



To Love Jesus and Make Him Loved

The Fraternity of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

Circular Letter for October
Year of Our Lord 2009

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Pax et Bonum

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

During the month of October, in addition to celebrating the Feast of the Most Holy Rosary, we celebrate the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi. In this circular, I would like to recall several highlights of the life of this glorious saint.

Giovanni di Bernardone was born in 1182 in Assisi, Italy to a devout woman named Pica. His father, Pietro, was a successful merchant. Shortly after his birth, Giovanni was renamed Francesco (Francis). During his youth, Francis spent much time and money frivolously in the company of friends. He had dreams of the glory of knighthood, but it wasn't until 1205 that he discovered that God had other plans for him, which led him to shed the name Bernardone and begin a new life in Christ.

Francis' new life embraced complete poverty - Lady Poverty as he called her. This renunciation of worldly possessions attracted many followers. It seemed as if Francis had been called to be a fisher of men. Soon Francis would feel the need to write up a basic Rule of life for his brothers. After he completed it, he went with his brothers to meet Pope Innocent III in Rome in 1209 to seek formal approval, which he would receive verbally. However, it was not until 1223 that a modified Rule would receive solemn papal approval during the reign of Pope Honorius III. And so began the Friars Minor - the First Order founded by Francis.

It became apparent that not only men were interested in the life in Christ led by Il Poverello (the Poor One), but women as well. His first flower was a young maiden by the name of Chiara (Clare). She became so enthralled by the example set by the future saint that it was not long after that she herself would follow in the same path. On the evening of Palm Sunday in 1212, Clare solemnly renounced the world and embraced the consecrated life in the presence of Francis and his brothers. Just as Francis would come to embrace the evangelical life of Christ, Clare now embraced the hidden life of Our Lady. Soon thereafter, many others joined Clare. And so began the Poor Clares - the Second Order founded by Francis.

The founding of the First and Second Orders would not be the end for our Seraphic Father. Many in the married state and others who had domestic responsibilities wanted to leave everything behind and follow in the footsteps of Il Poverello. Understanding that the religious life was not possible for everybody, Francis undertook the task of adapting the way of life of his First and Second Orders to the life of those living in the world. Although it existed in seed form since about 1212, the first official Rule for seculars was approved by Pope Honorius III in 1221. And so began the Brothers and Sisters of Penance - the Third Order founded by Francis.

From the time of his conversion onward, Francis strove fervently to live his life exactly as Christ did. His extreme poverty, rigorous penances, and love of the Cross afforded him to be called the "Second Christ" by many admirers. Yes; it is true that very few saints have been called by Our Lord to live a life so much resembling His own that legend has it that God had reserved the place in heaven for our Seraphic Patriarch once reserved for the greatest of all angels, Lucifer, before his fall. Yet despite the many blessings and graces that Our Lord had bestowed on Francis throughout his life as a reward for his fidelity, the greatest gift would befall him shortly before his death.

It was in the year of Our Lord 1224 when Francis climbed Mt. Alverno to fast in preparation for the Feast of St. Michael (Sept. 29). It was here that Our Lord appeared to him in the form of a Seraph and imprinted on his body the five Sacred Wounds of the Cross - the Stigmata. Francis became the first person to be so privileged to bear these marks. He literally became Christ Crucified. This was the greatest proof of the intense love Our Lord had for Francis and Francis for Him. Shortly thereafter, Francis went to his eternal reward. He passed away on Oct. 3, 1226 and was canonized by Pope Gregory IX on July 16, 1228.

My friends, I have given you only a small taste of the holy life of this saint. There are many good books that recount the small and great events of his life. We invite you to read as many as possible over the course of time. However, it will do no good if we only read them without striving to imitate the life of this man of Assisi. Especially as tertiaries, we have promised to do so by following most diligently the holy Rule of the Third Order. Let us ever keep in mind the solemn response of the priest after pronouncing the formula of our profession:

"And I, on the part of God, if thou observest these things, promise thee life everlasting. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost".

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

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

Circular Approval:

Fr. Freddy Mery, S.S.F.X.,
Director

Note: Much of the storyline in this circular comes from "St. Francis of Assisi and the Conversion of the Muslims" by Frank M. Rega published in 2007 by Tan Books and Publishers.