



To Love Jesus and Make Him Loved

The Fraternity of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

Circular Letter for January
Year of Our Lord 2010

Blessed are the Poor in Spirit: for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven

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Pax et Bonum

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order of Penance and All People of Good Will,

Now that we have entered the Christmas season, let us reflect on the Baby Jesus and the conditions He encountered the moment He came into this world. Upon leaving His Mother's virginal womb, the Baby Jesus felt the pains of hunger and cold for the first time. All suffering was foreign to the God who took upon Himself our human nature. This fact alone demonstrates the great love the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity had for our wretched souls. But there is more. The King of kings and Lord of lords, Who alone was worthy to enter this world in the most glorious fashion, chose instead to strip Himself and become for us the poorest of all. It is to this poverty and its spirit that I would like to dedicate this letter.

My friends, what are the Franciscan Orders without poverty and its spirit? Would it not be a betrayal of their holy founder to even simply lessen their importance in the spiritual life, let alone abandon them altogether? *"The spirit of Christ, which Francis wished to imitate so closely, is fundamentally and essentially the spirit of poverty. To prove His love, Christ emptied Himself, taking the nature of a slave. For Francis, then, poverty was the chief means of imitating the crucified Christ."*¹ Now one may ask, "But isn't poverty an evangelical counsel that is required of many other religious orders? What makes it so special to the Franciscan Order?" It is true that many other religious orders take the vow of poverty along with the vows of chastity and obedience. However, when it comes to poverty, there is no one who took Christ so literally as St. Francis did. *"If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come follow me."*² It was as if these words of Our Lord were directed to Francis himself. And he did indeed take these words to heart by stripping himself of all possessions, even the shirt off his back. However, my friends, let us not think that this poverty means to simply be free from attachment to material goods. No; for St. Francis it also meant a complete renunciation of self. *"Humility, obedience, and simplicity, and chastity are in Francis' mind inseparable sisters of poverty, being simply different expressions or manifestations of this virtue."*³ The love of poverty was so vigorous in the life of this great saint that he became known as Il Poverello (The Poor One) and his bride was called Lady Poverty.

My dear brothers and sisters of the Third Order, our holy Rule and Constitutions do not call us to strict poverty as required of the Friars Minor and Poor Clares. Nevertheless, we are called to put into practice the spirit of poverty. Article 1 of the Rule of Life states: *"In all things let the members of the Third Order avoid extremes of cost and style, observing the golden mean suited to each one's station in life"*.⁴ Furthermore, Article 46 of the Constitutions states: *"Imbued with the spirit of poverty, the members, while they may prudently provide for their present and future needs, shall still take care to disengage their hearts from the things of this world. They shall bear in mind that they will be children of their Seraphic Patriarch only in so far as they foster this spirit of mortification."*⁵ To these let us add a renunciation of self-love and pride by submitting our wills to that of Our Lord as He desires us to do so through perfect obedience to His commandments, all the articles of our holy Rule and Constitutions, and our lawful superiors.

Let us always keep in mind that the ultimate end of this life is to achieve perfect union with God. And by what better means can we achieve this perfect union other than by the imitation of the crucified Christ? But what is the Cross without poverty? Our Lord, nailed to the Cross, stripped Himself of all material goods and consolations to the point of even feeling abandoned by His heavenly Father. And He did it all for the love of us. Do we dare not give ourselves in return by a complete mortification of the old man and new life in Him? On the contrary, let us walk in the footsteps of he who imitated Our Lord so intimately that he was given the gift of the Stigmata.

To my brothers and sisters, I urge you to detach yourselves from anything that hinders you from achieving that perfect imitation of and union with Our Lord, whether it be money, food, work, spouse, child, friend, consolation, or self-will. Let us have a holy indifference toward these things, which a true spirit of poverty will obtain for us. To all Catholics of good will, please believe me when I say that it is truly a privilege to serve Our Lord by means of the Third Order. Therefore, I ask that you consider joining. This way of life has been greatly endorsed by many popes throughout its 800-year existence and if we faithfully observe its Rule, we are promised eternal life.

The path has been set; we need only follow.

Yours Truly in Jesus, Mary, Joseph, and the Seraphic Father,

Br. Anthony

Br. Anthony, T.O.S.F.,
Prefect

Circular Approval:

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Endnotes:

1. Stier, Mark, O.F.M. Cap., Ph.D., S.T.L., Franciscan Life in Christ (Patterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1953), p. 46.
2. Matthew 19:21, Douay-Rheims Bible.
3. Stier, p. 55
4. Rule and Constitutions of the Franciscan Third Order: Authorized Translation (Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1959), p. 9.
5. Rule and Constitutions of the Franciscan Third Order: Authorized Translation, pp. 32-33.