

## LIVING FRATERNITY

**Theme: « Holy Mary, Mother of God ... and our Mother »**

In the month of January 2018, during our fraternal meetings, we are proposing a reflection on the Virgin Mary and her role in our human lives. The text for our reflection is composed of extracts from Pope Francis' homily of January 1<sup>st</sup> 2017. Good reflection and good sharing.

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

*Good preparation – Good meeting*

### JANUARY 2018 MONTHLY MEETING

**Opening Prayer and Song:** (According to the Ritual or chosen by the Fraternity)

#### **Introduction**

“Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart! (Luke 2:19). In these words, Luke describes the attitude with which Mary took in all that they had experienced in those days. Far from trying to understand or master the situation, Mary is the woman who can treasure, that is to say, protect and guard in her heart, the passage of God in the life of his people. Deep within, she had learned to listen to the heartbeat of her Son, and that in turn taught her, throughout her life, to discover God’s heartbeat in history. She learned how to be a mother, and in that learning process she gave Jesus the beautiful experience of knowing what it is to be a Son. In Mary, the eternal Word not only became flesh, but also learned to recognize the maternal tenderness of God. With Mary, the God-Child learned to listen to the yearnings, the troubles, the joys and the hopes of the people of the promise. With Mary, he discovered himself a Son of God’s faithful people.

#### **Reflection**

What word or sentence in this paragraph speaks to you particularly about the relationship between Mary and her Son? Take the necessary time to share your thoughts.

#### **Mary in the Gospels**

In the Gospels, Mary appears as a woman of few words, with no great speeches or deeds, but with an attentive gaze capable of guarding the life and mission of her Son, and for this reason, of everything that he loves. She was able to watch over the beginnings of the first Christian community, and in this way she learned to be the mother of a multitude. She drew near to the most diverse situations in order to sow hope. She accompanied the crosses borne in the silence of

her children's hearts. How many devotions, shrines and chapels in the most far-off places, how many pictures in our homes, remind us of this great truth. Mary gave us a mother's warmth, the warmth that shelters us amid troubles, the maternal warmth that keeps anything or anyone from extinguishing in the heart of the Church the revolution of tenderness inaugurated by her Son. Where there is a mother, there is tenderness. By her motherhood, Mary shows us that humility and tenderness are not virtues of the weak but of the strong. She teaches us that we do not have to mistreat others in order to feel important (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 288). God's holy people has always acknowledged and hailed her as the Holy Mother of God.

## **Reflection**

Silently, read the preceding text and share what these lines tell you about the Virgin Mary. (About 15 minutes)

## **Celebrate ...**

To celebrate Mary as Mother of God and our mother at the beginning of the New Year means recalling a certainty that will accompany our days: we are a people with a Mother; we are not orphans. Mothers are the strongest antidote to our individualistic and egotistic tendencies, to our lack of openness and our indifference. A society without mothers would not only be a cold society, but a society that has lost its heart, lost the "feel of home". A society without mothers would be a merciless society, one that has room only for calculation and speculation. Because mothers, even at the worst times, are capable of testifying to tenderness, unconditional self-sacrifice and the strength of hope. ... Where there is a mother, there is unity, there is belonging, belonging as children.

## **Sharing**

After the reading of the paragraph, what thoughts remain particularly with you?

## **The goodness of God**

To begin the year by recalling God's goodness in the maternal face of Mary, in the maternal face of the Church, in the faces of our own mothers, protects us from the corrosive disease of being "spiritual orphans". It is the sense of being orphaned that the soul experiences when it feels motherless and lacking the tenderness of God, when the sense of belonging to a family, a people, a land, to our God, grows dim. This sense of being orphaned lodges in a narcissistic heart capable of looking only to itself and its own interests. It grows when what we forget that life is a gift we have received – and owe to others – a gift we are called to share in this common home.

The lack of physical (and not virtual) contact is cauterizing our hearts (cf. *Laudato Si'*, 49) and making us lose the capacity for tenderness and wonder, for pity and compassion. Spiritual orphan hood makes us forget what it means to be children, grandchildren, parents, grandparents, friends and believers. It makes us forget the importance of playing, of singing, of a smile, of rest, of gratuitousness.

## **Sharing and reflection**

Now, we suggest that you take a moment together to consider the content of the preceding paragraphs. Afterwards, share your thoughts on the following sentence: *Spiritual orphan hood makes us forget what it means to be children, grandchildren, parents, grandparents, friends and believers.*

## **Celebrating the feast of the Holy Mother of God**

Celebrating the feast of the Holy Mother of God makes us smile once more as we realize that we are a people, that we belong, that only within a community, within a family, can we as persons find the “climate”, the “warmth” that enables us to grow in humanity, and not merely as objects meant to “consume and be consumed”. To celebrate the feast of the Holy Mother of God reminds us that we are not interchangeable items of merchandise or information processors. We are children, we are family, we are God’s People.

Celebrating the Holy Mother of God leads us to create and care for common places that can give us a sense of belonging, of being rooted, of feeling at home in our cities, in communities that unite and support us.

Jesus, at the moment of his ultimate self-sacrifice, on the cross, sought to keep nothing for himself, and in handing over his life, he also handed over to us his Mother. He told Mary: Here is your son; here are your children. We too want to receive her into our homes, our families, our communities and nations. We want to meet her maternal gaze. The gaze that frees us from being orphans; the gaze that reminds us that we are brothers and sisters, that I belong to you, that you belong to me, that we are of the same flesh. The gaze that teaches us that we have to learn how to care for life in the same way and with the same tenderness that she did: by sowing hope, by sowing a sense of belonging and of fraternity.

## **Reflection**

After the reading, share your thoughts on what reminds you of your devotion to the Virgin Mary. (About 15 minutes)

## **Biblical Reflection:**

Read the Gospel according to Luke 2, 19 or the Gospel of the day.

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?

## **In the Footprints of Francis**

*(Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Ritual of Secular Franciscan Order, page 77, 1984)*

Hail, O Lady, holy Queen, Mary, holy Mother of God: you are the virgin made church and the one chosen by the most holy Father in heaven, whom He consecrated with His most only beloved Son and with the Holy Spirit the Paraclete, in whom there was and is all fullness of grace and every good.

Hail, His Palace! Hail, His Tabernacle! Hail, His Home! Hail, His Robe!

Hail, His Servant! Hail, His Mother! And, (hail) all you holy virtues which through the grace and light of the Holy Spirit are poured into the hearts of the faithful so that from their faithless state you may make them faithful to God.

## **Deepening of points taken from the Rule and the General Constitutions**

### **Rule - 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<sup>1</sup>. 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 16**

1. 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 realized in her. The brothers and sisters should cultivate intense love for the most holy virgin, imitation, prayer, and filial abandonment. They should manifest their own devotion with expressions of genuine faith, in forms accepted by the Church.
2. Mary is the model of fruitful and faithful love for the entire ecclesial community. Secular Franciscans and their fraternities should seek to live the experience of Francis, who made the Virgin the guide of his activity. With her, like the disciples at Pentecost, they should welcome the Spirit to create a community of love.

### **Life-Objective:**

At the start of the New Year 2018, take time to thank Jesus Christ for having given us Mary as our Mother ....

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

Remind the members of regional and local activities.

Remind the members to celebrate an important anniversary – the 40th anniversary of the promulgation of our Rule.

**End of the meeting:** (prayer or hymn to the Virgin Mary chosen by the fraternity)

### **At home**

A small research task would be to take your copy of the Rule and find in it the exact date of the promulgation; we are in 2018, therefore it was 40 years ago. It was also the last official act of Pope Paul VI.