

LIVING FRATERNITY

Theme: « Go, with Mary, more enthusiastic »

For May, we present a second excerpt from Pope Francis' exhortation - *The Joy of the Gospel*. Here are the excerpts from the fifth Chapter - *Spirit-filled Evangelizers* - and more particularly from Section II - *Mary, Mother of Evangelization*

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

Note: Is our meeting place favorable, welcoming, warm? This is an important point to consider for encouraging our members to express their various points of view on the subject.

MAY 2014 MONTHLY MEETING

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

Reading: (choose a person who reads calmly)

Mary, Mother of evangelization

With the Holy Spirit, Mary is always present in the midst of the people. She joined the disciples in praying for the coming of the Holy Spirit (*Acts 1:14*) and thus made possible the missionary outburst, which took place at Pentecost. She is the Mother of the Church, which evangelizes, and without her we could never truly understand the spirit of the new evangelization.

Jesus' gift to his people

On the cross, when Jesus endured in his own flesh the dramatic encounter of the sin of the world and God's mercy, he could feel at his feet the consoling presence of his mother and his friend. At that crucial moment, before fully accomplishing the work which his Father had entrusted to him, Jesus said to Mary: "Woman, here is your son". Then he said to his beloved friend: "Here is your mother" (*John 19:26-27*). These words of the dying Jesus are not chiefly the expression of his devotion and concern for his mother; rather, they are a revelatory formula, which manifests the mystery of a special saving mission. Jesus left us his mother to be our mother. Only after doing so did Jesus know that "all was now finished" (*John 19:28*). At the foot of the cross, at the supreme hour of the new creation, Christ led us to Mary. He brought us to her because he did not want us to journey without a mother, and our people read in this maternal image all the mysteries of the Gospel.

Sharing:

1. What has touched me in this text? Why? (About 15 minutes)

Continue with the following reading once the sharing is finished.

Mary was able to turn a stable into a home for Jesus, with poor swaddling clothes and an abundance of love. She is the handmaid of the Father who sings his praises. She is the friend who is ever concerned that wine not be lacking in our lives. She is the woman whose heart was pierced by a sword and who understands all our pain. As mother of all, she is a sign of hope for peoples suffering the birth pangs of justice. She is the missionary who draws near to us and accompanies us throughout life, opening our hearts to faith by her maternal love. As a true mother, she walks at our side, she shares our struggles and she constantly surrounds us with God's love.

Sharing:

In the preceding paragraph, what do I remember about the moments in Mary's life? Name them. (About 15 minutes)

Star of the new evangelization

We ask the Mother of the living Gospel to intercede that the entire ecclesial community will accept this invitation to a new phase of evangelization. Mary is the woman of faith, who lives and advances in faith, and "her exceptional pilgrimage of faith represents a constant point of reference for the Church". Mary let herself be guided by the Holy Spirit on a journey of faith towards a destiny of service and fruitfulness. Today we look to her and ask her to help us proclaim the message of salvation to all and to enable new disciples to become evangelizers in turn. Along this journey of evangelization we will have our moments of aridity, darkness and even fatigue. Mary herself experienced these things during the years of Jesus' childhood in Nazareth: "This is the beginning of the Gospel, the joyful good news. However, it is not difficult to see in that beginning a particular heaviness of heart, linked with a sort of night of faith – to use the words of Saint John of the Cross – a kind of 'veil' through which one has to draw near to the Invisible One and to live in intimacy with the mystery. And this is the way that Mary, for many years, lived in intimacy with the mystery of her Son, and went forward in her pilgrimage of faith".

There is a Marian "style" to the Church's work of evangelization. Whenever we look to Mary, we come to believe once again in the revolutionary nature of love and tenderness. In her we see that humility and tenderness are not virtues of the weak but of the strong that need not treat others poorly in order to feel important themselves. Contemplating Mary, we realize that she who praised God for "bringing down the mighty from their thrones" and "sending the rich away empty" (*Luke* 1:52-53) is also the one who brings a homely warmth to our pursuit of justice. She is also the one who carefully keeps "all these things, pondering them in her heart" (*Luke* 2:19). Mary is able to recognize the traces of God's Spirit in events great and small. She constantly contemplates the mystery of God in our world, in human history and in our daily

lives. She is the woman of prayer and work in Nazareth, and she is also Our Lady of Help, who sets out from her town “with haste” (*Luke 1:39*) to be of service to others. This interplay of justice and tenderness, of contemplation and concern for others, is what makes the ecclesial community look to Mary as a model of evangelization.

Sharing and Bible research:

With a Bible, go and find the excerpts mentioned in the preceding text. Read them and invite everyone to meditate them while listening to them.

Reflection;

Let us listen to the reading of today’s Gospel... then take a moment to share.

In the footsteps of Francis

(Excerpt from the Salutation to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order, page 77, St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1985)

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 holy beloved Son and with the Holy Spirit the Paraclete, in whom there was and is all the 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 make them faithful to God.

Deepening of points taken from the Rule and the General Constitutions

OFS 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. 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:

During the month of May, take the time to recite with fervour the rosary or the Franciscan crown while thinking of Jesus and Mary...

Events and Information from the Church and the Order

Remind the members of regional and local activities.

End of the meeting (with the prayer from the exhortation)

Mary, Virgin and Mother, you who, moved by the Holy Spirit, welcomed the word of life in the depths of your humble faith: as you gave yourself completely to the Eternal One, help us to say our own "yes" to the urgent call, as pressing as ever, to proclaim the good news of Jesus.

Filled with Christ's presence, you brought joy to John the Baptist, making him exult in the womb of his mother.

Brimming over with joy, you sang of the great things done by God.

Standing at the foot of the cross with unyielding faith,

you received the joyful comfort of the resurrection, and joined the disciples in awaiting the Spirit so that the evangelizing Church might be born.

Obtain for us now a new ardour born of the resurrection, that we may bring to all the Gospel of life which triumphs over death.

Give us a holy courage to seek new paths, that the gift of unfading beauty may reach every man and woman.

Virgin of listening and contemplation, Mother of love, Bride of the eternal wedding feast, pray for the Church, whose pure icon you are, that she may never be closed in on herself or lose her passion for establishing God's kingdom.

Star of the new evangelization, help us to bear radiant witness to communion, service, ardent and generous faith, justice and love of the poor, that the joy of the Gospel may reach to the ends of the earth, illuminating even the fringes of our world.

Mother of the living Gospel, wellspring of happiness for God's little ones, pray for us.

Amen. Alleluia!

At home

In order to continue our reflection, go and see in the Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the articles 196-199 and in the Catechism, the articles 966-970, which present Mary, Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church.