

[Test] Newsletter Fall 2021

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To: communications <communications@ofmca.com>



## Newsletter Fall 2021



### Happy Feast of Saint Francis!

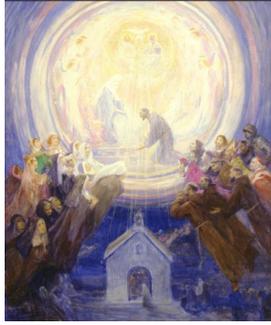
The theme of this newsletter is *Evangelization in the Spirit of Saint Francis and the Franciscan Tradition*. Obviously, this year, our evangelization efforts have been greatly affected by the current global health crisis. How can we speak of the theme of evangelization without situating it in the context of the pandemic that has been going on for nearly two years?

In the early Middle Ages, Saint Francis of Assisi carried out what was called a *return to the Gospel*. In the Church of his time – whose representatives were often closely connected to the richest and most powerful people of the day – Francis chose to draw near to lepers, the sick, the excluded and the marginalized. He helped, cared for and loved them, and he sought God with them.

During the COVID-19 pandemic that took us all by surprise and whose gruelling duration has become so draining and discouraging for many people, what does the example of Saint Francis teach us? It seems to me that his spiritual legacy invites us to follow him in an evangelical movement toward those who are most in need in our societies. I am thinking in particular here of the elderly and young adults, who seem especially affected by this health crisis. We know that anxiety and mental health problems are increasing, especially in relation to the sense of isolation that is one of the *side effects* of this pandemic. Why, therefore, not follow Saint Francis's example to draw closer to the most vulnerable people of our communities, to be a sign for them – through our actions and our words – that they are not alone and that God loves them? That's a good way to embody one of the main pillars of the missionary zeal of Saint Francis: care for others and nearness to the poorest, as taught by and put into action by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Happy reading!

Brother Pierre Charland, OFM  
Minister Provincial



[My Dear Brother Francis!](#)



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**A New Solemnly Professed  
Member of the Holy Spirit  
Province of Canada:  
Gabriel (Mathieu) Lacerte-  
Robitaille, OFM**



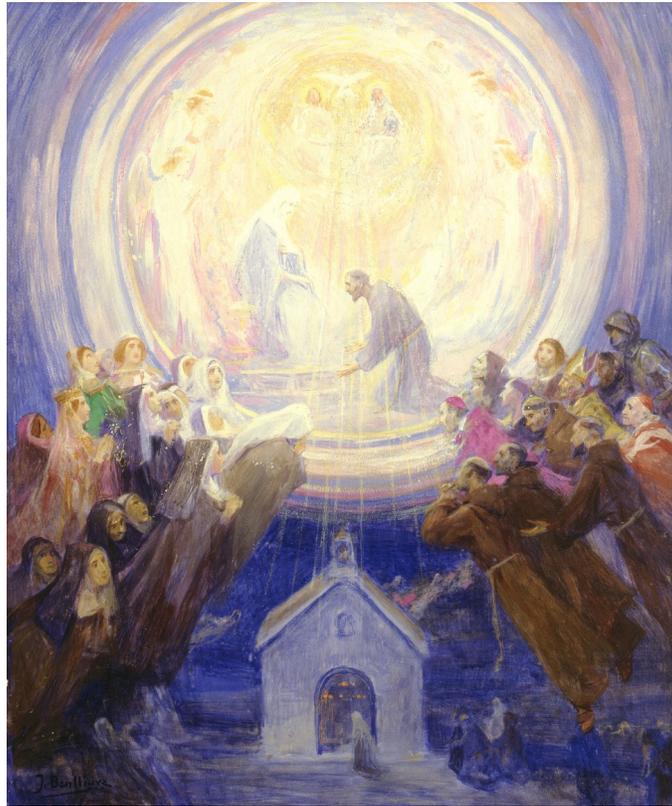
The brothers participated joyfully in celebrating the solemn profession of **Gabriel (Mathieu) Lacerte-Robitaille** last Saturday, July 31, in St. Anthony's Chapel of Trois-Rivières, the town of his birth. Gabriel pronounced his final vows in front of Pierre Charland, Minister Provincial, and in the presence of many friends and relatives. Among them were twenty of his fellow Franciscans from our Holy Spirit Province, two bishops, and several priests. It was a truly beautiful celebration with songs, with

organ music, and a ten people singing in the choir. Michel Boyer sang a song with an accompaniment by Guylain Prince. Pierre Charland gave a remarkable homily. It was the feast day of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, and Pierre commented on the "seeing, judging, acting" of Jesuit spirituality in its relationship to the Franciscan search for the Kingdom of God. A Carmelite came to sing the Litany of the Saints, during which Gabriel lay prostrate on the floor. After Mass, family and friends gathered at the St. Louis de France Golf Course, courtesy of the owner, who is a friend of Gabriel's.

