**THE STIGMATA**

***of St Francis of Assisi***

When I consider the symbolism and mysticism of the Stigmata of St Francis of Assisi, I’m also reminded of the unavoidable pain and suffering associated with the ‘wounds of Christ.’

The Stigmata are a mystical experience, transcending rational understanding. They represent the mystery of the Divine which Francis believed could only be understood through faith and prayer.

They hold great symbolic significance because they represent the five wounds of Christ: in the hands, feet and side. The receiving of these wounds signified the depth of St Francis’ devotion to Christ and the sacrifice he was willing to make in imitation of the Lord.

As someone once noted "…there cannot be pleasure without pain…", and it appears to be true here.  Along with the delight of his new found intimacy with Christ, St Francis had to endure the great physical pain and suffering the Stigmata brought with it.

Not only were the Stigmata a constant reminder of Francis' willingness to take up his cross and follow Christ's example but they also marked a significant turning point in Francis' interior life, signalling the completion of his inner transformation from a vain young man to a humble servant of God, his surrender to God's will and his commitment to living out his faith in a radical way.

In 2024, the year of the 800th Anniversary of St Francis receiving the Stigmata, let us renew our commitment to renounce worldly desires and embrace a life of poverty, humility, and service.  We do this gladly so that we may enjoy a renewed intimacy with God and a deeper expression of our love of Christ.

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