

## LIVING FRATERNITY

**Theme: The Rule: A way of life, 800 years on the road ...**

In this month of June, we are proposing the text prepared by the CIOFS Formation Secretariat that presents the 800 years of the Rule. You may use it in this month or during the Summer period when you hold fraternal gatherings.

**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.

### Introduction - History

The universe has, without any doubt, not only its own rules, but it also follows them precisely. If we are still enjoying our beautiful planet, it is because, “He established the earth on its foundations” (Ps 104,5). The first book of Holy Scripture tells us that “God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen 1,31). Any society that follows just laws and sound principles enjoys stability and offers its citizens a certain degree of comfort. The same is valid for any person, any family, small or large, and also for the entire Franciscan family, which is celebrating 800 years since the Rule of the Friars Minor was approved by Pope Honorius III, on November 29, 1223.

The Franciscan Order is a living institution both in its material elements (legal, administrative structure, etc.) and in its spiritual elements (path of holiness, theological thinking, etc.) because its founder, Saint Francis of Assisi, gave it a Rule which, for eight centuries, has never ceased to inspire its members to actively live the Gospel life.

With a sincere desire to avoid the risk of getting lost in words, we would like to turn our attention to this Rule, seeing it as its author intended it to be, namely a way of life. This is, in fact, how he conceived it, and his intention is very clear from the very first verse, which points it out: “The Rule and Life of the Friars Minor is this: to observe the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ ....” (LR I, 1).

The role and purpose of the Friars Minor, as intended by Saint Francis, is none other than to become and be custodians of the Holy Gospel, not merely to preserve it in libraries or special places, but by embodying it themselves. In order to carry out this task, the Rule has a very important place in their life and plays a very significant role in the structure of the Franciscan Order and, of course, of the great Franciscan family. Francis is aware of the value and importance of the word of God and is absolutely convinced that life, in all its fullness (cf. Jn 10:10), dwells only in this word. If we were to refer to certain philosophical categories, perhaps less familiar to him, namely, hylomorphism, we could say that the “Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” constitutes the “matter” while the Rule, conceived by Francis of Assisi, shapes its “form”. Therefore, the Rule is not life in itself, for only the word of God is life, but the Rule is one of the “forms” through which life expresses itself.

The Rule is actually the only form that life manifests itself to the Friars Minors, because it helps them to “pay attention to what they must desire above all else: to have the Spirit of the Lord and Its holy activity” (LR X 8).

The Franciscan Order has experienced countless divisions over the centuries, as we know only too well, mainly because of the way the Rule was understood and followed. Looking back on history only from a human point of view, we might be justified to say: “You, most holy one, know perfectly how, lost in a maze of mystifying perils, they follow your footprints from how great a distance” (2Cel 224). Of course, failures and mistakes made over the centuries can’t be ignored either but, all together, the friars, striving to follow in the footsteps of their Seraphic Father Saint Francis, have never ceased to enlarge his family by many brothers and sisters who are now living the same charism, albeit in different ways.

One of the problems of today's society, as we have unfortunately seen in recent years, is the reluctance of many individuals to follow rules. Could the same be true for the brothers and sisters of Saint Francis with regard their own Rule? Could it be possible that what was originally perceived as a way of life is no longer held in the same esteem?

Indeed, all God has made is very good (cf. Gen 1,31), but if the Rule and spirituality of Saint Francis continues to fascinate, inspire and attract an impressive number of brothers and sisters after eight centuries, we must admit that he has done something good. We all, brothers and sisters of the great Franciscan family, certainly have our own inner aspirations regarding our lives, and our vocation is definitely one of them. Therefore, despite our daily difficulties and weaknesses we continue to pray: “Draw us, then, to yourself that we may run after the fragrance of your perfumes (.....). Give us such days as we had of old, oh mirror and exemplar of the perfect! Do not allow that those who are like you by profession be unlike you in life” (2Cel 221).

### **See/Listen:**

In this part, we are going to share experiences from our Franciscan family. We have asked a Poor Clare sister, two brother Friars, a Franciscan TOR sister, a Secular Franciscan sister and a Franciscan Youth sister to share what the Rule of their orders mean in their lives and especially in the journey of their Franciscan vocation.

### **Excerpts from the sharing of members of our Franciscan Family**

#### **Excerpt from the sharing with a Poor Clare sister**

To be a Poor Clare sister today is not determined by an external, material dimension of space or place, but it is much more; it is a deep, essential inner and spiritual reality that constitutes one's identity in God. Through the profession of the evangelical counsels, I live my vocation in a constant attitude of thanksgiving to the Father of mercies and I feel I am called to live a form of life which makes me more and more like Jesus, the way, the truth, and the life. Therefore, by consecration, I offered myself

totally to Jesus, without anything of my own, and I am dedicating myself to contemplative prayer in the cloister, living in obedience, in chastity and in the communion of fraternal life, following the Rule written by Saint Clare, namely to observe the Holy Gospel. In the commitment of my profession, I am inspired by the example and teachings of our Mother Saint Clare, who enclosed herself out of love for her heavenly Bridegroom.