Gabriel began his Franciscan journey in Trois-Rivières, where he was a postulant beginning in 2014. He then entered the novitiate in Burlington, Wisconsin in 2016 and pronounced his first vows in 2017.

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## My Dear Brother Francis,



You are quoted as saying, "Let us begin, brothers, to serve God. Let us begin and let us make progress, because up to now we have made too little progress." This little phrase has been running through my mind, my heart, and even my soul over the past few weeks. You said these words near your death challenging your brothers. Now some eight centuries later I sit with them, listening to your wisdom, and they challenge me.

Let us begin to serve God. Yes, let us here and now in this time and place. Francis, this is hard to do in this time and place. Our world is so topsy-turvy as of late and I'm not sure if I have the right words or actions in my serving God. I know that I must continually come to see God in my sisters, my brothers, and in all of creation, but it must be more than simply seeing, it must involve action. I feel my words are weak and my actions inadequate. How do I serve God? I ask myself this question because your words to your brothers, "we have made too little progress," is a truth I ponder.

Our sister Mother Earth is calling out in pain, and I don't know how to respond. I want to make good steps to help be part of her healing. I desire to again simplify my living to seek the beauty she offers me each day as means of connecting with God. I feel if I can honor her, I will indeed see glimpses of the divine and in turn serve God. My progress here has been too slow. I heed your wisdom in seeing creation as our sisters and brothers. How did you do it? How did you see their divine nature beyond their temporal substance? I'm no scientist, and I know you were not, so this must mean wonder and awe was your navigator. Francis, my brother, tell me again about the wonder and awe you lived with so that I can bravely begin again to serve God by living in tune with creation.

The church is at a crossroads, and it seems that the word progress makes its members squirm with uncertainty and frustration. We the people of God called to be the body of Christ seem to be getting stuck in unnecessary details where we choose division over unity. I sometimes feel trapped like I'm walking a tightrope in how to respond. I desire to be an advocate for those who feel separated and alienated from the beauty of this community. My heart breaks for those who have been left out in the cold or hurt by the church. I think that we will only move forward if we acknowledge each other's pain by listening to each other, so as to strengthen the bonds of humanity. Francis, my brother, tell me again about the ways you challenged the church with your simplicity and your desire for people to encounter the love of God so that I can bravely begin again to serve God as a herald of hope in the church.

Then there are the many relationships we live in and encounter. Like with you what began as a small band of brothers grew, the relationships changed and were tested, I too find this in my relationships. It seems that over the past few months I have had to evaluate my relationships, reviewing how I am in them and what they need or mean. I am reminded that in some ways I must begin again with each encounter for we are constantly growing, changing, and seeking. Francis, my brother, tell me again about the ways you were present for your brothers and for those beyond the circle of your brothers, how you were present for the lepers and the poor so that I can bravely begin again to serve God in the relationships of my daily living.

Finally, dear brother Francis, I ponder this vocation that I continue to journey in and grow in. The ever-changing world around me is making me more attentive to the authenticity that my vocation demands. To be present for people, reminding them of God's deep love and mercy. To listen well to how God is speaking to my heart. To listen well to how God is speaking in the heart of others. To continually address the false power that I try to hold so that I can freely be who I am before God. This is the authenticity my vows demand. Being a religious brother in these difficult times can sometimes feel like I'm out of touch; in those moments I can hear your voice whispering, "it is time to begin again." Francis, my brother, tell me again about beginning again and making progress, for I think I'm starting to understand that this has more to do more with my heart than anything else. It is time for me to bravely begin again, I choose to do so knowing I have you as a companion walking with me in the footsteps of Christ.

Peace, my brother. May peace and goodness bless us all. Happy Feast!

