

Reflection by the Minister General

Brothers and sisters, in St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we are drawn into the great drama of Christian conversion, of what transpires in our lives when we welcome Christ's invitation to "follow me!" "You are not foreigners or strangers any longer, you are now fellow citizens with God's people and members of the family of God" (Eph. 2:18-19), St. Paul writes to the Christians communities not only of Ephesus but to all seven Churches of Asia Minor. Paul's message goes against all common sense and wisdom of his time, and even of ours. Political leaders in the Roman empire used ethnic, religious, and regional differences as a means to divide, as a means to conquer, and as a means to promote their own positions of power and wealth. I am sure none of this has anything to do with what might or might not be going on in the world today! HA!

In the times in which St. Paul lived, there was tremendous movement of peoples, ideas, commerce, and even religious doctrines and practices. We can speak of a type of globalization, a phenomenon that existed in different forms throughout much of human history. Perhaps what is different in more recent forms of globalization are connected to the constant, rapid and seemingly endless pace of changes that have invaded every aspect of human life and every corner of the planet. As in the time of St. Paul, so too in our times, we are challenged to redefine the way we perceive ourselves, how we relate to one another and to the physical environment that surrounds us and is also an integral part of us. Pope Francis has most recently pointed to the impact of globalization on human community and the natural environment, two arenas that can no longer be treated in isolation one from another but that must be considered from within an integrated and integrating ecology of life.

What emerges most clearly from St. Paul's theological reflection is the conviction that in Christ Jesus, life finds a new meaning; human relationships are redefined; no longer can we speak of an 'us' and a 'them', of 'insiders' and 'outsiders', of 'enemies' and of 'friends'. In and through the cross, all things are brought into relationship, all things 'fit', and all things matter. Jesus' offer of his life for all, which includes not only the human but also the natural environment, has, in St. Paul's mind, completely rewritten the course of human history and the history of the cosmos. This is not the message of the leaders – and even many Christians and Catholics – today. While Jesus seeks to build bridges and bring people of different national, ethnic, religious and other differences together, "drawing all things into one through the blood of his cross," others – politicians, even religious leaders and disciples of Jesus – seek to promote ideology of exclusion, fear, the inciting of violence against anyone who does not share an identical worldview or religious heritage. Their solution is to build walls in place of bridges, promoting the great lie that difference is dangerous, to be feared, which means that those who are different must not 'be allowed in'.

Tonight we celebrate communion with and in the Spirit of God who, through the unification of the two former Provinces of St. Joseph and Christ the King, is calling us to open our lives to holy newness. God is calling all Franciscans, all Catholics, all

Christians, and indeed all human beings to pursue the way of the Kingdom, which is grounded in what St. Francis called 'the commandments' – love of God and love of neighbor. Even St. Francis would undergo a conversion – ecological and integral, to borrow words from Pope Francis' encyclical "Laudato Si", His conversion would lead him away from a life defined by privilege and exclusion and sustained through collective paranoia and armed violence, and towards a universal sense of fraternity that embraced all peoples, beginning with a kiss, the kiss of the lepers, and extending outwards to "brother Sun, sister Moon," and to the entire created universe. Perhaps this should be understood as the consequence of what it means to enter into discipleship, friendship, with the Lord Jesus. As St. Paul reminds us: "You who used to be far away, have been brought near by the sacrificial death of Christ" (Eph. 2:13).

May this great event of the creation of the new Province of the Holy Spirit/Saint Esprit provoke within each of us, within our different institutions, within our families, within Canadian society, within the Church, and within the Order a desire to engage in the renewal of our true identity as beloved children of a loving God, brothers and sisters to one another and to the entire created universe. May the authentic values of God's kingdom be reflected in our lives, in the way we treat others, transforming us into instruments of grace, peace, forgiveness, and blessing to all we meet. Let our prayer be: "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace..."

Special blessings to all of the Franciscan brothers of the new Province! May God bring to completion the work that has begun.

[Read on ofm.org.](http://ofm.org)