**LET US LIVE ACCORDING TO THE PERFECTION OF THE HOLY GOSPEL**

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In 2021, we remember the 800th Anniversary of the *Regula non bullata*. This precious text still speaks to us in a formidable way of the evangelical inspiration of St Francis and, at the same time, makes us look towards St Clare. In the prologue, we read (Rnb Prologue 2): “This is the life of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that Brother Francis petitioned the Lord Pope to grant and confirm for him”; and he did grant and confirm it for him and his brothers, present and to come. And in the conclusion, we hear: “I ask all my brothers to learn and frequently call to mind the tenor and sense of what has been written in this life for the salvation of our souls.”

St Francis speaks of a life that he hands over to his brothers and that finds its source and inspiration in following the teaching and footprints of our Lord Jesus Christ (RnB I,1). The link that binds the Gospel to life and life to the Gospel1 in the *Regula non bullata* is constant in Francis, who also proposes it to Clare and her sisters in two short and intense writings: “Because by divine inspiration… choosing to live according to the perfection of the holy Gospel, I resolve and promise for myself and for my brothers always to have the same loving care and special solicitude for you as for them (Form of Life 1-2). I, little brother Francis, wish to follow the life and poverty of our most high Lord Jesus Christ and of His most holy Mother, and to persevere in this until the end; and I ask you, my ladies, and I give you my advice, that you live always in this most holy life and poverty” (Last wishes 1-2).

It is a counsel that Francis addresses to those he calls “my ladies”, and at the same time, it is the charismatic nucleus that unites brothers and sisters in the same form of life - lived in different ways and conditions. The Poverello promises to take diligent care and special solicitude of the sisters precisely within this communion in charism, which unites brothers and sisters in the most genuine sense. The early years of the friars’ experience of the Gospel came together in the *Regula non bullata*, a text that took root through a continuous dialogue between life, which is movement by definition, and the Rule, which lays down its cornerstones.

Francis knows that Clare senses and lives this circularity between life and the Gospel and proposes it fearlessly. What unites us, then, is precisely this link between life and the Gospel, where the one enlightens the other and receives continuous inspiration from it. If it is true that the Gospel directs life towards conversion, it is also true that life helps us to listen to the word of the Gospel in the ever-new journey of existence, immersed in the changes of history.

The word of the Gospel enlightens and transforms lives and is in turn enlightened by the word of the lives of the men and women we meet, of the little ones and the poor of our time, of creation and also of all those who are on a quest for meaning and truth. We need more of a life that is truly welcomed, lived, loved, given, shared, to welcome the Gospel word, without which the book of our existence remains sealed.

We cannot wrap ourselves up in the search for our Franciscan Clarian identity without continuous comparison and dialogue with the journey through life, ours, and that of many in this unique time. The Gospel calls us to conversion and ignites in us the call to the radicality of faith, made up of the search for the Lord’s face in following Jesus. The gift of life calls us to the radicality of self-giving as the decisive factor for a full existence. The radical following of the poor and crucified Christ united Francis and Clare in the space of a fraternity lived in minority and poverty, typical of those who renounce support and guarantees.

Clare’s cloister, lived with her sisters at San Damiano, and Francis’ cloister, lived with his brothers on the roads of the world, ask us to seek together what truly unites us and to be, with our lives, prophetic words for our time. I deeply feel that this is our common call in today’s Church for the world, which God loves: to listen and welcome the word of the Gospel, so that life may be transformed by it and allow the power of the Spirit to express itself, who dwells in it and wants to lead it towards its fullness, which is eternal life, the love of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, an eternal dance open to all creatures. And this fullness has the name of liberated and redeemed lives, capable of becoming truly fraternal and a leaven of fraternity for many today.

Dear Poor Sisters! In this first message that I address to you with simplicity, I ask you to make this journey together between life and the Gospel and to watch over us friars minor, your brothers, confident that it is still possible to live our vocation, so beautiful and full of hope for this time. I commit myself to have for you, in the name of St Francis, that care and solicitude that is grounded in life according to the Gospel, our shared and extraordinary vocation. Let us be a memory for each other of this fire.

Solemnity of Saint Clare,

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1 Footnote:

The Rule and the General Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order also stress going from “the Gospel to life and life to the Gospel.”

**OFS Rule:**

**4.3** Secular Franciscans should devote themselves especially to careful reading of the gospel, "going from gospel to life and life to the gospel".

**OFS General Constitutions:
2.** They seek to deepen, in the light of faith, the values and choices of the evangelical life according to the Rule of the SFO:
-- *Rule 7* in a continually renewed journey of conversion and of formation;
-- *Rule 4,3* open to the challenges that come from society and from the Church's life situation, "going from Gospel to life and from life to Gospel";
-- in the personal and communal dimensions of this journey.

**3.** Ongoing formation – accomplished by means of courses, gatherings, and the sharing of experience – aims to assist the brothers and sisters:
-- *Rule 4* in listening to and meditating on the Word of God, "going from Gospel to life and from life to Gospel";