Your brother,

Michael

*Michael Perras, OFM*

*(Image credit: Apotheosis of St. Francis of Assisi, by José Benlliure y Gil)*

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## **The Many Faces of Violence, The Unique Face of Pardon**



The pandemic has drastically changed our mode of thinking, living, and socializing. For example, our social distancing and the lack of regular human contacts has speeded up the ageing process, especially with the elderly. Researchers have noted an increase of anxiety leading to violence, at

interpersonal and even international levels.

As Christians we tend to identify ourselves with a non-violent lifestyle. As disciples of Saint Francis, we take for granted our calm behavior and openness to dialogue; we project ourselves in Matthew's Beatitude: "*Happy the peacemakers: they shall be called sons of God*" (Mt 5,9). Some of us bear peace in their behavior and their gaze at others, or through the sound of a soothing voice. Others build peace in creating harmonious relationships, while others flee confrontation or open conflicts. But it took a pandemic social crisis to make us realize how we can be violent at times.

During the last year, we have witnessed the many faces of violence. Or even experienced them in our spiritual life, our fraternal relations, or at a social level. The whole world has gone through the dark side of violence. We can easily pinpoint down an increase in road rage, impatience and complaining in lineups, ethnic gang wars, domestic quarrels, battered women and physical abuse, hatred and revenge triggered by the recent scandals concerning the First Nations... The list is endless and concerns each one of us. Violence starts within our hearts and explodes as far as Afghanistan. The Latin root of **violence** says it all: **an excessive use of force**. Pandemic violence has triggered darkness and refusal to consider the other as a precious human being. One better understands Cain's denial when asked where his brother Abel can be found: "*Am I my brother's guardian?*" (Gn. 4,9).

Then Francis of Assisi comes along with his **Canticle of the Creatures** at the end of his life. He gives an indirect statement on non-violence. He reconciles pardon and suffering: "*Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love, and bear infirmity and tribulation. Blessed are those who endure in peace for by You, Most High, shall they be crowned*" (CtC10). One finds it strange that such a praise of thanksgiving for Creation includes many dead-end situations in our lives: hatred, illness, trials, death and sin. We know the historical origin of this verse on pardon, added in the **Canticle**!

In July 1226, a quarrel between the Mayor and the Bishop of Assisi bursts out in the open. The Bishop excommunicates the Mayor. Their conflict could have been triggered by property issues and matters of jurisdiction. What was once a friendly relationship has become a source of violent *hatred*. What strikes us is Francis's immediate reaction to the conflict. The Legend of Perugia refers to his *pity* for the two men in authority. He criticizes the fact that no one would intervene to reestablish peace and harmony. His comment is clear: "*Shame on us, servants of God! There is no one to bring peace and concord when the Mayor and Bishop hate themselves so much!*" (LP44). The Saint acknowledges the crisis for what it is; he anticipates the consequences, but mostly suffers for the lack of action. He then adds a verse on pardon to his **Canticle**, and sends his friars to sing out loud the Blessing under their balconies.

This historical event offers a way of functioning in times of crisis. To be able to see and hear a conflict, either personal, interpersonal, or social. To have the courage to intervene in a compassionate way when no one else does – Francis reacts by creating a new verse in his **Canticle**. To rely on partners of reconciliation when one is unable to meet the people in conflict. To rejoice while searching for a peaceful solution. This reveals the need for reconciliation in our evangelization journey.

Another example in Franciscan literature shows us how to act in times of violence. The **Fioretti** invent the **Wolf of Gubbio** narrative to go further into the steps of reconciliation (Fior 21). Francis listens to the fears and victimized reactions of the people of Gubbio, in front of the beast. He sets out of the walls of the city to meet the wolf on his turf. He approaches him like a friend: no judgement, no menace, no accusations. He simply recalls the damage done and how much it affects Gubbio. At the end of a patient dialogue, he then proposes a double covenant between the people and the wolf. Bending low and extending his paw, the wolf engages himself by letting go his violence; the people engage themselves by protecting and offering him sustenance.

