

Minister's Message: Incarnation!

by Stephanie Sormane, SFO

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As we embark on our Advent Journey in preparation of the celebration of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, I would like to share with you what I feel is a profound insight in Franciscan spirituality, and why the celebration of the birth of Jesus was so central in Francis' spirituality, and therefore why it has special meaning for us as well.

I was privileged last year to go on pilgrimage to Assisi. Our group leader was Fr. Roch Niemier, OFM, Provincial Spiritual Assistant to the SFO for Assumption Province. Those of you who have experienced these pilgrimages know that there are daily reflections on where we are about to go and what we will see, so it will have utmost meaning for us. One of the days, Fr. Roch gave a reflection largely

based on Chapter 20 of his recently published book, *In the Footsteps of Francis and Clare*, in which he delves into the spirituality of the places in Assisi that we visited. (If you're interested in obtaining the book, it can be ordered from various online retailers.)

This particular talk reflected on the difference between monastic and Franciscan spirituality, which is also covered in Chapter 20 of his book. Fr. Roch says:

"The goal of the monk of that time was to gaze upward toward heaven and this upward direction would lead to union with God. The goal for the Franciscan, on the other hand, was a penetrating gaze into the ordinary of life. The starting point is the Incarnation, God descending to us rather than our ascending to God. Our gaze is

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Spiritual Assistant's Message

by Fr. Don Blaeser, OFM

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Peace and everything good to you! As I look forward to Christmas, my thoughts turn to what St. Francis did in the little town of Greccio. It seems that St. Francis was the first to create what we now refer to as a Christmas crèche or Christmas crib scene.

Indeed, he went to a lot more effort than we ever do, having a worthy man help him by bringing in some animals, and people from the area, and a priest to celebrate the Eucharist. And that celebration was *live*—live animals and live people celebrating the coming of the Son of God *alive* in our human flesh.

Francis of Assisi was a tactile person, who wanted to see, to hear, to get in touch with the reality of Christ's birth in Bethlehem. To savor the reality of Christ's birth into the poverty of the human condition, but also the

sweetness of his love for us, manifested in his Incarnation. And the aliveness of the scene, according to some authors, was intensified by the miracle of the child coming to life in Francis' arms.

We prepare for the coming of Christmas in some different ways than did our brother, Francis. We are perhaps getting ready to send cards and letters. We begin to shop, possibly till we drop, or feel that we're about to. We decorate and probably wonder if we have the energy to get it all done in time. And perhaps a little voice inside is whispering, "Why?" Why are we doing all this? Is it necessary? Is it meaningful?

Surely St. Francis would be aghast if he were plunked down in the middle of one of our cities today to see the lights, the

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Mother Cabrini Award Recipient: Ruth Meylor, SFO

by Stephanie Sormane, SFO

At the Region’s Mother Cabrini Celebration on Sunday, November 11, **Ruth Meylor, SFO** of St. Anthony of Padua Fraternity (Rockford), was presented with the Mother Cabrini Award.

Present at the celebration were the other nominees, **Mary Licata, SFO** of St. Francis - St. Louis Fraternity (Chicago) and **Lorraine Schuch, SFO** of St. Clare Fraternity (Oak

Brook). All three of these ladies are extraordinary witnesses of what it means to be a Secular Franciscan. Let us all honor them by following their example.

For more information on these great ladies, see last month’s *SFO News*. More details about the award recipient and the Celebration will be shared in the January *SFO News*. **■**

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upon this Incarnate God as reflected, particularly, in the Crucified Lord. The goal of contemplation for a monk focused on a vision of God that resulted in the ecstatic union. The goal of contemplation for the Franciscan focused on transformation by which one became like the face of God reflected in the Incarnation. ... Contemplative union for the monk was a goal to be achieved only in heaven, or by being drawn out of oneself apart from any contact with the world. Contemplative union in the Franciscan tradition happened in the process of transformation into the image of the Incarnate Lord in the here and now."

Christmas is usually a joyful time for us

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trimmings, the frenzy. Would he be delighted or would he question if all of this is truly an expression of the real meaning of Christmas?

As followers of the humble man of Assisi, we would do well to make our preparations for the real meaning of Christmas stronger than those for the secular dimension. We can exercise a contemplative spirit by making everything we do a prayer. So that each card we write, each treat we bake, each gift we buy and wrap, each tree we trim becomes a prayer.

Truly every effort can be part of preparing for the coming of Christ again this Christmas Season. In fact we can erase the divide between the sacred and the secular in our personal lives by seeing Christ in each moment, and proclaiming him in every act of our lives.

And while we’re at it, we might even decide that all those who are working so hard at

(although for some it can be very difficult). It’s hard not to get caught up in the hustle and bustle of all the commercialized merrymaking. But particularly as Franciscans, we need to remember Francis’ view of the celebration of the Lord’s birth: That crèche in Greccio was specifically for the purpose of helping people realize, on the one hand, the poverty into which the Lord was born, and on the other, that the Son of God emptied himself to become *one of us!* Please try to find the time to ponder this is as you celebrate the Lord’s birth this year!

Wishing all of you special blessings this holy holiday season! **■**

the secular or commercial side of Christmas are – whether they know it or not – giving witness to the real “Reason for the Season” – to Christ who is born in our hearts and in our world anew. Then the more we look the more we will see Christ in everything this Christmas. Perhaps that’s exactly what Francis would do if her were plunked down in the middle of Christmas, 2007.

Have a wonder-filled Advent and a Blessed Christmas! **■**

Events of Interest

December 1: Daniel and Susan Willenborg, SFO (St. Anthony of Padua Fraternity, Joliet) are hosting a Pro-Life Think Tank Follow-up Session & Planning for PASS Tour, open to all Secular Franciscans within the Region, at 10:30 a.m. Billy’s Pancake House, 440 W. Northwest Hwy., Palatine. The tour itself is scheduled for ...

December 8: 17214 S. Oak Park Ave., Tinley Park. Time and details to be decided at the December 1 planning meeting. For more information, or to attend the planning session or tour, contact Daniel and Susan Willenborg, SFO.

Calendar

Note: Unless otherwise indicated, all events are at Mayslake Village (Oak Brook).

January

12: Council Meeting, 9:30 a.m.

March

01: Per Capita, Census, and Fraternity Annual Reports due

15: Apostolic Action Workshop

29: Council Meeting, 9:30 a.m.

April

05: Candidates’ Retreat, Day 1

May

03: Candidates’ Retreat, Day 2

17: Chapter of Ministers and National Visitation

June

21: Leadership Workshop

July

19: Council Meeting, 9:30 a.m.

August

02: Regional Gathering, Feast of the Portiuncula

September

12-14: Regional Retreat, St. Francis Woods, Frankfort

October

25: Council Meeting, 9:30 a.m.

November

16: Mother Cabrini Feast Day Celebration (location TBD)