

RE : Workshop # 11: A life more responsible for a more fraternal world

Excerpts the CIOFS manual, section The VOCATION, CHARISM, MISSION of S.F.

MISSION

After dealing with Charism it is necessary now to examine the **Mission of St. Francis and of his Family: TO REPAIR THE HOUSE-CHURCH**. This mission of saint Francis, which at first looks so *generic* and *all inclusive*, is in fact saint Francis' **specific** Mission. Jesus Christ Himself indicated the mission to Francis when in the San Damiano Chapel he *heard with his bodily ears a voice coming from that cross, telling him three times: Francis go and repair my house, which, as you see, is all being destroyed* (LMj II, 1).

IN THAT MOMENT THERE WAS IN FRANCIS THE ENTIRE FRANCISCAN FAMILY

But, how is a house repaired? With the same *elements*, with the same *materials* with which it was built!

But what is the House-Church?

It is the **Body of Christ...**

The House-Church, Body of Christ, is healthy when he who looks at it, he who lives in it, sees Jesus and, seeing Jesus, sees and hears the Father. «*Show us the Father and it will be enough for us. Whoever has seen me, has seen the Father*» (Jn 14: 8-9)

This is what the man of the 1st Century asks, this is what the man of the 13th Century asked as well. **This is what the man of the 21st Century is asking**. This is what every creature asks always.

It is essential, therefore, for us to rediscover that **at the very center of our charism there is the heavenly Father** (centrality of the Father) and to understand its importance for our spiritual journey and the realization of the mission.

This is the journey that Francis, guided by the Spirit, has done and that we have to do. Therefore, we must commit ourselves to become, feel and behave as true "*children*" to discover the infinite richness of the divine Paternity and draw from it the capacity to love, to give and to for-give.

Jesus Himself wants that the Father becomes the norm and model, the inspiration and aim of all human beings. —*Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.*” (Mt 5:48; NMI 31)

This invitation carries with it a special meaning and responsibility for us, the children of Francis, whom the Spirit has endowed with the **special charism of sonship**. We are called to conform to the Son and to listen with a filial heart, when He speaks to us of the Father and proposes to us the attitudes to imitate.

It is our task to assimilate and live them so as to become living examples and admonition to the world, in support of the Church. We understand, now, that there are no limits in the scope of the mission of secular Franciscans. The object of the Mission is the whole Church and, working with it, the whole world. Secular Franciscans will have to make themselves available, like Francis, every time the Church calls, every time there is something, anything, to repair.

There are no limits to its scope: reconciliations to promote, sufferings to alleviate, solitudes to fill, despair to console, marginalizations to fight, material and spiritual poverties to heal, respect for life and for nature, youth to love and to accompany, catechize, animation of Liturgy, support to the Christian communities in anything they may need, etc. There are no limits! We must understand where God and the Church call us to serve. We understand, then, that **the Charism** not only empowers us to fulfill the **mission**, but also animates it and guides it so as to make the mission specifically effective at all times.

The children of Francis must continue his mission! What a responsibility!

Excerpts, section ELEMENTS OF ECCLESIOLOGY AND THEOLOGY OF THE LAITY

Secular character

The identity of the lay person and his/her special mission in the Church flows from the Christian newness brought about by Baptism. By this sacrament we are reborn to a new life, grafted to Christ, vivified by the power of the Spirit. We proclaim salvation, hope and love.

As baptized, we are all children of God; but the modality of living it is different for lay people than for presbyters and religious. This modality is not accessory nor secondary but proper and particular to the layperson; it is his/her intimate nature which is to be secular.

— The secular character is proper and particular to lay people || .

In no. 31 of *Lumen Gentium*, the Council Fathers affirm that —the term laity is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in holy orders and those in a religious state sanctioned by the Church. These faithful are by Baptism made one body with Christ and are established among the People of God. They are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ. They carry out their own part in the mission of the whole Christian people with respect to the Church and the world.

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Excerpts, IDENTITY OF THE LAYPERSONS

Lay spirituality

The particularity of lay people is made clear in an original and fruitful way not only at the level of the apostolate but at that of spirituality, one no longer borrowed from religious.

Lay Christians are called to be on the watch for the breath of the Spirit which makes the Word of God living and effective.

