

LIVING FRATERNITY

Theme: What joy, a saviour is born, it's Christmas ...

For this month of December, we are proposing a reflection on the text taken from Pope Francis' homily of December 24th, 2013 for the mass of Christmas night. We have chosen this text as a follow-up to the texts on joy presented in previous months.

Good reflection and good sharing.

Recall: A spirit of prayer heralds a good encounter, and a good preparation promotes communal experience. At the meeting, having a copy of the Holy Scriptures, the Rule and General Constitutions, will provide clarity and depth for our edification and experience.

DECEMBER 2019 MONTHLY MEETING

Opening prayer or song (according to the Ritual or a song chosen by the fraternity)

Introduction

Now, let us take the time to attentively read the text of this homily from Pope Francis on the solemnity of the Nativity of our Lord. Afterwards we will share our thoughts and/or experiences with the help of the questions presented.

1. "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light" (Isaiah 9:1).

This prophecy of Isaiah never ceases to touch us, especially when we hear it proclaimed in the liturgy of Christmas Night. This is not simply an emotional or sentimental matter. It moves us because it states the deep reality of what we are: a people who walk, and all around us – and within us as well – there is darkness and light. In this night, as the spirit of darkness enfolds the world, there takes place anew the event which always amazes and surprises us: the people who walk see a great light. A light which makes us reflect on this mystery: the mystery of walking and seeing.

Walking. This verb makes us reflect on the course of history, that long journey which is the history of salvation, starting with Abraham, our father in faith, whom the Lord called one day to set out, to go forth from his country towards the land which he would show him. From that time on, our identity as believers has been that of a people making its pilgrim way towards the Promised land. This history has always been accompanied by the Lord! He is ever faithful to his covenant and to his promises. Because he is faithful, "God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). Yet on the part of the people there are times of both light and darkness, fidelity and infidelity, obedience, and rebellion; times of being a pilgrim people and times of being a people adrift.

In our personal history too, there are both bright and dark moments, lights and shadows. If we love God and our brothers and sisters, we walk in the light; but if our heart is closed, if we are dominated by pride, deceit, self-seeking, then darkness falls within us and around us. “Whoever hates his brother – writes the Apostle John – is in the darkness; he walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has blinded his eyes” (1 John 2:11). A people who walk, but as a pilgrim people who do not want to go astray.

2. On this night, like a burst of brilliant light, there rings out the proclamation of the Apostle: “God's grace has been revealed, and it has made salvation possible for the whole human race” (Tt 2:11).

The grace which was revealed in our world is Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary, true man and true God. He has entered our history; he has shared our journey. He came to free us from darkness and to grant us light. In him was revealed the grace, the mercy, and the tender love of the Father: Jesus is Love incarnate. He is not simply a teacher of wisdom, he is not an ideal for which we strive while knowing that we are hopelessly distant from it. He is the meaning of life and history, who has pitched his tent in our midst.

3. The shepherds were the first to receive the news of Jesus' birth.

The shepherds were the first to see this “tent”, to receive the news of Jesus' birth. They were the first because they were among the last, the outcast. And they were the first because they were awake, keeping watch in the night, guarding their flocks. The pilgrim is bound by duty to keep watch and the shepherds did just that. Together with them, let us pause before the Child, let us pause in silence. Together with them, let us thank the Lord for having given Jesus to us, and with them let us raise from the depths of our hearts the praises of his fidelity: We bless you, Lord God most high, who lowered yourself for our sake. You are immense, and you made yourself small; you are rich and you made yourself poor; you are all-powerful and you made yourself vulnerable.

On this night let us share the joy of the Gospel: God loves us, he so loves us that he gave us his Son to be our brother, to be light in our darkness. To us the Lord repeats: “Do not be afraid!” (Luke 2:10). As the angels said to the shepherds: “Do not be afraid!”. And I also repeat to all of you: Do not be afraid! Our Father is patient, he loves us, he gives us Jesus to guide us on the way which leads to the Promised land. Jesus is the light who brightens the darkness. He is mercy: our Father always forgives us. He is our peace. Amen.

