**MEDITATION ON FRANCISCAN FRATERNITY**

Fr Anthony Fox OFMConv

And we pray

Eternal God

Protector and Creator of Families

Your gift of life is handed on to us through the blessing of fraternity through the lives of Francis and Clare

It takes shape through the form of life given to us as we relate to each other and brothers and sisters of the same Fraternity.

We pray that you send us your Holy Spirit as we meditate on this value today.

We pray that we might have new insight …….. To see clearly………. those gifts which you bless each one of us as we seek you more intimately in our Franciscan Fraternity.

The gifts that shape us……….. And mold us with your love………..

Re-created with your love…………

With your love

With your eyes still closed

Take a journey

Perhaps a familiar journey

To a place you go to get away from all that distracts you

Where nothing can bother you

Where you can find yourself ………. And be at peace

Take a journey to that place once more where you can be alone

Where nothing can harm you…………. And you feel very safe

Alone ………. And at peace……….

*(PAUSE)*

Look around you…………

Take a deep breath…………

And just relax…………….

Is the scent familiar? Or is something new?..............

Can you hear anything?........... Is it familiar? ……….. or something new?

What do you see around you?

Over there someone is sitting with their back to you

Drawing on the ground with a stick

Wide sweeping lines…….. A circle here ……… an arc there………..

With his back to you

He probably knows that you are approaching…………….

But he is being patient ………… quiet ………. Waiting for you to join him

As you come closer to him ……….. You find that there is a kind of tranquility in the air, a feeling of understanding and compassion

He seems to be radiating a kind of love ……….a love beyond all human understanding…………..

As you stand behind him ………. You can feel the warmth not on your hand or face …………

It is an incredible warmth deep within ………. Within your very soul……….

You reach out your hand to touch his shoulder…… and he presses the side of his face to it………

He stands……. and turns……… and the smiling face of Jesus meets you…….

Eye to eye…… heart to heart………. Soul to soul……………

And he wraps his arms around you…….. You can feel the power of his love……..

You know that he has been waiting ……… patiently for you…………

Be at peace…………..

Peace………..

*(PAUSE)*

As he steps back…… he smiles again…….. And tells you about some of his memories growing up in his family

Some of the best memories of his family

And sometimes he remembers………. It wasn’t easy ………. But some of those memories were the best………

Be still……… and try to hear him tell you of his happiest memories….. With his family Mary, Joseph, his extended family in Nazareth

Just be still and listen very closely ……… very closely……..

*(PAUSE)*

And the Lord asks you about your religious family…….. Your happiest memories when you chose your Secular Franciscan Family

A special time when you chose this Family as Jesus chose Mary and Joseph.

A great time in your Franciscan journey when you wished it would always be like that…….. But somehow it never was………

But for that significant time, it was……it was great, and you have never forgotten it.

Quietly…….slowly…….share that with Jesus

And his eyes seem to widen with excitement. He smiles in that familiar way that lets you know he understands ……..as if he had been there all the time….and understands.

Jesus takes you by the hand

He asks you to take him to that place when you first came to this Fraternity

The place of memories…………

Hold the Lord tightly as you go to that place where you were welcomed into Franciscan life and began this journey

You can walk if you want ……….or you can run………or even fly……..just blink your eyes until you are standing in front of that place where you began initial formation.

You can point out things to the Lord, the things about the Fraternity you remember the most………

Perhaps you will look out the window of your room, or the doors that you always used…….or the corridor that you had to polish……..or the housework you had to do every day.

Take the Lord by the hand through your front door……..or the back door………without even having to open it

Bring the Lord into the house………show him around in a kind of silence

Because suddenly you realize……….nobody seems to notice you…….they don’t hear you……..or see you

It’s as if you were there with Jesus and nobody knows…..except you and the Lord.

*(PAUSE)*

Take the Lord by the hand…….. To the place where you are most likely to find your Formation Director………from long ago.

What is she doing?.............Jesus asks you about her……..

About a time when there was tension…….or misunderstanding……and people got stubborn

Maybe you said something you really didn’t mean but you were afraid to tell her that you didn’t mean to.

And there were hurt feelings

Jesus nods his head in understanding…………he knows it’s difficult……..it happens

Then he asks you to think real hard about what you feel is her best gift……her best talent………the ability she had to do a certain something.