My day in the monastery is marked by various time periods: prayer, work, study, moments of recreation and rest, which embody the preciousness of time lived and given by God. This disposes me to live my life with perseverance, patience, and joy despite all its hardships, always praising God everywhere and every time. My life is a life intertwined with contemplative prayer and activity in the sacred space of the monastery. It is about a spiritual life characterized by the joy of meeting God and the other sisters, following the example of Saint Clare.

*Sr. Dorothea the Redeemer, Poor Clare sister - Our Lady of the Angels Monastery, Roman, Rumania*

### **Excerpt from the sharing with a Conventual Franciscan friar**

I am Father Julian Misariu, a Conventual Franciscan Friar, who has been serving as a confessor in St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican for more than two years. ... As a Franciscan brother, belonging to the First Order of the Seraphic Father, I feel honoured to testify that after 31 years of Franciscan life, I feel the enthusiasm I had at the beginning of my Franciscan experience. I feel in love with Christ and I am a beloved son of the Father, a confrere of the Seraphic Father, who continues in the present day of history the witness of faith that I have professed with courage and humility before the Church and the fraternity.

I came from a life experience living in a communist, atheist and dictatorial regime, having worked in a large factory in Romania, having done military service. The freedom God gave me, inspiring me to give myself totally to Him, was preceded by a few months by the fall of the communist regime in Romania. I was arrested by security while praying in a church, it was September 1989, leaving me after several hours of interrogation. The question the security guard asked me was: What are you?

My answer was categorical: I am a Catholic Christian. He told me that this could cost me deprivation of liberty for six months in a prison of the communist regime. I honestly trembled, but in that moment I met Christ, like Francis, before the crucifix at San Damiano.

*Fr. Julian Misariu OFMConv Rumania –Rome*

### **Excerpt from the sharing with a Capuchin Franciscan friar**

That is why I was interested, already as a Capuchin postulant, in studying the genesis and development of the text of the rule. Behind each expression there is a story, and in it resides the intention of Francis, what God was stirring up in him and what the brothers were discovering. Francis and the brothers (not only himself) were discerning and making choices, guided by the Spirit. Knowing more about Francis, especially through his own writings, was the way to become attuned to his heart and to better understand the charism. Later I learned that "a text without context is a pretext"... By understanding better the context of Francis's time, his words and choices were clearer and stronger. They were more inspiring and committed during the novitiate. And more demanding for a current rereading, in the

context of the times. For example the phrases, "don't ride a horse" or "don't touch money," reread by a fraternity that lives on the periphery, among poor people, visiting lepers... is understood from life. I was like this discovering that the rule is like a map... It indicates the general direction and the great places to stop. As a map, it is an instrument to orient yourself along the way.

*Fr. Leonardo González Ruilópez, ofm cap, Argentine - Rome*

### **Excerpt from the sharing with a Secular Franciscan**

My first encounter with our Rule was not impressive. It was an encounter with an old, lifeless, tired looking book. This, the fraternity said, was our Rule. This book was going to teach me how to live from Gospel to life and life to the Gospel. Not a very exciting start to my journey as a Secular Franciscan. First impressions last and I didn't pick up that book for a long time.

Now 16 years into the journey, the book still looks tired. But the pages have become more alive with occasional words jumping out at me. I am reading it more diligently and it has become a point of reference, a source of clarification and, importantly, an encounter with life – a life that I professed to “observe the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of Saint Francis of Assisi, who made Christ the inspiration and the centre of his life with God and people”. (Article 4)

Living the Gospel is hard enough; to follow the example of St Francis takes this to a different higher and higher level, one which I know I will never be able to achieve in my life time. “Let them individually and collectively be in the forefront in promoting justice by testimony of their human lives and their courageous initiatives. Especially in the field of public life, they should make definite choices in harmony with their faith”. (Article 15). I do not have courage for courageous initiatives and am only able to push the envelope a little at a time. ... The Rule is not an old, lifeless and tired book. It is not a set of rules. It leads to the Joy, Love and Peace the Gospel speaks about, if we allow ourselves to meet it. It is an encounter with Life.

