



Newsletter Christmas 2021



Merry Christmas to all!

Through this newsletter, I am pleased to share some news from the Holy Spirit Province of Canada and to send you our Christmas greetings.

On the first Christmas night, God appeared where people didn't expect him! God's greatness lay in making himself small and inconspicuous, even at his birth. Let us not be afraid to approach the crèche asking ourselves who God is... Too often, our world lives as if God didn't exist. We run the risk of being busy, of doing so many things, and forgetting God. In the crèche as on the cross, God reveals to us who he is and how he loves. At Christmas, he teaches us that love is not gaudy or flashy: it is understated, accessible and simple.

Isn't it true that some of the best parts of life are extremely simple? Friendship, for example, or the grace of being a spouse, a parent, a child, a consecrated person. God speaks to us simply: here, he does so through the birth of a little baby in a manger on a cold and clear night in a poor city of shepherds on the outskirts of Jerusalem. Despite everything that is difficult in our lives – despite the ongoing pandemic – I hope for all of us that in the depths of our hearts is this manger where love is born. God's love is not revealed in the spotlight, or in the palaces of kings, but rather in a manger, on a bed of straw, between an ox and a donkey. Like Francis



of Assisi in Greccio, may we know how to make concrete and tangible the nativity of Jesus!

Over the year that is now ending, the pandemic has once again touched our lives and disrupted our opportunities to meet and to gather. In this context, it seems important to remember that Christmas is an invitation to pay close attention to the treasures buried in the human heart! Is it not urgent, in spite of everything, to find ways to connect and to share, and to step up our efforts when it comes to reconciliation and caring for others? Those we love may be experiencing anxiety, the pain of separation or solitude. How can we lighten their burden? Christmas invites us to review our attitudes, our ways of being and living: to rekindle friendships and to restore life where it is lacking.

On this feast, my thoughts turn especially to those who are combating the pandemic, to forgotten or abused children, to those who feel abandoned, to migrants who have had to leave their country... The birth of Jesus into poverty, insecurity and anxiety – practically unnoticed – invites us to turn to others and, more than ever, to be attentive to our brothers and sisters who are suffering.

Dear friends, may we be granted the ability to truly enter into the grace of Christmas!

Fr. Pierre Charland, OFM
Minister Provincial



Our two novices,
Aldin Francis
Canobas and
Hawkins Choi are
now spending their
novitiate year in
Ireland and enjoy
learning more about
Franciscan life.



Mount St. Francis Retreat Centre: Greccio Christmas Creche

Christmas Greetings from Our Postulants!



Our postulants Dominic and Brandon, with Friar Paul Seo in the middle.

My Franciscan Calling, by Brandon Paziuk

Born 35 years ago in Edmonton, AB, I now have a bachelor's degree in Applied Physics and have worked as a field engineer in the oil and gas industry, a project manager for the construction of sports and entertainment facilities, a co-owner of a company specializing in pipeline instrumentation, and a Combat Engineer Sergeant in the Canadian Armed Forces – Army Reserves.

Growing up, my family and I attended regular Sunday Mass, and my grandparents had a strong relationship with the Sisters of the Atonement and the Franciscan Friars in Edmonton. They were my first experience with Franciscans.

In my late teens, I began to question the concepts of faith and God. Unfortunately, at that time, “concepts” were all these things were to me, and by my twenties, I had effectively left the Church and God, believing that scientific materialism was “The Way.” By my late twenties, my professional life had become my entire life, and I found myself under a mountain of stress. I began to seriously practice meditation in an effort to counteract the effects of stress. The more I practiced meditation, the



more I found myself growing in peace and joy—and the more I found myself questioning my secular worldview.

Following a series of impactful meditative-contemplative experiences I came to see the reality of God and the truth of faith, which I had so hastily cast aside in my youth. When I would discuss these things with my friends and colleagues, I found that they, too, were able to greatly benefit from meditative-contemplative practices and I decided to devote my life to the pursuit of this truth—to the pursuit of God.

With the early childhood exposure to the Franciscans deeply imprinted on me, Christ's call came to me in a Franciscan tongue. There is nothing more simple, more beautiful, or more challenging than St. Francis' call to live like Christ—and I pray that as I fall short and stumble on the way to this ideal, the brothers in this fraternity will have the kindness and patience to point me back towards the path of truth and love.

Merry Christmas! Thank you all for this great gift of Postulancy and the opportunity to walk with you toward The Kingdom!

My Franciscan Calling, by Dominic Woodbury

I was born in Victoria, BC, in 1982, or 800 years after the birth of Saint Francis of Assisi. My mother decided to name me Dominic after Saint Dominic, the Saint of the Rosary.

An important influence on my journey towards the Franciscans was my godmother. Now 90 years old, she is a devout Roman Catholic, fluent in Latin and currently writing a book about pro-life advocacy. My mother used to take me to mass at the Franciscan Friary in Victoria when I was a young. I really enjoyed going to mass and meeting the friars. I immediately felt their love for Christ, community, and their joyful and humble spirits. I love the fact that they were easy going and eager to share the word of Christ with me as a child.