Reflection and Sharing:

After the reading of the preceding text, take time to share your thoughts.

1. What do you retain from this text from our Pope Francis?
2. Do you think that it is possible to live the joy of Christmas in our lives in present world today?
3. How can it be lived in our daily lives?

Reflection and Sharing:

Recall of the Rule and the General Constitutions

In 2018, we celebrated 40 years of our way of life, we now suggest doing a review together of the articles within it. Let us continue by looking at article 11 from **Chapter II, the Way of Life and the Apostolic Activity** as well as article 156 of the General Constitutions that pertains to it.

Rule

Article 11

Trusting in the Father, Christ chose for himself and his mother a poor and humble life, even though he valued created things attentively and lovingly. Let the Secular Franciscans seek a proper spirit of detachment from temporal goods by simplifying their own material needs. Let them be mindful that according to the gospel they are stewards of the good received for the benefit of God's children.

Thus, in the spirit of "the Beatitudes," and as pilgrims and strangers on their way to the home of the Father, they should strive to purify their hearts from every tendency and yearning for possession and power.

General Constitutions

Article 11 – CG - Article 15

1. Secular Franciscans should pledge themselves to live the spirit of the Beatitudes and, in a special way, the spirit of poverty. Evangelical poverty demonstrates confidence in the Father, creates interior freedom, and disposes them to promote a more just distribution of wealth.
2. Secular Franciscans, who must provide for their own families and serve society by means of their work and material goods, have a particular manner of living evangelical poverty. To understand and achieve it requires a strong personal commitment and the stimulation of the fraternity in prayer and dialogue, communal review of life, and attentiveness to the instructions of the Church, and the demands of society.
3. Secular Franciscans should pledge themselves to reduce their own personal needs so as to be better able to share spiritual and material goods with their brothers and sisters, especially those most in need. They should give thanks to God for the goods they have received, using them as good stewards and not as owners.
They should take a firm position against consumerism and against ideologies and practices which prefer riches over human and religious values and which permit the exploitation of the human person.

Sharing:

Read each article of the Rule, followed by the article in the General Constitutions corresponding to it. Afterwards, share your thoughts on the content of these articles. Take the necessary time for this exercise.

Biblical Reflection:

Read the Gospel of Sunday following your meeting in order to be prepared to hear the celebrant's homily or the gospel according to Luke 2, 1-20 on the Nativity.

Share your thoughts on this gospel, 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? Another kind of message? How and why?

Life-Objective

In this month of December, during our fraternal meetings, let us share the joys that we lived since our childhood in this time of Advent and Christmas ...

Events and information from the Church and the Order

Recall the local and regional meetings and activities.

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

At home

Read this excerpt from 1 Celano 84

Also we must recall and honor with a reverent memory what he did, in the third year before the day of glorious death, in the fortified village that is called Greccio the day of the nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ. There was in this country a man named John, of good reputation, but of even better life. The blessed Francis cherished him in a particular way because, although in his country he was noble and honorable to the highest point, he had tread upon the nobility of the flesh to follow the nobility of the spirit. The blessed Francis, as he often did, had him come to him about fifteen days before the nativity of the Lord and said to him: « If you wish to celebrate the present birth of the Lord at Greccio, hurry and come in advance and do what I tell you, prepare it with care. Because I want to recall the memory of this child who was born in Bethlehem and observe in detail, as much as possible through my mortal eyes, the annoyances in the needs of the child, as he lay in a crib and how, next to an ox and a donkey, he was laid on the hay. » Hearing this, the good and loyal man ran quickly and prepared in this place everything that the saint had said ... At last the saint of God came and, finding everything prepared, he saw and was filled with joy. In fact, a crib was prepared, hay was brought, an ox and a donkey were brought in. There simplicity was honored, poverty exalted, humility praised and this made of the village of Greccio to become a new Bethlehem.

