

# LIVING FRATERNITY

## Theme: Like Mary, Attentive to the Word of God and to Fraternity

In this month of May 2023, we are proposing a text published in the magazine Bonne Nouvelle from May 1998, prepared by Doug Clorey, Past National Minister and that time International Councillor. While doing some research for Living Fraternity this month, we found that this text that seems to us still pertinent today. We are proposing it for your reflection.

**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.

## MAY 2023 MONTHLY MEETING

### Opening of the meeting

The members may suggest a song to Mary. After the song, the prayer according to the Ritual or one chosen by the fraternity starts the meeting.

### Introduction

As Franciscans, we are called to live a life in which we go from Gospel to life and life to Gospel, to let the Gospel transform us and to let ourselves be renewed on a deeper level. While celebrating the presence of God among us, we are also invited to live our lives to the fullest and, in so doing, to be witnesses of the Good News to those around us. The living out of our vocations requires that we be fully conscious of the presence of God in his Word and in his People. Mary, who received the Word Incarnate, can certainly serve as an example for us.

In his apostolic letter, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (10 November 1994), Pope Saint John Paul II reminds us of our need to admire and imitate Mary. Mary, who conceived the Incarnate Word by the power of the Holy Spirit and then in the whole of her life allowed herself to be guided by his interior activity, is to be contemplated and imitated as the woman who was docile to the voice of the Spirit, a woman of silence and attentiveness, a woman of hope.

### Reflection and Sharing

While listening to the reading, which passage in these texts particularly reach you?

One of Mary's attributes was her openness to the work of the Spirit. When the Angel Gabriel announced that she would conceive and carry a son, she was open to this action of God. She was ready to welcome the Holy Spirit, both physically and spiritually, and to let the will of God be accomplished in her. "The Virgin Mary, humble servant of the Lord, was open to his every word and call." (OFS Rule, article 9)

The Holy Scriptures clearly show a glimpse that Mary's trust in the Word of God was not without causing her some worries, that this situation was causing her a certain stress, indeed a certain malaise.

Decidedly, God's request was at this point shattering that she was frightened. How was this possible? What would Joseph think? What would be her family's reaction, her friends, her neighbours? In spite of these worries, she was capable of saying «Yes » to God in whom she placed all her hope. « Behold I am the handmaiden of the Lord let it be according to your word. » (Luke 1, 38) Mary was mindful to the Word of God as well as to the persons to whom she was close to. However, her first activity after the angel's visit was to go her cousin Elizabeth to confide in her, the same one who also had conceived a son in her old age. Elizabeth greeted her with joy and said to her: « Blessed are among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb» (Luke 1, 42)

## **Reflection and Sharing**

After the reading of the preceding paragraphs, share your thoughts on the content, on a phrase or even on a word that particularly resonates within you. Take the necessary time for the sharing.

Francis teaches us that we also carry the Christ in us that we bring him into the world with the simple acts of our daily life. We are his mother when we carry him in our heart and our body by the love of God, by the purity and the loyalty of our conscience and when we place him in the world by our holy actions that are the example of a light for our fellow man. (Prologue, Rule of the OFS) In *Redemptoris Mater* (March 25 1987), John-Paul II approached the same theme : « The Church itself becomes a mother by accepting the Word of God in its faithfulness.»

And, are we faithful to the Word of God? Firstly, are we faithful in recognizing that God speaks constantly to his people, that he speaks to us in person and as a community. Secondly, we are faithful to him by being silent in a manner to hear him speak to us. Jesus, through the action of the Holy Spirit, has chosen to live within us and be at work in our life. And thirdly, we are faithful to him by placing ourselves in the service of our brothers and sisters.

## **Reflection and Sharing**

After the reading of the preceding two paragraphs, what do you understand of their contents? Take time for sharing your thoughts.

