***Monthly Spiritual Message***

**August 2018**

**THE OFS RULE**

**(Part 6)**

**CHARITY AND HOLINESS**

There is a saying of Jesus that is not in the Gospels, but it is in the New Testament. It comes to us from St Paul and is found in Acts 20:35:

“In all things, I have shown you

that by so toiling one must help the weak,

remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said,

“**It is more blessed to give than to receiv**e.”

*Number 11 of the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order states:*

Let the Secular Franciscans

seek a proper spirit of detachment from temporal goods

by simplifying their own material needs.

Let them be mindful that according to the gospel

they are stewards of the goods received

for the benefit of God’s children.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Down through the centuries[[2]](#footnote-2), the “Brothers and Sisters of Penance” as they were first called, and then the “Third Order of St Francis”, as they were called until 1978, and now the “Secular Franciscans”, have been renowned for their works of charity.

**Blessed Luchesio** (1174 – 1241)[[3]](#footnote-3) and his wife Buonadonna, called the “First Tertiaries, were involved in hospital work and care of the poor and needy. Luchesio went out in search of sick people. Sometimes, he traveled great distances to bring them to hospital for treatment. **Bl. Davanzato** (1200 – 1295)[[4]](#footnote-4), a tertiary priest, used the income of his parish for the care of the poor and assisted them to the point of sometimes having only bread and water for his meals. He even gave up his bed for poor pilgrims and slept on the floor. This devotion to the poor saw that the tertiaries in Modena, with great sensitivity, organized assistance for poor people who were ashamed to beg, by collecting alms for them. We see this in the life of **Bl. Humiliana Cerchi** (1219-1246).

This concern of the Tertiaries for the poor constantly led them into conflict with their spouses, their family, their relatives, their friends and even strangers. **Bl. Novellono of Faenza** (1200-1280)had difficulty with his wife when he first began to care for the poor, as did Luchesio with Buonadonna. Bl. Humiliana had trouble with her husband as did **St Veridiana** (1182-1224) with her relatives. A band of ruffians murdered **Bl. James of Pieve**, a Tertiary priest, because he protested against misappropriation of part of the revenues of his hospital.

In Rome, the Tertiaries ran four benevolent homes. At Cortona, they maintained the Hospital of Mercy. In Florence, there was the famous Hospital of St. Paul. There the Tertiary infirmarians were popularly known as “*bonomini.*” At Imola, the Brothers and Sisters of Penance oversaw the Hospital of St. Francis until 1488. At Piacenza, there was a whole series of splendid foundations which were in no way inferior to the best-run welfare institutions of today. Poor sisters and female pilgrims were given shelter at the Hospital of St. Elizabeth: the brotherhood owned some houses that it let at a low rent to other needy Tertiaries; it was the mission of one group of Tertiaries to reclaim fallen women. In Reggio Emilia, from 1238, the Tertiaries visited the poor in their own homes and kept a dispensary and a food store, both free of charge, for the benefit of poor people of any category, whether laymen, clerics, or religious.

In Paris, in 1300, Guy de Joinville founded a Tertiary brotherhood of infirmarians. At Mons, in Belgium, the Tertiaries gave free tuition to fifty poor children; in other towns, there were Tertiary priests dedicated to training young men for the priesthood.

In Naples, **Queen Sancha**, who became a Tertiary and then a Poor Clare, founded two nunneries, St. Mary Magdalen and St. Mary of Egypt, for homeless women. Any number of similar examples could be given, not only in Italy but in all European countries.

Often, in their zeal to assist the poor, they completely exhausted their funds. At times, this caused great resentment towards them, because of their constant requests for assistance to care for the poor. However, in some cases, this zealous simplicity was rewarded by a miracle, and they were saved from embarrassment. St Veridiana had the miracle of "The empty chest full of beans again", and Bl. Novellono had his miracle of "An empty cupboard full of bread again." **St Frances of Rome** (1384-1440) stunned her husband to silence when after she had given away enormous amounts of corn and wine during a famine, he found his empty granary filled again, and a huge empty wine cask replenished.

Most Tertiaries lived simple lives, uncomplicated by miracles, and probably the best example of this was, **Bl. Peter of Siena** (d. 1289). He was a simple comb maker who worked steadily at his trade, grew in holiness and became one of the most famous members of the Third Order. Later on in his life, he lived with the friars while still going to his shop in the city to work, during the day. He was then able to give all his profits away to the poor.

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1. Specifically, the poor, the sick and all who suffer in any way. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Tertiaries have been involved in works of charity for eight hundred years and still today. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The main source for these Saints and Blessed of the Third Order of St Francis is: Cecily Hallack, Peter Frederick Anson and Fr Marion Alphonse Habig OFM, *These Made Peace:* Studies in the Lives of the Beatified and Canonized Members of the Third Order of St Francis of Assisi. Paterson, New Jersey, St Anthony Guild Press, 1957. It was also published by Burns & Oates London, in 1957. Cecily Rosemary Hallack (1898 – 1938) was the author of sixty works, among them several books and pamphlets. She began this book on the Tertiary Saints and Blessed somewhere around 1932, but died in 1938, at the age of forty, before it was completed. Peter Anson, a Tertiary, in his Foreword to the book, thanks her and acknowledges many people for their assistance in sorting through Cecily’s notes and updating a great deal of her source material. He mentions the tremendous work of Fr Marian A. Habig, OFM. There is little doubt that any OFS library that does not have a copy of this book, now out of print, is all the poorer for its absence in terms of inspiration. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)