This scene might seem a romantic fiction, yet a legend holds hints for interpretation. Any legend is worth its finale: reconciliation is a long-term commitment. Just like the verse on pardon in the **Canticle**, the Gubbio scene discloses a way of communicating in order to build harmonious relationships, and create a practical spirituality of reconciliation. Pardon becomes a healing process to rekindle and create, a work in progress. The unique face of pardon feeds on God's own way of treating us, contemplating our lives, with or without the wounds or elements of crisis. As members of the Franciscan family, our legacy enables us to risk steps of pardon in a proactive Gospel Way. When Jesus asks us to extend the **other cheek** (Lk 6,29), he simply asks us to stop and silence violence where it is happening, and to let the violence in the others die within us. The joy of healing cannot come without such courage!

(Photo by Chris Sabor on Unsplash)

## The Church on the Eve of Vatican II



Why did the Second Vatican Council take place? At first glance, the Catholic Church in Canada seemed to be in good shape. In terms of structure, the occupants of Church offices knew their place well; the levels of authority and the respect and obedience that authority expected were clear-cut. Mass attendance was high – in the upper 60s percent – and many parishes boasted of a fervent devotional life. Vocations to the ministerial priesthood and religious life were numerous. Most Catholics would have thought that the Church they experienced had been ever thus – they were not accustomed to change.

Yet, the new Pope – St. John XXIII – was convinced some changes were in order. Although the jovial Pope gave the impression of being a naïve Italian “papa”, he was nothing of the sort. A seasoned Vatican diplomat as well as a Church historian, he was in a good position to judge the state of the Church in the modern world. The Pope’s initial address to the Council made it clear that he judged the Church’s leadership to be overly defensive, even negative, towards this world – and he affirmed that it was time to bring the Church “up to date”. Pope John had the conviction that because of the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, it was time for the Church to rejuvenate itself – this is probably the best way to understand his desire to bring the Church “up to date”.

If an institution fears unduly the influence of those outside its boundaries, this leads to an over-emphasis on structure and the centralization of authority. This is in view of protecting the identity and goals of its members from the negative influence of those outside. This helps to explain the clearly defined levels of authority in the pre-Vatican II Church as well as its highly centralized exercise of Church authority. The Roman Curia exercised much of the authority that belonged to local Bishops. The Church appeared to be not only a “pyramid” in its structure, with all the authority resting in Rome, but a fortress as well – to protect its members from the modern world.

Not that the Church did not have good reason to be wary of this world. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century on it viewed itself as a fortress of truth defending itself from the threats of the Reformation, the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and so on. Although the movement to modernity was not – obviously – all negative, the chasm between the Church and the modern world had – by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century – seemed almost unbridgeable.

Nothing demonstrates this state of affairs better than the Modernist crisis. In the large sense of the word, a “modernist” could be any thinking Catholic interested in modern science, philosophy, etc. An unorthodox Modernist believed that the doctrines, structures and worship of the Church were mere expressions of a religious “sentiment”; they could change according to different cultures, historical events and subjective thinking and tastes. The Church’s

crusade to stamp out Modernism deepened the centralization, legalism and fears of “modern” ideas in the Church right up to – and even during – Vatican II.

In the meantime, St. Pope Pius XII sought to make the Church more aware of its more authentic nature in three encyclicals: *Divino Afflante Spiritu* promoted modern historical methods in interpreting Scripture; *Mystici Corporis* presented a more spiritual vision of the Church; and *Mediator Dei* encouraged the renewal of the Church’s liturgical life.

At the same time, earlier, in fact, theologians were returning to the sources of the faith – Scripture, the Fathers of the Church, the liturgy – in view of leading the faithful to a vision of their faith that would be more easily interiorized and more effectively integrated into their lives. They were convinced that too many Catholics suffered from “extrinsicism”, that is, a faith overly determined by abstract truths and laws that were difficult for them to understand and to live. The “school” theology taught in pre-Vatican II seminaries, which trickled down into the pastoral life of the Church, might have protected some people from the perils of Modernist heresies. However, it also did not enrich the faith of the laity or prepare them for the Good News that they were, by their baptism, commissioned to share with the world. These “back to the sources” theologians were responsible for most of the content in the Council’s documents. They were acutely aware of the need for a deeper and renewed faith – more centered on Christ and the Trinity, both more personal and communal in nature, and more empathetic to and responsible for the “other”. Every document of Vatican II resonates with this dual intentionality of a renewed, more Christ-like faith and a renewal of the Church’s sense of mission to the world.

