

Minister's Message

Dear brothers and sisters,
As we continue our celebration of Easter, I'm reminded of what we commit ourselves to when we make our profession to follow Christ as Francis did. A reading came to mind that turned out to be the end of the Gospel for the Sunday of Easter next year. This is after Jesus has asked Peter three times, "Do you love me?" Jesus continues speaking to Peter:

"Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." He said this signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when he had said this, he said to him, "Follow me." [John 21:18-19]

It occurs to me that while this foretold Peter's martyrdom, isn't it the case for all of us who reach old age that we will eventually be dressed and taken wherever someone else wants us to go? Jesus calls us to follow him; as St. John Paul II said to our leaders, "Perhaps, you will not be required to pour out your blood as a martyr, but you will certainly be asked to give a coherent and steadfast witness in fulfilling the promises made at your Baptism and Confirmation, which you renewed and confirmed with your profession in the Franciscan Secular Order." Fr. Richard Trezza, in speaking about the meaning of profession at our Regional Retreat several years ago, made it very clear when he said that during the Eucharistic Prayer, we should think of ourselves as offered on the altar with Christ. That is why it is so appropriate for Profession to take place in the context of the Eucharist. The older we get, the more we

encounter situations that we would prefer to avoid, even if we know we cannot. As we seek to follow Christ more closely, we have more opportunities to say with Jesus, "Take this cup away from me, but not what I will but what you will." (Mark 14:36b) Moreover, as our Rule states, we are to have a positive attitude born of our faith even in difficulties: "Messengers of perfect joy in every circumstance, they should strive to bring joy and hope to others." (Rule 19) Returning to that same final chapter of John's Gospel, the next passage is interesting too. Peter turns, sees the beloved disciple, and asks Jesus, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus responds, "What if I want him to remain until I come? What concern is it of yours? You follow me." (John 21:21b-22) We usually focus on the first part of Jesus' answer to Peter, especially since the evangelist is at pains to explain it away, but what I've realized is that Jesus is making a point here: It's none of your business what he wants to do with someone else. It is YOUR job - and mine - to follow Christ. To return to my favorite words from St. Francis, "May God give you what is yours [to do]" - and let's not worry about what God may have given someone else to do. My task is uniquely suited to me, your task is uniquely suited to you, and comparing them is going to be as unhelpful as comparing apples and pork chops.

Whatever the circumstances of your life during this Easter season, may you be able to find joy and hope in Christ's Resurrection and share that joy with everyone you meet, especially those whose circumstances make it most difficult to believe the Good News. Peace and blessings, Vickie ☒

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REGIONAL CALENDAR 2015

All events are at Mayslake Village unless otherwise noted

Saturday, January 17
Regional Executive Council Meeting

Monday, March 2
Per Capita/Census/Fraternity Annual Reports due

Saturday, March 21
Regional Executive Council Meeting

Sunday, April 5 *Easter*

Sat./Sun., April 11-12
Candidates Retreat (*tentative*)

Saturday, May 16
Chapter of Ministers

Thursday-Sunday, July 9-12
Summer Seminar – Loretto, PA; topic “Seroant Leadership”s

Saturday, July 18
Regional Executive Council Meeting

Saturday, August 1
Regional Gathering – Feast of the Portiuncula

Saturday, September 19
Formation/Leadership Workshop

Saturday, October 3
Regional Executive Council Meeting

October 13-18
NAFRA Chapter/Chapter of Elections, Clinton, NJ

Sunday, November 15
Mother Cabrini Feast Day Celebration location TBA

Saturday, December 5
Regional Chapter of Elections



Spiritual Assistant’s Message

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Do you have May flowers yet? I don’t but very soon I will be planting my seeds and herbs. Ask me in June how my crops are coming along. I’m always happy to talk about new green life in my garden especially if it’s delicious.

Have you heard anything about the Candidate’s Retreat which was held at Mayslake Village on Saturday April 11th and Sunday the 13th? If you had candidates or your formation team at the event, ask them to give a report to the community on what they heard or experienced. I was there and thought it was very well done with a fine turnout of those in formation who are the hope of our region.

In the month of May there are a good number of Franciscan holy men and women we are called to remember. On the 9th we remember Catherine of Bologna, on the 16th we honor Margaret of Cortona, on the 17th we celebrate the life of Paschal Baylon, then on the 18th we recall the Capuchin friar Felix of Cantalice, on May 20th we remember Bernardine of Siena.