I attended the Bachelor of Hospitality Management program at Vancouver Community College and then the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages Program at Greystone College. I wanted to travel, teach English, and learn Spanish.

While living in Mexico, I felt at different moments my calling to join the Franciscan Order. I saw the poverty of the people and saw that there are many people in need. I was inspired when I was invited to Toluca by Father Juan Pablo to visit and help the people in the community. We prepared 100 ham sandwiches and gave them to the people in the street. I was inspired seeing Father Juan Pablo preaching about Jesus and inviting the people to mass; he made everyone feel welcomed and loved. That day, we were both filled with the love of Christ Jesus, and his humble hearted charity work greatly inspired me. I came to the realization that I am here on this earth to help people and learn from others.

I learned the language and custom in Mexico, taught English, attended mass, and visited beautiful churches and monasteries. I felt that my life should have a greater purpose. At the time I ignored this urge to join the fraternity. It was not until I returned to Canada in February of 2020 that I had more questions in my mind about the Franciscan fraternity. I had the need to contact the Franciscans and learn more about them.

After meeting with Fr. Joachim Yoon, attending the retreat at the Friary in Cochrane and learning more about the humble heartedness of Saint Francis; I felt that my values were in correlation with Franciscan Spirituality. I feel the essence of Franciscan Spirituality is to be Christocentric, living and praying with the friars, being humble-hearted, sharing the word of Christ and helping people.

I want to continue to be a humble servant of Jesus Christ and be part of the Franciscan fraternity. My charisms are helping Immigrants, the poor, working with and praying for the sick and elderly. In the future, I hope to do missionary work with the Franciscans in Spanish-speaking developing countries.

Do you know that the Franciscans of Canada have a new website? Take a look!



The Incarnation, Spiritual Care, and Military Chaplaincy



This past year, I began the application process to become a military chaplain in the Canadian Forces Reserves. It might seem strange to some that a Franciscan friar such as myself would feel a call to the ministry of military chaplaincy! Some would think that the Franciscan charism of peace is not compatible with ministry to people who serve in the profession of arms. But I would offer the point of view that it is very Franciscan to be in the ministry of military chaplaincy: It embodies the Franciscan belief in the Incarnation which is expressed in pastoral ministry and spiritual care. As the Christmas season is upon us when we celebrate the first Incarnation of our Lord, I feel it is very apropos to talk about the Incarnational aspects of military chaplaincy.



As Christians, we believe in the Incarnation of our God who became flesh with the conception and birth of his Son Jesus Christ; this is enthroned in our Nicene Creed: “We believe in one God. . .who for us and our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.” In short, we believe that our God became flesh and took on its burdens and sufferings of humanity in order to bring salvation. We see this enshrined in the Prologue of the Gospel of John and embraced by St. Francis when he constructed the first live Nativity scene at Greccio. The reality of the Incarnation drives the focus and motivation of military chaplaincy and chaplaincy in general. The work of military chaplains understands themselves as “incarnating” Christ’s presence within their congregation, particularly in times of suffering and death. For them, it boils down to a “ministry of presence” and just “being there.”

I experienced the Incarnational element of military chaplaincy first-hand. I served as a member of the Canadian Forces for almost 10 years; first as an Army reservist in Ontario, then as a sailor in the Royal Canadian Navy. In addition to the training exercises, I participated in overseas deployments and callouts to assist civil authorities. A constant presence during these times was the chaplain—commonly known in military circles as “the padre.” Throughout my years in military service, whether in garrison, in the field, or on the ship, the chaplain was available for a comforting chat, to develop a relationship with us, and participate in our unit life and activities. Through the chaplains, the presence of Christ was made incarnate once again; they were an outward sign of Jesus and the Church who cares and comforts. The incarnational presence of the military chaplain offers comfort, peace, and sanity in often difficult and harsh environments. Whether I was in recruit basic training, occupational training, on deployment or exercise, there were times when I felt lonely and isolated, missing my family, friends, and things familiar to me. But having access to a chaplain, whether attending their church services or talking with them one-one-one, was an opportunity to experience the comfort and consolation of Christ. The padres offered compassion and understanding; you knew that they were on your side.

By virtue of experiencing the same hardships as an ordinary soldier, military chaplains are able to establish a unique relationship of trust with a servicemember which might not be possible with other healthcare professionals. Soldiers trust the



chaplain because he/she knows that the chaplain understands what they are going through because they are going through the same thing as well. The chaplain becomes a neutral brother or sister in arms—they wear the same uniform but are not beholden to the same command structure and authority; they can respond to the spiritual and mental health needs of the soldier and make recommendations directly to the Commanding Officer. Like the person of Jesus Christ, military chaplains take on the role of protector and counsellor, particularly when the military members are away on deployments.

