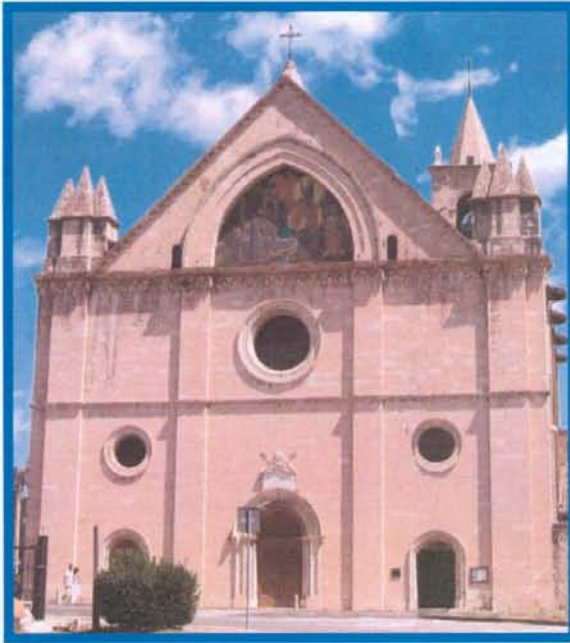


# The Spirit of Secular Franciscan Life

Newsletter for Secular Franciscans - Assumption BVM Province

April 2008 - No. 14

## Spirituality and the Places of Our Lives Rivo Torto The gift of Fraternity



The Sanctuary of Rivo Torto.

When I meet Secular Franciscans there is a frequent reference to fraternity as an essential hallmark of their vocation. We know, however, that the glue that holds any fraternity together is gospel love. A real challenge.

In the book *Franciscan Family Connections*, a manual for training Spiritual Assistants, the authors write: "Love is a transformative power that can reshape our world and our lives. Our main concern is not with individual rights and liberty. Rather, we seek creative expressions of love to bring people to a communion of mind and heart ... exemplified by St. Francis's relationship with all of creation. ... Like the Trinity, we recognize our differences from one another. It is unrealistic to think we are all the same simply because we seek a community of love. In our relationship with God and one another, we strive to create a community of people united in love. Each of us is blessed with individual skills and gifts from God. We use our skills and gifts to build a 'kingdom' that embraces all people and ensures dignity and inclusion for all." (Pages 18-19)

I begin with these thoughts and want to relate them to a special place in Francis's gospel journey, **Rivo Torto**. It is a place that holds many memories of the earliest years of the Franciscan story. It is about two miles from the Porziuncola, St.

Mary of the Angels, and two miles from Assisi. This site, which were huts in an abandoned shed near a crooked stream, that is, a **rivo torto**, housed the first brothers. The stories that have come down to us remind us that these first days together were like the honeymoon period of the Franciscan Order. The love and care that the brothers knew left an indelible imprint on their memory.

The following story is a good example.

In their zeal to be perfect and purify themselves, in imitation of blessed Francis, the new community of brothers enthusiastically fasted with great severity. Once, however, a young friar awoke screaming in the middle of the night saying that he was dying of hunger. Our father Francis



Replica of a hovel at Rivo Torto

immediately woke all the other brothers and admonished: "Do not imitate me. You must find Christ in your own way. God created us as a brotherhood and he created us in his individual likeness. Each brother must allow his body its needs so that it has the strength to serve the spirit. While we are to avoid overindulgence, which injures both body and soul, we must also avoid excessive abstinence" The tender father then took some grapes which they had received the previous day, and in his knightly courtesy, he encouraged all the brothers to eat together so as not to embarrass the one who awoke with the complaint. Throughout the night they ate and laughed and told stories, as they were often given to do, adapting that hovel of **Rivo Torto** into a veritable banquet hall. (Arranged by Joseph Wood OFM Conv. and Robert Melnick OFM Conv.)

The glue that held the brothers together was respect and genuine love. But what does that mean? Whenever Christ spoke about love, he seemed to talk about responding to others in such a way that we would allow others into our lives and give them a right to make demands on us, because we choose to love. We could allow them to use us, because we choose to love.

When Jesus asked Peter: "Do you love me?" and Peter responded with a resounding "Yes!" the Lord in effect said to him, "I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go" (John 21:18). Peter's greatness would unfold in a lifetime of response to such a challenge.

If we choose to love, if we accept the demands of being a loving person, we immediately take on the responsibility of being for others, in service and in times of opposition, in trials and persecution, also in peace and joy. We accept this dynamic not in the way we would like, but as determined by the needs of others around us. Frequently this means putting more heart into what we are about in the ordinary tasks of daily life; it means reaching deeper into the source of our energy when it seems like it is too hard to allow the ministry or a child or another to keep making demands. It takes a self-possessed, mature person to respond thus. But these same people know freedom; they are free from self and free for others, free to live the challenge of the gospel and open to all that life can call forth. Such know joy!



So how do we receive those persons in our life who make demands on us. We who are the ministers of the brothers or sisters, we who are teachers in classrooms, or pastoral ministers, or mothers and fathers? How do we welcome those members of the human race who sometimes, like Peter experienced, lead us where we would prefer not to go, and ask us to do what we don't want to do? How do we receive those who use us?

Fraternity and the love that lies at its foundation, is first of all a quality of the heart and grows out of the conviction that we do not exist for ourselves but for the Kingdom of God. Genuine love results from our capacity to make the interests of others more important than our own.

Francis and the brothers knew a special kind of love at **Rivo Torto**. What bound them together was the conviction that they willingly and firmly professed the same Gospel values and vision of life. Each was committed to the Gospel of love, trying to outdo each other in showing it.

### NEEDED: UPDATED INFORMATION

In January 2008 I wrote to all local ministers asking for updated, accurate, information on each fraternity. More than half have responded but I'm waiting for 10 or 12 others to respond. I would appreciate it very much if you would do so. Thank you.

### Installation of Spiritual Assistant

In February of this year I attended the installation of a new Spiritual Assistant for St. Bernadine of Siena Fraternity in Wayne, Illinois. Fr. Sergius Wroblewski OFM, who founded the fraternity 50 years before, did the honors. In his message he spoke of the supreme quality of love that is at the heart of the gospel and Christianity. He quoted Pope Benedict who devoted his first encyclical to Love which reveals the image of God and our destiny, namely, to love as God loves, a self-giving mirrored in the life-giving union of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Francis had this kind of self-giving love and urged all the brothers and sisters to respond with the same. Such love is not within our power, but a gift of the Holy Spirit given in baptism. From the moment we receive that love, we commit ourselves to make love the mainspring of our lives. He encouraged the new SA, Br. Edward McKenzie OFM, to make such love the guiding principle of his ministry

## SFO FRANCISCAN PILGRIMAGE

November 8-17, 2008

Brothers and sisters, I again encourage you to consider this Pilgrimage to Rome, Greccio, La Verna and Assisi. Register as soon as possible. Use the application below.

We need registrations.

### APPLICATION

Detach and send with \$200.00 deposit to:

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