***Monthly Spiritual Message***

January 2021

**2021 – THE FRANCISCAN MOMENT?**

Pope Francis begins his most recent encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, with a challenging reference to St Francis’ Admonition VI: A call to be saints!

Let all of us, brothers, consider the Good Shepherd Who bore the suffering of the cross to save His sheep.

The Lord’s sheep followed Him in tribulation and persecution, in shame and hunger, in weakness and temptation, and in other ways; and for these things they received eternal life from the Lord.

Therefore, it is a great shame for us, the servants of God, that the saints have accomplished great things and we want only to receive glory and honour by recounting them. (FA:ED I, p.131)

A common theme of Pope Francis’ pontificate has been his call for all Christians to share the Gospel by example and service to others: to be builders of God’s home.

In his first encyclical, *Lumen Fidei* (2013), he reminds us that “faith is not a private matter.” In the light of Christ, we can clearly see the world around us and are invited to respond to the gospel call. Our faith is directed outward towards building the city of God. He points to St Francis as a model of one who clearly sees the suffering in the world and responds.

In his Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2015), the Pope reminds us that evangelization is the work not of the few but of the entire Church. We are all called to be “missionary disciples” of the Gospel message, not only reaching out in service but inviting people to experience the divine through the Sacraments, devotions, and pilgrimages, and in being people of peace. He points to St Francis as one who enthusiastically shared the Gospel with all.

In *Laudato Si’* (2015), the Pope writes to all people of goodwill calling them to respond and enter into dialogue about how we can act individually and collectively, to care for our common home, the Earth. He paints the image that we are called to “till and keep it” (Gen 2:15). He points to the example of St Francis’ fraternal relationship with all of creation.

A Holy Year of Mercy was celebrated in 2015. We were invited to be people of forgiveness and reconciliation. Pope Francis pointed to St Francis, his call to penance and the Porziuncola Indulgence as a model.

In 2016, Pope Francis reflected on the realities of the joys and trials of family life in *Amoris Laetitia*. He wrote about how much St Francis was struck by the humility of God: The Word made Flesh coming as a newborn child into the life of a family in Nazareth, lived for the most part in hidden simplicity. St Francis celebrated that we are all embraced and welcomed into this family.

In the Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete et Exsultate* (2018), the Pope points to the Beatitudes as a guide to holiness. He calls us to live them, guided by prayer and in our fraternities of faith. He points to St Francis as a person whose faith is focused on the realities and possibilities of life around him. St Francis responded in gratitude to God’s gifts and graciously shared those gifts with others.

St Francis is proposed as an example to young people in *Christus Vivit* (2019). Pope Francis sees in St Francis someone who as a young man not only dreams big but also faces up to the Christian challenge: to work to build the Kingdom of God through service and prayer.

In *Fratelli Tutti* (2020), Pope Francis once more challenges us to build fraternity. Our local Secular Franciscan fraternities are places where we practise and build skills to build the “universal fraternity.” He points to St Francis’ outreach, not only to the Sultan but also to the poor and rich alike. It is a call to open our hearts and spread God’s love: a love unlimited, not bounded by age, status, wealth, country, race, or religion.

Pope Francis is asking the Church to turn outward. He is asking us to have the confidence of St Francis who realised he was called to be an “ambassador” of God. He is reminding us that as Christians we carry the gift of Christ, the Good News, the Father’s gift to the world.

In 2021, we celebrate 800 years since Pope Honorius III wrote *Memoriale Propositi* (1221).This was an invitation to a life of penance, read by the Brothers and Sisters of Penance of Assisi alongside St Francis’ *Letter to All the Faithful* and the stories of Francis’ life.

*Memoriale Propositi*, as aguide to a way of penance, formed and inspired many saints.: Blessed Luchesius Modestini and Buonadonna de' Segni, St Elizabeth of Hungary, St Margaret of Cortona, St Rose of Viterbo, St Angela of Foligno, Blessed Ramon Llull, and many more!

The disciplined life proposed in *Memoriale Propositi* was challenging. A life of prayer, penance, fasting and abstinence. In a violent world, the Brothers and Sisters of Penance were not to bear or take up arms against anyone. They were to be instructed by the Gospel to undertake acts of penance and works of mercy. Together, they were called to address the material and spiritual needs of the fraternity, the poor, and the Church.

The Rule and Life of the Secular Franciscans should be just as challenging today! Secular Franciscans are called to follow Christ in the footsteps of St Francis of Assisi! Secular Franciscans are called to go forth and proclaim Christ by words and actions. Secular Franciscans are called to bring hope and joy to others. They are called to build fraternities as communities of love. And, just like the Brothers and Sisters of Penance under *Memoriale Propositi,* Secular Franciscans are called into a lifetime commitment to an *apostolic* life.

Pope Francis has written repeatedly on the rich gift of our Franciscan spirituality. We have been formed again for mission, Christ’s mission! Let us respond to this “Franciscan moment” in the life of the Church. Let us not just recite the deeds of Saints, let us be bearers of God’s peace to the world.

Do we dare respond to God’s command to St Francis and to us today?

Vade , repara domum meam!

(Go, repair my House)

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