The incarnational nature of military chaplaincy also reminds the military institution of the existence of a spiritual element within the human person. This becomes increasingly important as military forces such as Canada's become increasingly involved in combat operations, disaster assistance, confronting human rights abuses, etc. These types of traumas experienced by soldiers compels them to search the spiritual realm for answers concerning the meaning of life, suffering, God, good and evil, etc. Retired General Romeo Dallaire supports this perspective in his memoir *Shake Hands with the Devil* describing his battle with PTSD stemming from his experience in Rwanda: “. . . in Rwanda I shook hands with the devil. I have seen him, I have smelled him, I have touched. I know the devil exists, and therefore I know that there is a God” (preface, xviii). This perspective is supported by studies of veterans who have undergone extreme stress; like the general population, they often turn toward the spiritual or “higher power” in search of answers. Military chaplains, therefore, are especially well-equipped to address these spiritual concerns in the healing process and to lessen the effects of operational stress injuries such as PTSD. Chaplains, when given the proper formation and training, can offer the soldier the spiritual support and make manifest the Christ-like values of forgiveness, love, reconciliation, hope, compassion and generosity as means of healing the whole person—both physically and spiritually.

The Incarnational nature of military chaplaincy is also true for other forms of chaplaincy such as prison and hospital chaplaincy. They bring Christ to the prisoner and to those who are sick and dying. What is common among them is the Franciscan belief in the poor and suffering Christ which St. Francis saw present in the world. As a former military member, I see the poor Christ in those who are



presently serving in uniform in Canada. That drives my call to serve them as a chaplain; to “be there for them” and make Christ present for them.

Benjamin Ripley, OFM



Giotto: The Nativity

There between an ox and a grey donkey Sleep, sleep, sleeps The Little Son One thousand divine angels, a thousand seraphim (They) fly around this great God of love.

I imagine that if a children's choir began to sing this very old Christmas hymn: There between an ox and a gray donkey having before their eyes this Nativity of Giotto, they would easily discover the main illustrations of these words of children that abound in this Christmas hymn composed on the model of a childish folk melody. It seems to me that these little singers would immediately see in the center of the painting of the crib "an ox and a donkey" near the baby Jesus with Mary at his side. Surely they would ask the question: Why are these animals in this place in front of "the little son, between the two arms of Mary."



We know that the presence of an ox and a donkey in the manger of Bethlehem is not mentioned in the Gospels but is inspired by the prophet Isaiah who reproaches Israel and its people for not knowing its God unlike the ox and the donkey: "The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib, Israel knows nothing, my people understands nothing." (Is, 1: 1-3).

In this Nativity of Giotto, we notice that "the little son" of this scene of the nativity scene is not at all sleeping (as the words of the hymn indicate) but that he is perfectly awake! In fact, he has his eyes open, and they are fixed on the face of Mary who also looks him in the eyes for the first time. Mary's head bows slightly, a slight smile forms on her lips and her little boy seems to smile at her in return. Perhaps she is singing to him tenderly: Sleepy, sleep, the child will sleep The child's gonna quickly fall to sleep Sleepy, sleep, the child will sleep The child soon's gonna fall to sleep!

It is quite likely that our little singers would not have noticed this detail "of the little son" who does not sleep or this other detail that is at the very bottom of the crib: Another presentation of the Child Jesus in the arms of a midwife who is about to make him take his bath with the help of another companion. The images of the two choirs of angels bearing these charming names of "a thousand divine angels, a thousand seraphim" would certainly have attracted the attention of our little singers who would have seen them first and admired them at length. It is quite rare, however, to find in a Nativity two choirs of angels, one inside the nativity scene and the other outside as Giotto does here.

We see in this painting that the angels arrive hastily from all sides. Twelve of them represent the celestial choir of the "thousand divine angels" who fly above the Mother and Child. These angels have half-celestial and half-earthly faces, and their hands are joined together for prayer, but they wear robes that curve with a flower resembling musical notes. So, they would be singing.

Above the roof, other angels (the " thousand seraphim?") converge to the star of Bethlehem, located at the central top of the painting and the golden rays descend on the Newborn Child: "this great God of love". The Word became Flesh and suddenly from the heavens burst the songs of praise of the many seraphim who are "myriads



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of myriads and thousands of thousands" (Rev 5:11). "And suddenly", as St. Luke writes (Lk 2:13-14), "with the angel there was a great throng of the heavenly host praising God and singing, Glory to God, in the highest heaven and on earth peace to people of good will."

To express in colour this Glory of God appearing in the sky of Bethlehem, Giotto uses a shade of fine stone of an unparalleled azure blue. A Franciscan from Assisi, Enzo Fortunato, writes about this colour: "Everything is both so powerful and so quiet. Giotto eliminates special effects and uses that blue colour, unprecedented, 'so captivating, so moving' that no one can resist... The pigment has the same brilliance as gold, but more real: the starry vault is blue, the sky of (the Nativity) is blue. Mary's coat is blue. A deep, luminous but above all 'royal and real' colour."

Wishing you all the best for Christmas 2021 here is a short excerpt from the Christmas Psalm of St. Francis of Assisi: "This is the day the Lord has made; let us exult and be glad in it. For the most holy beloved child is given to us, and he was born on the way and placed in a manger because he had no place in the inn. Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to people of good will. Let heavens rejoice and earth exult, the sea and all that is in it be moved, let fields and all that is in them be glad. Sing to him a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth! "

George Morin, OFM

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