Something that at times you relied on………What was the best thing she did for you?..........Jesus goes to your Formator ……..gives her a big hug………

And thank her for that special talent……..the something that made your Franciscan life a little better………How she was special to you………Jesus give her another big hug.

Is there anything you want to say to your Formation Director?

Anything you would like to do?

Simply be at peace……….. At peace.

*(PAUSE)*

Now take the Lord by the hand again……….This time take him to the room where you would expect to see members of your Fraternity as a Professed Secular Franciscan.

Now you stand there…….You and Jesus and these Brothers and Sisters of your Fraternity

Again, the Lord asks you to tell him about one of the difficult times you might have had with being a member of your Fraternity.

When nobody listened………..because one or two members were too busy speaking…….or maybe yelling…..and nothing could get resolved…….or at least not resolved your way.

And you felt kind of tense inside…….almost as though it was too much and you could explode, but you had to hold firm………..because no one seemed to understand.

They couldn’t understand

Jesus remembers a time in his ministry when his Apostles didn’t understand especially when he spoke about his Passion, Death and Resurrection.

He understands those difficult times in community, and nods.

He asks what good thing you will always remember about that Community.

What special quality or ability did this community help you so much with?

What can you depend upon……..that you would like to have for yourself?

What is that special insight you received in living a common Franciscan life that you will always be grateful for?

Again, the Lord smiles that all knowing smile like that of the leper in the face of Francis.

Jesus goes to your Fraternity, to the members of that community and thanks them for that………and tells them how grateful he is……and gives each a warm embrace.

Is there anything you would like to say?

Anything you would like to do?

And be at peace………..Peace

*(PAUSE)*

Then Jesus asks you to take him to the one sister or brother or more that you prayed to be with.

And standing there now is that sister or brother or more.

Jesus asks how you grew in friendship with each other?

He asks about those times when you got along so well and when you lost patience with each other.

The times when you enjoyed each other’s company and the times when you drove each other to frustration.

Jesus laughs out loud because he can hear so much love hidden in all these words.

Love that just doesn’t know how to get out.

Jesus asks you what you really like about this sister or brother?

What is the one special quality that is really so great about her or him?

What quality might you miss if you weren’t there?

What is there in her or him that shows the greatest potential?

And again, the Lord goes to that sister or brother and thanks them for just being themselves.

Created specially by His Heavenly Father ……..with so much love.

Is there anything you want to say to that sister or brother?

Anything you would like to do?

Be at peace………….Peace

*(PAUSE)*

Now with the Lord’s hand firmly in yours……. Take him to that place where you can find an important inspiration to your life like Francis, Clare, or a Brother or Sister Mentor

A person/figure that has always been important to you as you live your Franciscan vocation.

That guide that has gone out of their way for you…….That you feel you have been treated special………or the one that you just like more than anyone else……..the one who you’re glad that she or he impacted your life spiritually and practically.

As you stand with Jesus and this person of influence, explain to the Lord why this/these mentor/s have made you grow into the Secular Franciscan sister that you are now.

What quality through them has made you a better Franciscan woman or man?

The Lord smiles……nods his head a few times…..and you know how blessed you are to have this influence in your life.

Is there anything you would like to say?

Is there anything you would like to do?

Be at peace……….Peace

*(PAUSE)*

Then Jesus turns to you…….He tells you to look into yourself and if you look hard enough…….you can find all these qualities that each member of your community has instilled right there inside you.

Look deep inside……and you will find what made the Formation Director so wise, and the quality and ability of that first assignment.

And keep looking, and you will find that quality in you that makes you admire that sister or brother so much.

And of course, the gift from your spiritual mentor is in you as well.

And all these qualities…….some of you know already……and some you need to develop more strongly.

These are the qualities God has given you to help build up this Fraternity even stronger than it is now.

Gifts and qualities of love immersed in Franciscan values, bringing the Gospel to all people in season and out.

You have the power and the gifts to make it happen.

To bring the love of Jesus into your community in a new way…..

Is there anything you would like to say to the Lord?

Is there anything you would like to do?

Be at peace……..

When you are ready……….

Leave the memories of you have meditated upon

But bring with you those special gifts

And return here to this space bringing those qualities with you.

When you are ready, open your eyes…….

But please do not try to make contact with anyone.

Just spend a few minutes reflecting on those great qualities that are still with you…….ready to be used in building this Fraternity.

And be at peace……….

Peace……..

Amen.