We must listen to the Word. We must try hard by reading and meditating the holy Scriptures so that God can reveal himself to us in his Word. Francis knew the importance that listening had for his style of life and he urged us to « live the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.» (Rule, Article 4). «Secular Franciscans, therefore, should seek to encounter the living and active person of Christ in their brothers and sisters, in Sacred Scripture, in the Church, and in liturgical activity. » (Rule, OFS, Article 5) Therefore, we are nourished by this Word of God that helps us to build the community. Our fraternal life is rooted solidly in the Word and in the Eucharist, two nutritional elements essential to the life in community. We go back once again to *Redemptoris Mater*, where we read about the commitment, taken by the Church toward the Word: « But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart (Luke 2, 19-51), the Church commits itself to preserve the Word of God and to draw from it discernment and prudence in a manner to allow it to be a faithful witness through the ages.»

Thanks to the support of our fraternity, we can answer the call from the Word of God who invites us to serve, to be faithful witnesses. The effects of this call must be felt where we live the major part of our time; at home, at work, in our local communities, at church. The message is simple: «He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. » (Micha 6, 8) Then as we walk together, we must remember our mother Mary. Remember the woman who carried the Word of God and who was ever attentive to his calls. Remember Mary who accompanied Jesus to his death on Calvary, Mary who supported the disciples in their hardships. Remember Mary who was among the apostles when the spirit of God manifested himself in a very new manner. Remember that Secular Franciscans should *express their ardent love for her by imitating her complete self-giving and by praying earnestly and confidently.* (Rule, OFS, Article 9).

## **Reflection and Sharing**

After the reading of the preceding paragraphs, what message do you see? Share it.

## **Biblical Reflection**

Read the following texts: Luke 1, 38; Luke 1, 43; Luke 2, 19-51; Micha 6, 8.

Take a moment of reflection; then underline words or phrases that resonate especially for you.

## **Here are the links with the proposed text, the Rule and the General Constitutions**

### **Rule**

#### **Article 4**

The rule and life of the Secular Franciscans is this: 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 center of his life with God and people. Christ, the gift of the Father's love, is the way to him, the truth into which the Holy Spirit leads us, and the life which he has come to give abundantly. Secular Franciscans should devote themselves especially to careful reading of the gospel, going from gospel to life and life to the gospel.

#### **Article 5**

Secular Franciscans, therefore, should seek to encounter the living and active person of Christ in their brothers and sisters, in Sacred Scripture, in the Church, and in liturgical activity. The faith of Saint Francis, who often said “I see nothing bodily of the Most High Son of God in this world except his most holy body and blood, should be the inspiration and pattern of their Eucharistic life.

#### **Article 9**

The Virgin Mary, humble servant of the Lord, was open to his every word and call. She was embraced by Francis with indescribable love and declared the protectress and advocate of his family. The Secular Franciscans should express their ardent love for her by imitating her complete self-giving and by praying earnestly and confidently.

## **General Constitutions**

### **Article 9.1.**Rule 5

The spirituality of the Secular Franciscan is a plan of life centred on the person and on the following of Christ, rather than a detailed programme to be put into practice.

### **Article 9.2** Rule 4

The Secular Franciscan, committed to following the example and the teachings of Christ, must personally and assiduously study the Gospel and Sacred Scripture. The fraternity and those responsible for it should foster love for the word of the Gospel and help the brothers and sisters to know and understand it as it is proclaimed by the Church with the assistance of the Spirit.

### **Article 16.1** Rule 9

- . Mary, Mother of Jesus, is the model of listening to the Word and of faithfulness to vocation; we, like Francis, see all the gospel virtues realised in her. The brothers and sisters should cultivate intense love for the Most Holy Virgin, imitation, prayer, and childlike surrender. They should manifest their own devotion with expressions of genuine faith, in forms accepted by the Church.

## **Life- Objective**

In this month of May, where nature is renewing its beauty, let us appreciate the wonders of the Creator by sharing them in our daily life, in our families, in our work areas and in our fraternal meetings ...

## **Events and Information from the Church and the Order**

Remind the members of regional and local activities.

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

## **At home**

If, occasionally, you have a good moment in your day, do a reading about the Virgin Mary.