

## LIVING FRATERNITY

### Theme: « The Humility of the Incarnation – A Demonstration of Divine Love »

In December 2016, during our fraternal meetings, we explore a special text prepared by Jewel Jasmins, National Director of Formation and Br. Gerry Clyne, ofm, Spiritual Assistant. This text reminds us of the true meaning of Christmas.

Recall: At the monthly meeting, members should have at their disposal a Bible, at least one copy of the General Constitutions, a copy of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and at least one copy of Living with Christ. Also, members should have in hand their own copy of the Rule.

*Good preparation – Good meeting*

## DECEMBER 2016 MONTHLY MEETING

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

**Reading:** (choose a person who reads calmly)

### Introduction

In Franciscan spirituality, Christmas is an important feast. Christmas celebrates the love of God. It celebrates the love that compelled the Almighty and All-righteous God - who dwells in perfect loving community within the God-head (between the Persons of the Trinity), and therefore had no need to create, much less to love and redeem what had fallen - to condescend to come to earth to *love us*, and not only to love us, but to love us *as one of us* and not only to love us as one of us, but to come to us *as a helpless baby* - born into poverty, born in a barn.

### Sharing:

What sentence or word speaks to you in the introductory paragraph?

Share your answers for a few moments. Afterwards, continue the reading.

The whole odyssey of the "Christ event" began with the profound humility of the Incarnation - the human birth of Christ. Christmas is a profound demonstration of the Divine love. In fact, in the Legend of Perugia an early biographer (perhaps the beloved friend Br. Leo) noted: "The Blessed Francis had a greater reverence for the Lord's nativity than for any other solemnity of the Lord because, as Blessed Francis said, although in all his other festivities the Lord brought about our salvation, nevertheless, from the very fact that he was born for us, it followed that we would be saved. " (Legend 110) (The Geste of the Great King, pg. 347)

## **Greccio**

And there is no event in the life of St. Francis which speaks so greatly of his love for the humility of the Incarnation of Christ than the story of Greccio. One year St. Francis celebrated Christmas in the town of Greccio. He wanted to make explicit the humility that was in the Incarnation.

One Christmas Eve, Francis arranged to have mass celebrated in a cave complete with hay and animals and an altar built over a manger. (The Apennine Mountains wherein Greccio is found are full of such caves. They often became hermitages in which the Friars prayed. The Carceri above Assisi is another example.)

All the people of Greccio attended. Francis read the Gospel and preached. (In his biographies, Friar Celano calls St. Francis a "Levite". This is because Francis read the Gospel and preached that night. In the Old Testament the Levites helped the Jewish priesthood. Scholars think that Celano was drawing on the similarities of a Levite to a Deacon.

This has led some to postulate that Francis was a Deacon.) Friar Celano describes how all of creation responded: "The night is lit up like day, delighting both man and beast...The forest amplifies the cries and the boulders echo back the joyful crowd...The whole night abounds with jubilation". (1 Celano 30:85)

## **Reflection:**

Following the reading, what does tell you of our patron saint Francis?  
Take a few moments for this sharing.

## **The Crèche**

In time, the tradition of setting up a "crèche" or a "manger scene" spread from Greccio to around the world. At the church at Greccio, one can see many crèches that people have brought to this pilgrimage site. Upon seeing a manger scene we often get warm and even nostalgic feelings.

As a child, my family always set up one in our home. My father actually made a beautiful miniature log barn for it. But it is more than a quaint tradition. The message behind it is profound. God loved us so much that in order to love us as one of us, he humbled himself to come to us as a baby born in a manger.

## **Reflection:**

After the reading how saint Francis began the tradition of the Crèche, take the necessary time to answer the following questions.

1. How do I show tangible love for God in my everyday life?
2. What does it mean to love one another?
3. Living as brothers and sisters in fraternity, does our community as family bear witness to the love of Christ .

## **Biblical Reflection:**

Take the New Testament and find the story of the Nativity in the Gospel of Mathew 1, 22-25 or Luke 2, 20.

Afterwards, share your thoughts, using one or two of the following questions:

1. What does this gospel teach us?
2. To whom does it speak?
3. How does it reach us personally?
4. Is it a message of hope? Is there another kind of message? Why and how is it?

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

### **Rule 11**

Trusting in the Father, Christ chose for himself and his mother a poor and humble life<sup>1</sup>, 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 goods 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 15**

**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.

**15.2** 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.

**15.3** 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.

### **Connecting with Franciscan Writings**

The first emphasis of Franciscan spirituality is the realization that God is love, and that Christ is our brother in God's love, and we are all brothers and sisters in Christ.

### **Life –Objective:**

- During the Advent season, as you visit a crèche, reflect on the humility and love of God, and offer prayers of thanksgiving to Jesus, our brother and savior.
- Consider offering a special gift to Christ this Christmas that brings His love to others.

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

Remind the members of regional and local activities.

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

May we suggest any hymn of the Nativity.

### **At home**

If you have some books or writings on our patron saint and his love of Christ, you could read them again. The reading may remind you of your Franciscan vocation.

*Our wishes for a Happy and Peaceful Christmas time and a New Year filled with peace and joy to all our brothers and sisters.*