***Monthly Spiritual Message***

**November 2019**

**“Francis, teach us to pray”**

Thomas of Celanotells us that coming back from Rome, where they had received verbal permission from Pope Innocent III to live their way of life, Saint Francis and his twelve companions[[1]](#footnote-1) found an abandoned hut near Rivo Torto and began to live there *“in great poverty and want.”* [[2]](#footnote-2) Rivo Torto, so near Assisi, is called “The Franciscan Novitiate” because it was there that Saint Francis lived together with the first friars teaching them in much the same way as Jesus did with the Apostles.

Saint Bonaventure[[3]](#footnote-3) takes up Celano’s version[[4]](#footnote-4) of this story, adding his own insightful comments:

They spent their time there praying incessantly, directing all their effort mentally[[5]](#footnote-5) rather than vocally to devoted prayers, because they did not as yet have liturgical books from which to chant the canonical hours. In place of these, they had the book of Christ’s cross, which they studied continually day and night, taught by the example and words of their father [Francis] who spoke to them constantly about the cross of Christ.

When the brothers asked him to teach them to pray, St Francis said: “*When you pray, say ‘Our Father . . .’ and this prayer:*

*‘We adore you, O Christ,*

*in all your churches*

*throughout the whole world,*

*and we bless you,*

*for by your holy cross*

*you have redeemed the world.’* ”[[6]](#footnote-6)

He also taught them to praise God in all and with all creatures,[[7]](#footnote-7) to honour priests with a special reverence,[[8]](#footnote-8) and to believe with certainty, and to confess with simplicity the truth of the faith, as the holy Roman Church holds and teaches.

They observed the holy father’s teaching in every detail and prostrated themselves humbly before every church and crucifix which they were able to see from a distance, praying the formula he had taught them.

The first focus of St Francis is on our Lord Jesus. He said, “*I know Christ, poor and crucified*.”[[9]](#footnote-9) This is the essence of Christian mysticism, the person of Christ. He is the beginning and the end of all Christian mysticism. Other forms of mysticism may focus elsewhere, or nowhere in particular, but Christian mysticism begins and ends in Christ. Francis, that true Catholic man, for this reason, speaks of the “Book of Christ’s Cross”[[10]](#footnote-10),which he gives as the source for his own prayer “*We adore you, O Christ…*”, which he teaches to the brothers.

But before he teaches them this prayer, he reaffirms the priority of the “Our Father”, taught to us by our Lord Jesus himself. It is all so simple. Francis, the formator of the brothers, said first say the “Our Father.”[[11]](#footnote-11) OK, that is easy enough. However, later he gives them an inspired and soaring paraphrase or catechesis of the Our Father. It is simply breathtaking in its scope and vision.[[12]](#footnote-12) We do well not only to know of its existence but to use it at our fraternity meetings from time to time, perhaps with the Minister leading the highlighted Our Father and everyone together responding with the additions.

1O **Our Father**most holy:

Our Creator, Redeemer, Consoler, and Saviour:

2 **Who are in heaven:**

In the angels and the saints,

enlightening them to know, for *You, Lord, are light;*

inflaming them to love, for You, Lord, are love;

dwelling in them and filling them with happiness,

for You, Lord, are Supreme Good, the Eternal Good,

from Whom all good comes

without Whom there is no good.

3 **Holy be Your Name:**

May knowledge of You become clearer in us

that we may know

*the breadth* of Your blessings,

*the length* of Your promises,

*the height* of Your majesty,

*the depth* of Your judgments.

4 **Your kingdom come:**

That You may rule in us through Your grace

and enable us *to come* to *Your kingdom*

where there is clear vision of You,

perfect love of You,

blessed companionship with You,

eternal enjoyment of You.

5 **Your will be done on earth as in heaven:**

That we may love You

*with our whole heart* by always thinking of You,

with our whole soul by always desiring You,

*with our whole mind* by always directing all our intentions to You,

and by seeking Your glory in everything,

with all our whole strength by exerting

*all our energies* and affections of body and soul

in the service of Your love and of nothing else;

and we may love our neighbour as ourselves

by drawing them all to Your love with our whole strength,

by rejoicing in the good of others as in our own,

by suffering with others at their misfortunes,

*and by giving offence to no one.*

6 **Give us this day:**

in remembrance, understanding, and reverence

of that love which [our Lord Jesus Christ] had for us

and of those things that He said and did and suffered for us.

**our daily Bread:**

Your own beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

7 **Forgive us our trespasses:**

through Your ineffable mercy,

through the power of the passion of Your beloved Son,

and through the merits and intercession

of the ever-blessed Virgin and all Your elect.

**8 As we forgive those who trespass against us:**

And what we do not completely forgive,

make us, Lord, forgive completely

that we may truly love our enemies because of You

and we may fervently intercede for them before You,

*returning no one evil for evil*

and we may strive to help everyone in You.

**9 And lead us not into temptation:**

hidden or obvious,

sudden or persistent.

**10 But deliver us from evil:**

past,

present,

and to come.

*(To be continued)*

John Cooper OFM Cap

National Spiritual Assistant OFS - Australia

1. How many can we name? : 1. Bernard of Quintavalle; 2. Peter Catanii; 3. Giles; 4. Philip; 5. Moricus; 6. Sylvester; (a priest)

   7. Leo; 8. Illuminato; 9. Rufino; 10. Angelo; 11. John de Laudibus; 12. Juniper; 13. Masseo; 14. William of England. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 1Celano 45 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Major Legend of St Francis by St Bonaventure. Ch: 4: 4 The Founder. p. 551. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. St Bonaventure has before him, Celano 1 & 2, Julian of Speyer, and the prayers of St Francis. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Mental Prayer includes a number of methods of silent prayer. A study of these methods is not often included in formation. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. So important to St Francis was this prayer that he repeated in his Testament No 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. St Bonaventure has 1 Celano 80 noting St Francis’ love of creatures, but also, he has the Canticle of the Creatures. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Pina: See Testament 6 ff. St Francis refuses to judge priests; he knows they are in God’s hands and that is a wondrous but fearsome place to be! This is why we should reverence them, so that we are reminded of their high calling. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. 2 Celano 105, also called: “The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul” The Founder, p.316. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. St Bonaventure speaks here of “The Book of the Cross.” In the Itinerarium, he speaks of the “Book of Scripture” and the “Book of Creation” 15. *He, therefore, who is not illumined by such great splendour of created things is blind; he who is not awakened by such great clamour is deaf; he who does not praise God because of all these effects is dumb; he who does not note the First Principle from such great signs is foolish. Open your eyes therefore, prick up your spiritual ears, open your lips, and apply your heart, that you may see your God in all creatures, may hear Him, praise Him, love and adore Him, magnify and honour Him, lest the whole world rise against you.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See Appendix II, No 5. The Office of the Twelve Our Fathers of “The Trilogy” (Rule, Constitutions, Ritual). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. I believe that this prayer could be said at a fraternity meeting or on retreat by the Minister saying the Our Father and the Fraternity responding with the additions. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)