

LIVING FRATERNITY

Theme: The Joy of the Gospel

For this month of October, we are proposing a reflection on a text taken from the Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* by Pope Francis. We have chosen some text from the first chapter – The Joy of the Gospel – to establish the link with articles 4 and 5 of our way of life.

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.

OCTOBER 2019 MONTHLY MEETING

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

Introduction

As the text of Article 4 from our way of life invites us to go from the Gospel to life and from life to the Gospel we suggest that you read the following text as introduction.

A joy ever new, a joy which is shared

I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unflinchingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since “no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord”.

The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms. Now is the time to say to Jesus: “Lord, I have let myself be deceived; in a thousand ways I have shunned your love, yet here I am once more, to renew my covenant with you. I need you. Save me once again, Lord, take me once more into your redeeming embrace”.

How good it feels to come back to him whenever we are lost! Let me say this once more: God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy. Christ, who told us to forgive one another “seventy times seven” (Mt 18:22) has given us his example: he has forgiven us seventy times seven.

Time and time again he bears us on his shoulders. No one can strip us of the dignity bestowed upon us by this boundless and unflinching love. With a tenderness which never disappoints, but is always capable of restoring our joy, he makes it possible for us to lift up our heads and to start anew. Let us not flee from the resurrection of Jesus, let us never give up, come what will. May nothing inspire more than his life, which impels us onwards!

Reflection and Sharing:

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

The books of the Old Testament tell us something of the joy of the Gospel

The books of the Old Testament predicted that the joy of salvation would abound in messianic times. The prophet Isaiah exultantly salutes the awaited Messiah: “You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy” (9:3). He exhorts those who dwell on Zion to go forth to meet him with song: “Shout aloud and sing for joy!” (12:6). The prophet tells those who have already seen him from afar to bring the message to others: “Get you up to a high mountain, O herald of good tidings to Zion; lift up your voice with strength, O herald of good tidings to Jerusalem” (40:9).

All creation shares in the joy of salvation: “Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth! Break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his suffering ones” (49:13). Zechariah, looking to the day of the Lord, invites the people to acclaim the king who comes “humble and riding on a donkey”: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he” (9:9).

Perhaps the most exciting invitation is that of the prophet Zephaniah, who presents God with his people in the midst of a celebration overflowing with the joy of salvation. I find it thrilling to reread this text: “The Lord, your God is in your midst, a warrior who gives you the victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing, as on a day of festival” (3:17).

This is the joy which we experience daily, amid the little things of life, as a response to the loving invitation of God our Father: “My child, treat yourself well, according to your means ... Do not deprive yourself of the day’s enjoyment” (Sir 14:11, 14). What tender paternal love echoes in these words!

Reflection and Sharing:

After the reading of the preceding text, find a word or a phrase that particularly speaks to you and share your thoughts.

The Gospel, radiant with the glory of Christ’s cross

The Gospel, radiant with the glory of Christ’s cross, constantly invites us to rejoice. A few examples will suffice. “Rejoice!” is the angel’s greeting to Mary (Lk 1:28). Mary’s visit to Elizabeth makes John leap for joy in his mother’s womb (cf. Lk 1:41). In her song of praise, Mary proclaims: “My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour” (Lk 1:47).

When Jesus begins his ministry, John cries out: “For this reason, my joy has been fulfilled” (John 3:29). Jesus himself “rejoiced in the Holy Spirit” (Lk 10:21). His message brings us joy: “I have said these things to you, so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete” (John 15:11). Our Christian joy drinks of the wellspring of his brimming heart. He promises his disciples: “You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy”

(John 16:20). He then goes on to say: “But I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you” (John 16:22). The disciples “rejoiced” (John 20:20) at the sight of the risen Christ. In the Acts of the Apostles we read that the first Christians “ate their food with glad and generous hearts” (2:46).

Wherever the disciples went, “there was great joy” (8:8); even amid persecution they continued to be “filled with joy” (13:52). The newly baptized eunuch “went on his way rejoicing” (8:39), while Paul’s jailer “and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God” (16:34). Why should we not also enter into this great stream of joy?

Deepening points from 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 the articles 4 and 5 from **Chapter II, the Way of Life and the Apostolic Activity**. Here are the articles from the Rule and the General Constitutions that pertain to these.

Rule 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 centre 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 gospel.

Rule 5

Secular Franciscan, 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.

General Constitutions

Rule 4 – GC – Article 8.2 They seek to deepen, in the light of faith, the values and choices of the evangelical life according to the Rule of SFO, open to the challenges that come from society and from the Church's life situation « going from Gospel to life and from life to Gospel » ; in the personal and communal dimensions of this journey.

Rule 4 – GC – Article 9.2 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 its leaders 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.

Rule 5 – GC – Article 9.1 The spirituality of the secular Franciscan is a plan of life centered on the person and on the following of Christ, rather than a detailed program to be put into practice.

Sharing and Reflection:

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 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?

Life-Objective

In this month of October, during our fraternal meetings, do a reading on the life of our patron saint, Francis of Assisi ...

Events and information from the Church and the Order

Recall the local and regional meetings and activities.

Remember to pray for the success of our Spiritual Conference in October.

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

To end this meeting, here is a prayer taken from the booklet *Pray the Word* from September–October 2018 edition. Written by: Madeleine Delbrêl. Source: <https://goo.gl/vzeISV>

Prayer to evangelize with joy

Since Words, oh my God, are not made to remain inert in our books; but to possess us and roam over the world in us; allow that from this Fire of joy, lit by You, in times past, on a mountain, that from this lesson of happiness, of sparks, we are bitten, invested, invaded; inhabited by them, as the « flying sparks in the thatch », we rush through the city streets, we hug the wave of crowds, contagious in the beatitude, contagious in joy.

As we have truly had enough of all these criers sellers of bad news, of sad news. They make so much noise that your Word do not resound anymore. May the gripping silence of Your message bursts through their din. In the cohorts without face, allow our collective joy pass, more resounding than the news sellers' cries. More invasive than the sadness spread by the masses. Amen.

At home

Read a text from Franciscan writings.