*Janet Lim, ofs, Singapore*

### **Excerpt from the sharing with a YouFra sister**

My experience of living promises in YouFra and OFS Rule as inspiration Two weeks ago I gave my 8th promise, my 8th promise to God that I would follow the steps of Saint Francis and walk the way of Life. It's very interesting to reflect on my life from eight years ago. I was a child, now I'm still kind of a child, but at least I'm aware that I'm a child of God, a beloved child of God.

I probably wouldn't be aware of it without my fraternity and without my holy promises. To take the narrow path, to follow Jesus – that is not an easy thing, but if you are aware that you are a child of God, it is possible. Not only that you think it's possible, but your heart changes and you just want to follow that path. So you do. How? You make a promise to God that you will. Did I do it perfectly? No. Was I always faithful? Sadly, no. But, He was, He was perfect and faithful and He never gave up. There were times when I would find myself thinking how I would much rather take the easy way out, but I was well aware of my promises and I kept saying to myself. This is not how a member of YouFra acts, this is not what you promised.” But that wasn't in a restrictive way. I was free to do anything I wanted.

It's just that my heart longed to do better and I knew I could do better because I had promised God that I would and He equipped me with an abundance of mercy. Be it the first or the eighth promise, it brings with it many questions, but also encouragement. The first time, you ask yourself if you are worthy of it, if you will manage to live up to it and the eighth time you ask yourself again if maybe this year you will succeed better, if this time you will really surrender to Jesus, will you be more obedient this time, will your heart be purer and more humble.

You don't know if you will manage to live that fullness this year, but you know that you want it, you see your brothers and sisters from YouFra and you see examples from OFS members who have promised to live like that till the end of their lives. You remember that Saint Francis, before his conversion, wasn't much different from you so you believe it's possible and you finally say your first or your eighth.

*Ana Matic, YouFra – Croatia*

### **Excerpt from the sharing with a T.O.R. sister**

As for my experience in living the Rule, it is not a question of doing a lot or a little, but in looking for the joy of doing so. I try to discover that 'point' so in everything I do, I discover the essential. This way, prayer, obedience, poverty, apostolate, community life, etc. become an expression of an essential vigor, the little cultivation to “be the presence of the Heart of Mary”. Is it easy? Do I get 100%? Is it a “party”? No. But the “little” becomes the path for a little more. For me, living the Rule does not have to be seen as something pleasant or unpleasant.

Well, it does not lead to what I call the search for self-identity. That is, in the pursuit of living the Rule, I seek the formation of a strong personal self. Therefore, to create a happy environment, I need to create this energy, not just work based on pleasant and unpleasant things.

When I assume the Rule as “This is the life of the Gospel of Jesus-Christ”, I try to assume the Rule – Life in my life, trying to guide my life by the Rule. The Rule is the rule of my life. The Rule becomes a guide, an objective. I seek to have the Rule as The Rule, the boundaries of my way of living. By following this Rule, my life is safe. The ‘norm,’ then, becomes the goal that gives security and firmness into my life. Life is the root; the Rule is the bud, the result, the solidification of life.

Therefore, I seek to guide my life by the Rule. This gives me freedom! This generates life in my life. However, it generates a task, an effort, an exercise, but also the joy of knowing that I am on the path following Our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Sister Claudenice Aparecida Sabadin Franciscan Sister of Mary´s Heart – Brasil*

**Act:**

Let us share in our local fraternities the following questions;

- How comfortable are you in 2023 following a Rule from 1223?
- Do you feel the fresh air of the Holy Spirit in the Rule?
- Can I repair the Church, somehow wounded, by living the Franciscan charism?

Take time to share your answers on the questions presented.

**Celebrate:**

Once the Rule was approved by Pope Honorius III, on November 29th 1223, the Franciscan Order officially became a very important “evangelizing tool” in the Church spreading the Good News everywhere.

To celebrate this event, we would like to invite every local fraternity to find a proper time during this year (in the month which is most suitable) and make your presence felt in your local parish with a humble action (cleaning the church, the churchyard, the parish hall, etc.), which normally nobody wants to do.

Talk to your parish priest and prepare an hour of adoration in front of the Blessed Sacrament (inviting the whole parish community to participate) on the day which is closest to November 29th, in gratitude for being held worthy to serve the Church.

Or, ask your pastor to celebrate an evening Mass on November 29th, or on a day which is most convenient for the parish community, and celebrate the event together.

**Life- Objective**

In this month of June, we suggest that you review and read the texts to better understand and share the journey that you have travelled as a member of the Franciscan Family during your Summertime gatherings. ...

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

**Suggestion:** a song to the Sacred Heart of Jesus or to the Immaculate Heart of Mary

**At home**

Take the occasion to again read the text remembering your own Franciscan journey.

**Happy vacation to all our members and appreciate the wonders of the Creator.**