*Don MacDonald, OFM*

*(This article originally appeared in Celebrate!, Winter, 2012. It was revised and updated, Sept. 2021.)*

*(Photo by Lothar Wolleh, The Council Fathers seated during the Second Vatican Council, licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/).)*

## Evangelizing in a Scientific World



In the last 18 months, science came up daily as we reacted to a global crisis unleashed by a virus. But as people of faith, we want more than just the science during a crisis. There is always more than science can grasp. We want to trust science, but what we mean by trust is more than technical accuracy. We want to trust that this use of science will lead us towards a better life. We want to understand why it is good to act in this way. It is not obvious how science fits into a well-lived life. And for the well-lived life, St. Francis is our guide. It is not obvious for us how to make sense of science and give it meaning to that it becomes part of Christ’s power to heal.

Making sense of science falls mostly on scientists, but they will need to understand their faith to do this well. One organization that is prepared for this task is the Society of Catholic Scientists. It was founded five years ago, and I have been part of it from the start. Most members are scientists working in academia or industry and have a PhD or are studying towards one. They form a professional society of scientists who also happen to be Catholics who

practice their faith. They seek harmony between their professional lives and their lives as baptized Catholics.

Having such a society was not an obvious idea, and even just 20 years ago, few would have supported the idea. It would have seemed entirely unnecessary. Faith gives us a special appreciation for life and the human person, but this leaves no scientific question behind. There is no question that Christians are forbidden to ask, and no hypothesis that cannot be considered. God being the creator of everything, Christians cannot fear a conflict between faith and science. If there seems to be one, it is either bad science or bad theology. Our faith merely requires attentiveness to the dignity of creation and creatures during scientific investigation. Rather than impeding scientific studies, faith is likely to make them more valuable by letting us trust its results more readily.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, decisions had to be made that changed the way we go about our daily lives. More than a few times, we were asked to follow the science, often in ways we did not like very much. We were asked to trust in science. But of course, following the science and trusting in science is done in the larger context of life. And making sense of your life requires faith in it. Therefore, when you follow the science, your faith will be part of it. Suddenly, faith and science are no longer separate. There is no Catholic science, but there are Catholic scientists, and they need to know each other so that we can work together to make sense of life in a scientific culture.

As a Franciscan, the vision of St. Francis shapes how I make sense of my life and my faith in a scientifically understood world. He praises God, he gives thanks to God for all his creatures, he sees how all creatures proclaim the glory of God. He sees creation's beauty, in the way God intended it, and he recognizes this beauty in each creature. He becomes a peace maker, seeking reconciliation among people. He knows that death awaits him, but it is not to be feared by those who die doing God's will, which is reconciling what was broken by sin.

In our age, what was broken by sin now also includes our relationship with natural creatures. Climate change and extinction of species resulted from a scientific-technological culture that paid insufficient attention to the dignity of creatures and creation. Healing this is the Franciscan vision. But this vision cannot be a reason to turn against science and its applications in technology. Nobody wants to return to the preindustrial way of life. Making better technology, technology that fits better into the earth's ecosystem, is simply the next scientific challenge. I had no doubt that it can and will be done. But it needs scientists and engineers who understand the value of creatures and creation, who see them not just as resources but images and reflections of God.

To evangelize today, in a scientific age, means to study science and one's faith and bring both together. When we do, we discover God's presence as creator of the goodness and beauty in creatures and creation. In this context and with this understanding, the results of science will contribute to the praise of the goodness of God.

*Joachim Ostermann, OFM*

*(Photo by Jeremy Bezanger on Unsplash)*

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**On our feast day, we remember our mission...**

*through a responsible fraternal presence with the people entrusted to us, a renewed attitude of wonder and an informed awareness of Nature.*

*in Haiti, and especially of the young Haitians who are deprived of schooling.*

*in this wounded world, yes, but most importantly inhabited by Our Lord himself. Franciscan spirituality is a call to trust and be daring. Let us wish to radiate hope, charity and faith wherever we are! For the Lord has preceded us there!*



*in being a contemplative fraternity in mission who gives thanks to God for journeying with the people of the Cochrane and Calgary areas.*

*by reaffirming our commitment to pastoral care to all, with a renewed zeal for 'Truth and Healing' at the local level, to support the migrants and the refugees in fight for justice, and journey with a listening heart with the young and the elderly in our midst, thus make our fraternity a living witness in this place.*

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