Their —life in the Spirit || (or spirituality) has specific connotations.

- It is characterized above all by service and apostolic co-responsibility which takes human history seriously, living it as the daily place of sanctification. The today of God is in our concrete lives, our day-to-day is the —hour || of God, the today of salvation. Secular involvement, however, does not consist in living the faith by consecrating the world, but in living in the world according to the Spirit-mission proper to the People of God.
- It is Christ-like in the sense that it flows from sharing in the priesthood, prophecy and kingship of Christ in the Church.
- It is Charismatic: it is founded in the inner freedom of the Spirit which continually offers new life.
- It is Evangelic: in the spirit of the Beatitudes, lay people are not prisoners of the logic and wisdom of the world, but they make of their life and —path || the arena for the virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance.
- It is Wisdom: by its dual belonging to the ecclesial community and the human community, as such it brings together the demands of divine revelation and human reason.

Gaudium et Spes denounces the grave error of separating daily life from the life of faith: —They are mistaken who, knowing that we have here no abiding city but seek one which is to come, think that they may therefore shirk their earthly responsibilities. For they are forgetting that by the faith itself they are more than ever obliged to measure up to these duties, each according to his proper vocation(...) This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age (...) The Christian who neglects his temporal duties neglects his duties toward his neighbour and even God, and jeopardizes his eternal salvation || (GS 43). Such is the vocation and spirituality of the lay person: to seek the Kingdom of God and to be concerned for God's concerns

VOCATION IS ALWAYS AND FOR EVERYONE A CALL TO PERFECTION

Reading the story of the rich young man we drew the attention to the word *perfect*. What does it mean to say, —*If you want to be perfect*”?

Let us dwell for a moment on this important concept of —perfection || .

Christians must **mature** to reach their **fullness**, their —*telos* || (this is the word in the original Greek text) that is their perfection (the Greek word means to bring to completion).

In this sense **all** Christians are *called* to be perfect. And if someone does not reach this goal it is because he has renounced to implement Christ’s command: “*Be perfect (teleioi) as your father who is in heaven is perfect*” (Mt 5:48).

Before we were even born, God pre-ordained us, He sanctified us, as St Paul teaches us (Rm 8:28-30). Hence, there is not (there cannot be) a *state of life* or a *ministry* which is —more perfect || than another!

The **baptismal consecration** puts all the followers of Christ in a common *basic* condition of Grace, whereby every *christifidelis* (faithful) acquires the possibility of *full self-realization according to God’s existential project* (irrespective of the *state*, lay, cleric, religious): **this is vocation**.

...

Being attracted, however, does not necessarily correspond to a vocation to bind oneself permanently into a —consecrated || Franciscan —religious || or —secular || form of life. An accurate discernment is necessary. It is necessary to understand with the help of God what He wants from us.

ONE CAN BE INSPIRED BY FRANCIS BUT NOT BE DESTINED TO SERVE IN A CONSECRATED FRANCISCAN FORM OF LIFE.

Francis was chosen by God as an example, as a model, for the entire People of God, for all mankind and not only for the —Franciscans || .

In order to understand if we have a genuine FRANCISCAN VOCATION it is essential to know Francis, to confront ourselves with him. It is necessary to move away from generic feelings, from romanticism and sentimentalism and understand if, in fact, the project God has prepared for us goes in the very same direction of Francis’ project.

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TO HAVE A REAL FRANCISCAN VOCATION, means to be called to take **the same path of identification and total conformity** that Francis took with *his Christ*.

To have a genuine FRANCISCAN VOCATION, whether religious apostolic, contemplative or secular, means this: to verify our own availability to fully embrace this path.

This FRANCISCAN WAY requires: following Jesus without reservations in the footsteps of Saint Francis: in other words, to be ready, in our specific state of life, to follow Jesus just as Francis did.

to discover, accept and develop within ourselves the same Charism received by Saint Francis, so as to make it present and bring it to fruition in the world.

This spiritual style entails: a very intense *Eucharistic spirituality* (kénosis)

a very strong *fraternal communion*

simplicity

love of *poverty*

humility

a genuine sense of *minority*

a complete and active abandonment to God, which materialises in *obedience*, particularly to the Church.