

Re : Workshop # 6: Prayer is the soul of our life and action

Excerpts from the CIOFS Manual: section GOD REVEALS HIMSELF
And from FRANCIS OF ASSISI AND HIS APPROACH TO DIVINITY
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Today we need, more than ever, to **recover a typically saint-Franciscan Christological vision**, namely that of the *whole* Jesus Christ, who is experienced by Francis, concretely, as the *Jesus of history* (insisting on following his words, his example, his teachings, his life) but always seeing Jesus as the expression of *God-with-us* (the Divinity of Christ, Son of the Father), in his condition of *kénosis* which is *the form taken by divine love* in order to enter into intimate communion with all human beings.¹

(Here is)... a reflection in order to deepen our essential understanding of the *kénosis* of God.²

Jesus, in John's Gospel, states quite unequivocally: «*He who sees me, sees the Father*». (Jn 14,9).
To see Jesus equals to see the Father.

Jesus said to him: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, then you will also know my Father. From now on you do know Him, and have seen Him."

Philip said to him: Master, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.

Jesus said to him: Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip?

Whoever has seen me, has seen the Father. *How can you say "Show us the Father?"*

Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me is doing His work.

Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe because of the works themselves. (Jn 14, 6-11)

SPIRITUALITY ARISES AND NOURISHES ITSELF FROM THE INTIMATE PERSONAL CONTACT WITH GOD

It is an often forgotten fact that the Poverello spent many weeks in silence - in the last years of his life, as much as half his time³.

None of us, either, can experience an authentic spiritual development towards the realisation of our own vocation, unless we find enough space for silence to remain **alone with God**, as Francis did, in intimate and ceaseless prayer.

It is not enough to follow some lessons, to read and study texts however interesting.

Spirituality is the result of an inspiration of the Spirit in the most intimate depths of our being. It is something so intimate and so personal that cannot be received through the study of books as a simple form of intellectual enrichment. It is something that concerns no-one but ourselves, individually, we and no other.

FAITH

Lk. 18.8: "*But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?*"

Mk. 9.23-24: "*Everything is possible to one who has faith. Then the boy's father cried out: I do believe, help my unbelief!*"

In the climate in which we live today, it is rare to find people who, in their concrete daily life, show a **true, profound and unwavering faith**, and not just on the intellectual level. In other words, people whose faith (which is more than simply believing) has substantially changed their lives. With our lips

(perhaps with our minds too), we manifest our belief in the overwhelming tenets of Christian revelation: *God exists, God has revealed Himself, God loves me, God has come close, He is even intimate with me, God wants to share the fullness of His life with me for all eternity.* But then, in concrete daily life apparently nothing changes. Sadly, we have to acknowledge that for most of us there is a gulf between the mind and the heart, between intelligence and will, between saying and doing and, in the last analysis, between thought and “being”.

We need to recognise that often our thoughts, our will, our faith, are essentially “weak”. At times they are extremely weak and unable to produce any effective results.

Religion, belief, faith have often become merely mental, theoretical, abstract exercises, a ‘habit’ which is essentially cultural and does not involve our deep being, our will or our actual life.

The Christian experience of St Francis of Assisi helps us to understand the extent to which faith must be nurtured, deepened and continuously tested out in our lives.

Faith can never be taken for granted.

This has always been true, and it is particularly true today.

We must find the courage to put ourselves to test and ‘to prove’ our faith, to make sure that it produces concrete and authentic changes in our daily lives.

Our times seem especially marked by a **lack of this verification**, which manifests itself by the **diminished impact of faith on our lives.**

The apostasy of the modern era is based on the reduced impact of faith on the lives of Christians.⁴

St Francis, in his own human adventure, lived out his faith by incarnating it, by making it grow each day and by allowing it to transform him in his depths. This is one reason why Francis is so perennially attractive.

In many ways, our own times are different from those of Francis but there are also many similarities between his day and ours. Through looking at him and meditating on his spiritual experience, we come to realise how faith has become habitual, theoretical, weak, discounted, unable to impact on our daily lives.

Therefore, in dealing with the “faith of Francis”, *his theology, his spirituality*, we must make an effort to assume the right interior attitude, in holy humility and in a spirit of self-criticism so that, while we discover Francis, we also adopt his own capacity to believe and live as firmly and as generously.

Every approach to God must go through Jesus the Christ. **Christ is the way**, as he said himself. No-one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son wishes to reveal Him. (Lk 10, 22)

*O eternal truth and true love and dear eternity! You are my God, for you I long day and night... I sought how to gain sufficient strength to rejoice in You and I did not find it until I embraced the Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus! (1Tim 2, 5) who is above everything, God be blessed for ever! (Rom 9, 5). *He called me and said: I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. (Jn 14, 6), and He united my being with this food which I was not capable of taking, because the Word was made flesh (Jn 1, 14). Thus your Wisdom, by means of which you created everything, is made the food of our human weakness.**

The heavenly Father gives full meaning to Francis’ life and Francis turns to Him in trust, familiarity, wonder and recognition, especially in consideration of the acute awareness of his littleness and unworthiness. Yet, it is exactly this awareness (that God loves him in spite of his ‘unworthiness’) which sets him on fire with an ever greater love, with a will ever more determined to be united with Him.

⁴ J. Ratzinger, “Guardare Cristo. Esercizi di fede, speranza e carità”, Milan 1989 p. 31

Francis can hardly believe that God loves him to the extent of giving Himself totally *in the Son*, and he wants to respond to this love by offering himself completely, *like the Son*, in order to achieve a total conformity with Him. He lets the *Spirit* completely permeate him so that the *Father* may bring about this miracle.