We also celebrate on the 24th the Dedication of the great Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi by Pope Innocent IV on May 25, 1253. So as you see, there’s plenty of Franciscan prayer, study, and reflection available to us in May. But of course all good catholic folks know that May is Mary’s month.

In some places we still bring flowers of the fairest to her honor. We might even create a prayerful May Crowning with festive songs as we place a crown of fresh flowers and jewels as befitting The Queen of Heaven; the Queen of the May.

Now if you ask me, the best things about May is the part about going outside into the fresh air and we can invite Sister Fresh Air to come inside as we open our windows. Oh! And all of us who are lucky enough to live by the lake have some very special warm weather elements. There places to walk, or ride a bike, places to sit in the sun or in the shade with a good book. I can sit for hours and watch the boats on the water. I can easily imagine Francis saying to his faithful companion Leo if they were up here “Come on Leo let’s get out of here, let’s go to the Lake,” and off they would go.

Well, once again I send my blessings and best wishes.

Your brother, Joe.

Good News - Profession!

Sunday April 26th, 2015
St.Francis of Assisi Fraternity, Steger.
James Leech (now OFS), home parish:
St. Liborius, Steger, IL

It was a wonderful celebration with fraternities from Cedar Lake and Elizabeth of Hungary participating Mass was celebrated by Fr. Chuck Faso, a friend of Jim's from childhood, and the Franciscan Spirit was the order of the day with lunch and lots of hugs to go around!

In-formation –

“See, I make all things new!” “O Mary we crown thee with blossoms today...”

by Sandra Kisel Formation Commission

Happy Easter to all! What a beautiful Candidate’s Retreat! There was a large turnout of Candidates and wonderful presentations were given. We also celebrated the Feast of Divine Mercy and prayed the Divine Mercy Chaplet together at the 3 o’clock hour. What a wonderful way to complete our retreat!

This month is especially dedicated to our Blessed Mother and everywhere I travel and wherever I look over creation breaking into blossom, two thoughts come to mind, *“See, I make all things new”* [Easter], and the song, *“O Mary we crown thee with blossoms today...”*

Many of you have visited the National Shrine of the Militia of the Immaculata (MI) at Marytown, founded by St. Maximilian Kolbe. St. Maximilian Kolbe was a *faithful son of St. Francis of Assisi!* His parents Maria and Julius were also Secular Franciscans! Raymond, [he later took the name Maximilian], was instructed well in the faith by his parents, however; saints are not perfect, they are real people who struggle in their life journey just as we do. It’s known that one day Raymond got himself into a spot of trouble and his mother said: *“Raymond, what will become of you!”*

These words were fire that pierced the young heart of Raymond and he ran to Mary asking her this question in prayer until she answered him presenting him with two crowns. Raymond chose both! Many of you know the rest of the story about how Mary guided him throughout the rest of his life preparing him for the white crown of purity, [his priesthood], and the red crown of martyrdom in the Auschwitz prison camp. Among other things St. Maximilian Kolbe is known for championing Mary’s cause as *Mediatrice of all graces coming from the Most Holy Trinity.*

From the beginning of time Our Heavenly Father always wanted to send His Son to earth through Mary as a sign of His great love for us. Since the Incarnation of Jesus in Mary’s womb by the Holy Spirit, Mary has been the one who has made Christ present to us, it is she through whom we have always received Christ and experienced His great love, healing, salvation and mercy. Mary’s intercession, guidance and help for the Church didn’t stop with making Christ present in the stable at Bethlehem, nor at the Presentation or at Pentecost.

Total Consecration to Mary is not different than St. Francis’ entrustment of himself and his entire Order, with great love to the Mother of God. In fact, we know St. Francis contemplated Christ in the Crib, at the Cross and in the Eucharist throughout his life. Would he not have seen that if it pleased the Son of God whom he loved so intensely to entrust Himself into Mary’s womb in order to become present to us, that he would do no less?

According to St. Bonaventure, St. Francis received the grace of living the gospel life through Mary as the Mother of Mercy. Our Rule of Life (9), lets us know *“devotion to (Mary), is the hallmark of the Franciscan calling, both as a way of expressing love for her and as an important way of finding Jesus himself”* [From Gospel to Life w/ commentary].

