***Monthly Spiritual Message***

 **March 2024**

**JESUS IS GOD**

*“Gospel to life; life to the Gospel.”*

This is our Process of Formation; This is our Way of life.

The formation process must carefully examine the gospels to know Christ. Indeed, Gospel discussion[[1]](#footnote-1) and meditation,[[2]](#footnote-2) even for the friars, is part of initial[[3]](#footnote-3) and ongoing formation.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Let us focus, then, on the Miracles – the “good works” or “Signs” of the Lord Jesus given in the Gospel of Saint John. These are the proof of who he is and the authenticity of his teachings. Saint John gives us Seven Signs of Jesus’s divinity:

1. Turning water into wine. (John 2:1-12)
2. Healing the nobleman’s son. (John 4:46-54)
3. Healing the man at the Pool of Bethzatha. (John 5:1-11)
4. Feeding of the five thousand. (John 6:1-15)
5. Walking on water. (John 6:16-15)
6. Healing the man born blind. (John 9:1-12)

All the previous miracles are before Chapter 10 in Saint John’s gospel. But Chapter 10 is a watershed moment because this is where Christ says, *“The Father and I are one!”* (John 10:30). And then Jews fetched stones to stone him to death. It is a severe confrontation to which Jesus responds, *“I have done many good works, for you to see, works from my Father, for which of these are you going to stone me?”* Then, Saint John has Jesus asking the Jews (and us) to reflect and re-read the previous six miracles back to the changing water into wine. After this, we read about the most spectacular miracle Jesus worked when the Lord Jesus brought back to life his friend, who had died four days before.

1. The resurrection of Lazarus. (John 11)

So, we see that Saint John, in recounting Jesus' miracles, is not just telling us incredible stories – he has a purpose. He wants us to believe and be utterly convinced about Christ's divinity**.**

Much later, in 17:5, Saint John records Jesus making an extraordinary statement: *“Now, Father, it is time for you to glorify me with that glory I had with you before ever the world was [made].”* This is such a dramatic prayer that it demands that we pause to think about it:

“Be still,

and know that I am God.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

Saint Paul takes up the implications of this statement of Jesus, that he existed before the world was made, in his Letter to the Ephesians, 1:3-5:[[6]](#footnote-6)

Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

who has blessed us with all the spiritual blessings of heaven in Christ.

**Before the world was made, he chose us, chose us in Christ**,

to be holy and spotless and to live through love in his presence,

determining that we should become

his adopted sons and daughters through Jesus Christ.

Even Saint Peter declares to us all: 1 Peter 1:20.

Remember the ransom that was paid to free you from the useless life your ancestors handed down to you was paid in anything corruptible, neither in silver nor gold but in the precious blood of a lamb without spot or stain, namely Christ; **who though known since before the world was made,** has been revealed only in our time, the end of ages, for your sake. Through him, you now have faith in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory for that very reason – so that you would have faith and hope in God.

Having made this point, let us go back to Saint John’s story (John 9:1–7)

**Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind.**

As he went along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. His disciples asked him, *“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, for him to have been born blind?”* *“Neither he nor his parents sinned,”* Jesus answered, *“he was born blind so that the works of God might be displayed in him.”*[[7]](#footnote-7) *“As long as the day lasts, I must carry out the work of the one who sent me; the night will soon be here when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”* Having said this, he spat on the ground, made a paste with the spittle,[[8]](#footnote-8) and put this over the eyes of the blind man. and said to him*, “Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam”* (a name that means ‘sent’). So, the blind man went off and washed himself and came away with his sight restored.

Perhaps, we should first note that nowhere in the Old Testament is a blind man given sight. This miracle is unique to Jesus. He came not just to give sight to the blind but to dispel the darkness of ignorance. Jesus says clearly, *“I am the light of the world!”*

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1. Gospel discussion is a central part of the formation of many movements in the church. E.g., Young Christian Students, Young Christian Workers, and Young Christian Families use the method of “See, Judge, Act”, asking the questions: What is it that I “SEE” in my family life, work life, recreational life? How can I “JUDGE” this according to the criterion of the Gospel? How am I going to “ACT” now and in the future?

 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Gospel formation as found in the Constitutions of the Capuchin friars is noted in this way: *“Let us strive to grow constantly in the wisdom of Christ, which is acquired above all by living it, notably through persistent READING, MEDITATION, and careful STUDY of the Sacred Scriptures.* In the Conventual Constitutions, *“Friars are to prepare themselves diligently with MEDITATION, PRAYER and STUDY.*” Franciscan OFM Constitutions: *“Since the life and Rule of the Friars Minor is the observance of the Holy Gospel, the friars are to apply themselves to the READING and MEDITATION of the Holy Gospel.”* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The formation program of the Secular Franciscan Order is clearly outlined in “The Time of Formation”, General Constitutions Article 40.2 and 3, which deals with Initial Formation.

 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ongoing formation is explained in Article 44:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Taken from Psalm 46:10. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ephesians is called the “Queen of Epistles.” The Opening Canticle is so beautiful it needs to be read very carefully. To this end, it occurs four times in the Evening Prayer of the Liturgy of Divine Office. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. In other words, something quite special is about to happen here – something ordained by God! [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Why does Jesus spit on the ground and make a mud paste to put on the eyes of the blind man? Is it a reference to Genesis 2:7? “God fashioned man of dust from the soil.” This man was born blind. Jesus is not just restoring sight, there is a hint that Jesus is not just fixing his eyes but doing something even more amazing, something that only God can do - create. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)