul, when I am dead, clean from the purging fire

R. Grant that thy rising up from death may raise my thoughts from sin, grant that thy parting from this earth from earth my heart may win.

Grant, Lord, that thy ascending then may lift my mind to thee that there my heart and joy may rest, though here in flesh I be.

L/R. Amen

(*Saint Philip Howard, "Prayer"*)