



Franciscan Vocations

November 2006

Franciscan Pilgrimage Retreats

Why are the Franciscan Friars of Saint John the Baptist Province going on a Pilgrimage Retreat? Why is the entire Franciscan Order focusing on the theme of "Pilgrimage?" Where are they going? Put simply, the Franciscans are heading toward the 800th Anniversary of the approval of their way of life by Pope Innocent III in 1209.

Shortly after Saint Francis began his "life of penance," men from Assisi began to follow him. Soon there was a small band of brothers, and Francis realized that they had come to stay. A new "religion," as he called it, was taking form.

The life of penance that they espoused was not unique in the thirteenth century. However, many of the penitential groups had gotten into trouble with Church authorities, so Francis decided to go to Rome to seek official approval of the new way of life for himself and his followers. The approval was given in 1209.



Saint John the Baptist Province chose to commemorate our provincial founding as a theme for the first year of our "pilgrimage" celebration. Many of the friars took part in the "Pilgrimage Retreat" as they boarded a bus and traveled to significant sights in our provincial history. For the better part of four days we traveled to Cincinnati, Ohio to remember the brave and courageous Franciscans from Germany who came to this country to minister to the German speaking immigrants. From there we moved to Pitts-

burgh, Pennsylvania to remember and celebrate the Slavic Friars who came from the "old country" to serve the Slovakian immigrants.

Heading west, we pilgrims arrived in Detroit, Michigan at what was formerly Duns Scotus College where most of us studied philosophy at the undergraduate level. The pilgrimage ended in Dayton, Ohio at the former Saint Leonard College, the previous House of Theology, which is now a very successful Retirement Community.



The first pilgrimage was in June when a picnic lunch was enjoyable. The third was in October when eating at a rest stop was a bit chilly.

Our observance in 2007 will be an All Province Assembly. In 2008 we will hold a Chapter of Elections during which a new administration will be elected and new policies and procedures will be enacted.

The provincial celebrations, as well as those of the entire Order, will culminate in 2009 for observances of the approval of our way of life.



The Pilgrimage closed with a Eucharist

The Postulants learn more about themselves

In October the Poor Clares joined the Postulants for an Enneagram workshop. In November the Postulants of Sacred Heart Province joined them for a Personality Profiling Workshop which featured, among other things, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator.

These are just two of the events that are designed to assist the Postulants in their personal growth as both individuals and as members of the community. A major focus of the first year of formation is human growth and development. Or, to state it in question form: Who am I?

Later in the novitiate the emphasis switches to the gift of self that has developed in both Christian and Franciscan aspects to the person of Jesus. During Temporary Vows the question becomes how to live out that self-gift ministerially.

Of course, the three questions can be the focus of our Franciscan life long after we finish initial formation, as we develop ourselves and give ourselves more fully to Christ and the People of God.

Enclosed you will find an Advent prayer/ meditation guide. May



the Advent and Christmas Seasons bring you much peace and joy.

Some Aspects of Franciscan Theology/Spirituality

Most of us grow up learning about theology and spirituality without knowing what “school” it comes from. There are various distinct schools or approaches to the beliefs of our Catholic faith. These approaches developed out of the Religious Orders and various centers of learning throughout the world. The distinct “Franciscan” way of looking at our life with God (spirituality) and at our faith (theology) is a case in point.

Where did Franciscan theology and spirituality come from? Certainly, its roots are firmly planted in Saints Francis and Clare. But many other Franciscan men and women contributed over the centuries. Perhaps the best know are Saint Bonaventure and Blessed John Duns Scotus. Today, with the help of computers and other technologies, we have access to a wealth of resources to glean the highlights of the Franciscan tradition.

Saint Francis was very well versed in the Scriptures. Annotated copies of his writings point out the abundant use of God’s word in the thoughts and writings of Francis. Thus, Franciscan theology is firmly rooted in God’s revealed word in both the written text (Scripture) and in the Word of God made flesh (Jesus).

For example, Jesus tells us that God is Father of all; not just creator, but “Abba,” an affectionate term for one’s parent. As Francis meditated on one of his favorite questions: Lord who am I and who are you?, he came to realize that he was a creature, one of our loving God’s creations. But so is Jesus. God the Son became a human, a creature, to share fleshly life with the rest of us. Remaining truly God, the Word became flesh, as Saint John tells us in his Prologue. God took on flesh and was seen and heard in human form (see Phil. 2:6-11)

Eventually, Francis began to see not only humans as his brothers and sisters, but all of creation. All have the same Father; all have the same Brother, Jesus. Thus, toward the end of his life he could compose the beautiful *Canticle of the Creatures* in praise of God.

Saint John also tells us that the Son, the Word, came to his own when he took on human flesh. He did not come as an alien from outside somewhere; he came into the world that had been created for him. The world is his created home and for all eternity he intended to come to share earthly life with us. Thus, in the Franciscan spiritual tradition, God did not become flesh primarily because of our sin (Scotus argued that to say that would be to say that we have power over God—we *caused* him to take on human flesh which is unthinkable), but purely out of love for us. Both creation and salvation are works of pure love.

Because of this understanding of the facts of our faith, Saint Francis could say that the crucified Jesus is the most perfect expression of God’s love for us. It was on the cross that God the Father expressed most clearly and perfectly his love for humankind because there he most perfectly expressed his absolute *humility* and *poverty* through his Son; his Word made flesh.

The other event that, for Francis, clearly expressed our God’s humility and poverty was his becoming flesh; what we celebrate at Christmas. In both events—the cross and the crib—we experience our God selflessly handing himself over to us in love.

Saint Clare tells us to gaze on the crucified Jesus and see the model in whose image we are created. In other words, look there to see how we are to love one another—in humility and poverty pouring our self out for others.

It is out of this theology/spirituality that we Franciscans find the source of our joy as well as our love for creation, peace, and social justice. We *have* to love all of creation and care for it, if it truly is the created home of God’s Eternal Son. We *have* to strive for peace among all peoples if all are fellow brothers and sisters of Jesus and thus of us as well. We *have* to work for justice for as Saint Paul says, if one member of the body suffers, all suffer.

The enclosed statement from our 2005 Chapter captures these thoughts. Hopefully this explanation of a bit of Franciscan theology/spirituality makes the Franciscan way of life more understandable. This is the Way of Life that we are preparing to celebrate in 2009—the 800th Anniversary of the Papal approval of Saint Francis’ vision of living the Gospel Life in simplicity and poverty after the example of our God who came (comes) to us in humility and poverty.

Come and See weekends

Ten young men have come to Saint Anthony Friary in Cincinnati, Ohio so far this academic year to experience first hand the way of life and ministries of the Friars of Saint John the Baptist Province.

Gathering on a Friday evening to join the Friars in prayer and the evening meal, these men look at the Postulancy Program both by listening to an explanation of the program from the Director and Postulants, and living with the friar community for the weekend. They also take a look at some of the ministries the friars perform in the Cincinnati area. There is also ample time to have their questions answered.

If you would like to participate in a weekend, contact the Vocation Office at: 1-800-827-1082 or by email at: sjbvocations@franciscan.org.

See also our website at:
www.franciscan.org