Who else was perfectly without sin and so pleasing to the Most Holy Trinity than Mary? Who else can obtain the graces from the Holy Trinity we need in order to live our Profession Promises as perfectly as possible? Mary has mediated in the cases of countless saints and souls as she did with St. Francis and St. Maximilian...among these don’t forget the miraculous conversion of Alphonse Ratisbonne! Throughout our lives, who else has more interest in guiding us along the pathways of the gospel not only for our own sanctification but for the purpose of making her Son known to every soul— for the conversion of the whole world!

Have a beautiful month enjoying the sight and smell of creation coming alive again and remember to offer...rosaries, rosaries, rosaries! All beautiful roses for our Mom, all for the Sacred Heart of Jesus! **T**

By Barbara Elkins, OFS, JPIC Councilor

During Lent, I made a conscious effort to limit my reading selections to books that will support my spiritual life. I have a stack of books purchased throughout the years that have been put aside after a cursory reading of the first few pages. The demands of professional reading materials, staying abreast of current events and the pleasure of escaping into a good novel often take priority over contemplating spiritual works. I took the time to read and reflect on two books whose topics addressed a need in my life. The first book *Reconciliation* by Bishop Robert Morneau helped to deepen my understanding of the great gift of God's mercy through the sacrament of reconciliation. In the introduction, the author states, "Just as we have been forgiven and restored to a life of grace, we in turn are sent forth to be peacemakers."

This idea of reconciliation and peace lead to my second book selection, *Saints and Social Justice: A Guide to Changing the World* by Brandon Vogt. In this book, the author's goal is to illustrate Catholic social teaching through the lives of the saints. In his introduction he writes, "My hope is that this book imitates stained glass windows, using the saints as conduits of light through which the radiance of Catholic social teaching can shine with new vividness and splendor."

Vogt highlights two saints for each of the seven major themes of Catholic social teaching as defined by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. There are well known contemporary saints like Bl. Teresa of Calcutta, who was chosen to represent the theme of *Life and Dignity of the Human Person* and St. John Paul II, who was selected for *Solidarity*. Servant of God Dorothy Day's life illustrated the theme of *Dignity of Work* and the *Rights of Workers*. The author shares a short biography about each of the fourteen saints along with several noteworthy sidebars containing unique references and quotations. What I found interesting about his approach was his reflections on the lessons he gleaned from each saint.

From St. Vincent de Paul, he shares that the most effective form of charity is personal and that personal connection is transformative witness of to excuses. "From the poor we learn the value of simplicity and the unshakeable faith." St. Peter Claver, who ministered to the slaves in the early 1600's, demonstrated the guiding lesson of not submitting "Fear and timidity should never discourage our charity."

St. Frances of Rome's life is a beautiful example of how holiness begins with the family and the value of spiritual friendship. By keeping our own gifts, culture and family heritage in consideration, we may find our own path to holiness like St. Roque González, who worked to maintain the rights of the native Indians in South America during the time of Spanish conquest. St. Giles demonstrates that we're responsible in protecting the land and animals around us.

The call to peace and social justice is not limited to a few brave saints. Brandon Vogt highlights a quote from Mother Teresa: "I never look at the masses as my responsibility; I look at the individual. I can only love one person at a time - one, one, one. So you begin. I began - I picked up one person. Maybe if I didn't pick up that one person, I wouldn't have picked up forty-two thousand." (p 26)

Every morning, I receive a "Saint of the Day" email from Franciscan Media. These small biographies and reflections on the lives of the saints remind me that we are all called to the communion of saints. While reading this book, my thoughts turned to all the Franciscan saints who have demonstrated their own unique path to holiness by their willingness to love. Let us look to these holy brothers and sisters for guidance as we go from gospel to life and life to gospel.

Would you consider taking some time to learn more about a Franciscan saint who exemplifies Catholic social teaching? There are plenty of resources available on Franciscan saints. I particularly like this list of Secular Franciscan Saints and Blesseds compiled by Our Lady of Mount Carmel Fraternity in Michigan. <http://www.rc.net/detroit/olmcsfo/Saints.html>. The list was based on the book *Day by Day with followers of Francis & Clare* by Fr. Pat McCloskey, O.F.M. from St. Anthony Messenger Press.

In reference to Catholic social teaching, Vogt raises the point that it is an "unfortunate fact that people describe this body of wisdom as 'Catholicism's best kept secret.'...Catholic social teaching should be well known, well understood, and most of all, well practiced. The saints knew this best and it's to them we turn."

"No one can demand that religion should be relegated to the inner sanctum of personal life, without influence on societal and national life...An authentic faith - which is never comfortable or completely personal - always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it." ~ Pope Francis (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 183) 