

LIVING FRATERNITY

Theme: Celebrating the Gift of the Stigmata ...



In this month of February 2024, we offer for reflection this text prepared by the CIOFS Formation Secretariat which invites us to celebrate the gift of the stigmata, one of the 800th anniversary texts.

Good reflection and interesting sharing.

Recall: Our monthly meeting should favour an encounter with Christ. A spirit of prayer will ensure a meeting that will promote a good experience for all the members.

FEBRUARY 2024 MONTHLY MEETING

Opening of the meeting

After the chosen song, a prayer according to the Ritual or one from the fraternity opens the meeting.

Introduction

The hagiographic sources tell us that Francis of Assisi, after an intense period of apostolic activity, withdrew to Mount La Verna to carry out a Lenten period of fasting and prayer, as was his custom. It was precisely in this context of silence and prayer that the Poverello received the visit from the winged Seraphim, because only in silence can one hear and be open to the words of the other. On Mount La Verna, the profound desire that motivated the Poverello to follow Christ and to conform himself totally to Him was realized in his encounter with the Crucified One, who imprinted the signs of His love on Francis' heart and body.

St. Bonaventure summarizes Francis' experience in this way: "[The] true love of Christ transformed the lover into His image" (*Major Legend 13: 5, FF 1228*). The encounter with the Beloved became a song of praise; therefore, after his encounter with the Crucified One, Francis composed the Praises of God, a prayer which sprang from a heart in love, totally focused on the divine "You": "You are the holy Lord God Who does wonderful things. You are strong. You are great. You are the most high" (*Praises of God 1-2, FF 261*).

In celebrating the Centenary of the Gift of the Stigmata as a Franciscan Family, we are invited to restore the dimension of prayerful and contemplative silence in our daily lives, the silence

that places us before the essential, that lets us recognize our desire for the infinite that resides in our hearts, that allows us to listen to ourselves, to others and to God.

In fact, even today, the Poverello is presented as a person who made listening a way of life:

“Saint Francis heard the voice of God, he heard the voice of the poor, he heard the voice of the infirm and he heard the voice of nature. He made of them a way of life. My desire is that the seed that Saint Francis planted may grow in the hearts of many” (*Fratelli tutti* 48).

After receiving the sacred stigmata, “Francis came down from the mountain, bearing with him the likeness of the Crucified, depicted not on tablets of stone or on panels of wood carved by hand, but engraved on parts of his flesh by the finger of the living God” (*Major Legend* 13: 5, *FF* 1228). Moreover, just as the finger of God touched Francis, so, Francis went forth to touch the poor, the sick and the needy, to transmit that divine love to them.

Francis’ meeting with the Crucified One prompted him to meet those who had been crucified throughout history, those whose pain he wished to alleviate. We see this in St. Bonaventure’s account of the man who was suffering from cold: “Burning with the fire of divine love, he stretched out his hand and touched him. A marvelous thing happened! At the touch of his sacred hand, which bore the burning coal of the Seraph, the cold fled altogether and the man felt great heat within and without, as if he had been hit by a fiery blast from the vent of a furnace” (*Major Legend* 13: 7, *FF* 1231).

Remembering and celebrating Francis being touched by the Crucified One inspires us to come out of ourselves and go forth “touching Christ’s suffering flesh in others” (*Gaudete et exultate* 37) at the same time, we allow ourselves to be touched and challenged by the dramatic instances of pain and suffering we see afflicting so many of our brothers and sisters around the world.

Note for the person animating this section of the document; Utilise the method best suited for your fraternity meeting.

Our being in Christ

“I bear the marks of Jesus on my body” (Gal 6:17).

Objective

To renew the way we live our common Christian vocation, in order to achieve authentic conformation to the poor and crucified Christ, so as to bear the stigmata of his presence in ourselves.

Activities

- Revitalize the time we reserve for encountering the Lord, those moments already present in our personal lives.
- Realize the value of silence as a fundamental condition for listening to God, ourselves and others.
- Use the ascetic paths that the Church and our Franciscan tradition offer us, so that our desires, purified of any form of selfishness, may be centered solely on God.

Our being brothers and sisters

"Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give"

Objective

To deepen the culture of generosity and giving freely, so that it characterizes our life together in a meaningful way.

Activities

- Foster an attitude of true dialogue in our families and fraternities, which allows listening, understanding, knowledge and mutual acceptance.
- Encourage concrete gestures of selfless service, which express and realize the gift of ourselves.
- Be prudent with our words and judgments, so that they always “touch” others with mercy and compassion.

Our being in communion

“By his wounds we were healed” (Is 53:5).

Objective

To dedicate our lives, as members of the Church, witnessing to the merciful love that flows from the Crucified One.

Activities

- Foster making time to listen to and welcome young people, those whom life has tossed aside, those who are excluded and minorities
- Collaborate with the local Church to make it an “outgoing Church” one that reaches out to all those who have strayed from the faith, the needy and the least among us.
- Support ecumenical and interreligious initiatives, trying to contribute to the “healing” of the wounds that hinder communion.

Our being in the world

“The Lord Himself led me among [the lepers] and I showed mercy to them”
(Testament 2; FF 110)

Objective

To allow ourselves to be touched and challenged by the many instances of pain and suffering we see in the places where we live and work.

Activities

- Practice the art of contemplating Christ in the sufferings and difficulties of the people we meet every day.
- Gently and devotedly tend to the wounded bodies and spirits of all those in our fraternities and neighborhoods who are afflicted and hopeless.

- Promote encounters with those who do not believe in God or who profess no religion, encouraging common initiatives aimed at helping the poor and the needy.

Reference - Texts

1 Celano 94-95, FF 484-486; Major Legend 13: 1-10, FF 1222-1236; 1-2, FF 261; Blessing for Brother Leo, FF 262; 2 Celano 49, FF 635.

Biblical Reflection:

Read the Sunday Gospel or of the day or of the day following your meeting.

Take time to share your thoughts using the following questions:

1. To whom does it speak? What does it teach us?
2. How does it reach us personally?
3. Is it a message of hope? How and why is it ?

Life-Objective,

In this month of February, take some time to read a text on the life of our patron Francis of Assis ...

End of the meeting: (song or prayer chosen by the fraternity)

At home

After some interesting research, I found a few saints who also received the gift of the stigmata. Here are two:

Saint Veronica Giuliani, Virgin, Poor Clares

Born in 1660, she entered the convent in 1677 of the Capuchin Poor Clares in Citta de Castello where she became the abbess. Contemplative, she tried hard by her mortification to conform herself to the crucified Jesus. Favored with mystical graces, during the last thirty years of her life, she bore in her body the stigmata of the Lord; she died in 1727. Her feast is celebrated on July 10th.

Saint Padre Pio de Pietrelcina, priest, Capuchin

The life of Fr. Pio de Pietrecilna (1887-1968) was marked by the stigmata which he was imprinted during 50 years starting on September 20th 1918 at the convent of the Capuchin Friars in San Giovanni Rotondo. The crowds were drawn by his fervent celebration of the Eucharist and his direction of consciences in the sacrament of reconciliation. He founded many prayer groups and favored the construction of a great hospital for the relief of the suffering. He was beatified by Pope St. John-Paul II in September 1999. Canonized on June 16th 2002.