In his beautiful **Paraphrase on the Our Father**, Francis affirms that «our Father most holy, light, love and supreme good» already reigns «in the angels and saints», giving them full awareness, inflaming them with love and filling them with happiness. As for us, let us pray that His name be kept holy, that it be made greater and be successful in bringing us to full knowledge of the «breadth, length, height and depth» of the mystery of the Father for at present this escapes us. Only when the Father «will call us into His kingdom» will we finally have that «clear vision, perfect love, blessed companionship, eternal joy».

In the **Office of the Passion**, we seem to hear Francis himself who, while putting the words of invocation to the Father on the lips of Jesus (as in the Gospel of John 17,11), adds to ‘Holy Father’ his own “*My*” (holy Father)⁵. Such identification with Christ is moving, it comes from the innermost depths of Francis.

As a result, when Francis prays - as the Son taught him - he addresses himself to the Father.

In the 15 prayers by Francis, 11 are addressed to the Father, 2 to Christ while 2 are praises of the Virgin. (T. Matura, op cit)

“Almighty, eternal, just and merciful God,
give us miserable ones the grace to do for you alone (*propter temetipsum*)⁶
what we know you want us to do, and always to desire what pleases you.
Inwardly cleansed, interiorly enlightened,
and inflamed by the fire of the Holy Spirit,
may we be able to follow in the footprints of your beloved Son
our Lord Jesus Christ,
and by your grace alone may we make our way to you, Most High,
who live and rule
in perfect Trinity and simple Unity,
and are glorified God almighty, forever and ever. Amen.”

He who is «Almighty, eternal, just and merciful», the Most High who lives and reigns in «perfect Trinity and simple Unity», has a beloved Son. Therefore, He is a **Father** even though the word does not appear in this particular prayer. To him our desires come, miserable though we are, and they come in the certainty that they will be heard simply because of who he is and by His grace alone.

An itinerary is traced above along which human **activity**, dependent on God, combines with the **passivity** needed if we are to be «purified, enlightened and inflamed by the (divine) fire». Our guides, along this road, are the Holy Spirit and the beloved Son. Where do the footprints of this beloved Son lead those who follow Him, when they are set on fire by the Spirit, if not to the Most High Father? «To make our way to you» is the final destination of the journey. If love «for your sake alone» (*propter temetipsum*) leads the Father out of Himself towards his work in the world, this same love finally **redirects** everything back to Him who is the *Alpha* and the *Omega*.

Excerpts from The Profession in the SFO

Profession and Eucharist

Through the presbyter the *Church associates the promise or Profession with the Eucharistic Sacrifice*. The Ritual gives special attention to this aspect, prescribing that the —Rite of the Promise to live the gospel life, or Profession || is —to be celebrated during Mass || : no other form of celebration is envisaged.

To celebrate Profession within the Eucharist expresses the *sacrificial dimension of self-giving* inherent in the Profession of the gospel life in the Secular Franciscan Order. In Profession, manifested in the presence of the Fraternity and the Church, the true nature of the candidates as priests and victims is made manifest. They, by promising to live the gospel life, make themselves entirely available to God and place their own bodies (persons) on the altar of Christ's sacrifice as a holy victim pleasing to God.

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Excerpts from THE VOCATION, THE CHARISM and MISSION OF SFO

CHARISM OF FRANCIS AND OF HIS FAMILY

The *mission* to which Francis is called has an exceptional character and, as far as we know, it has remained unique in the history of the Church.

To an **exceptional mission** there must be a corresponding **extraordinary Charism** to accomplish it. This cannot be one or more virtues lived heroically, but a comprehensive gift that radically re-moulds the whole life in all its expressions and enables it for the mission.

St. Bonaventure writes that Francis —*by perfect imitation, strove to be conformed while living to Christ living; dying to Christ dying, and dead to Christ dead, and deserved to be adorned in his body with the visible image of Christ* || (LMj XIV, 4).

But what is the existential characteristic of **Christ**, the very essence of His life? This characteristic cannot but be that of —**being Son** || , the Son of the Father (NMI 24). His personality is a —son-like || personality. This filial quality penetrates the depth of his mystery.

Now if Francis is —*another Christ* || , the Christ he incarnates and expresses cannot but be the Christ in his essential son-like personality.

It is reasonable and established to think that the charism with which the Holy Spirit has endowed Francis is **the vital and all encompassing experience of truly feeling to be a “son” in the hands of the heavenly Father**, just like Jesus-Son, with all its consequences.

We do not mean by this, to become —son || as for every Christian who, with Baptism, is introduced in the family of God, but we refer, instead, to a very special gift that enabled Francis to share the very same feelings of Jesus-Son, who made himself poor, took on the condition of servant, was obedient all the way to a death on the cross, always acting in harmony with the Father (Ph 2: 5-8).

Hence, Francis, by gift, came to think with the mind of the *son*, see with the eyes of the *son*, love with the heart of the *son*, act with the abandonment and dedication of the *son*. In the Father all creatures, animate and inanimate, are to him brothers and sisters. And those who would join him cannot but give life to a *fraternity*, under the gaze of the heavenly Father.

By virtue of this most particular gift that configures him to Christ, *founder* of the Church, Francis can be the one who can —*repair* || the Church.

His **charism**, therefore, in its fundamental nucleus, consists of a **strong and radical son-like experience** which is manifested in the joyful, loving and trustful attitude and in a serene and responsible behaviour of readiness to do the will of the heavenly Father. He used to say —*I desire to be found always and completely in harmony with and obedient to God's will alone in everything* || (1C, 2nd Book, VII, 107), just like Jesus the Son who said that *‘My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to accomplish His work.’* (Jn 4:34).