

The Spirit of Secular Franciscan Life

Newsletter for Secular Franciscans - Assumption BVM Province

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CHRISTMAS

The Incarnation

and Intimacy



Intimate Encounters with God in Silence



Moments of quiet: a cave at Carceri.



Mountain Hermitage: Poggio Bustone.



God in the ruggedness of LaVerna.

Cave at Greccio where Francis renewed Bethlehem.

The most intimate moment ever to occur in the history of humanity has been the **INCARNATION** when God joined divinity and humanity as one. It was, and is, the most visible, extravagant, and concrete expression of love. Thus Christmas, for Francis of Assisi, was the Feast of Feasts, because no other moment ever expressed so wonderfully God's great love.

Intimacy is perhaps the deepest need in each of our lives. It is the sharing of one's heart, one's deepest self. When one experiences intimacy it affects every aspect of life in a way that nothing else can: work, family, one's image of God and one's self image. Likewise, intimacy releases all kinds of energy for good, for creativity, fidelity, for artistic expression, for the giving of oneself to commitments and to the gospel. Intimacy requires what we can call psychological nakedness, namely the undressing of one's heart with another. Undressing one's body can be easy. Undressing one's heart, however, is quite something else. It takes a lifetime.

God undressed God's heart with us throughout all of history. God pursued this journey because the essence of God is love, and God has, for all eternity, yearned for passionate intimacy with us. The most profound moment of this truth was and is the Incarnation when Jesus "undressed" the face of God once and for all. Christians call this moment: Christmas Day.

For Francis and Franciscans, Christmas happens every day, wherever and whenever expressions of love are in evidence, wherever moments of intimacy are possible:

- Opening one's heart to God in quiet prayer.
- Inviting the poor and outcast into a moment of respect and response to their needs.
- Feeling the expansiveness in one's spirit in the wonder and beauty of creation.
- Celebrating Eucharist where God is born each day on the altar and in our hearts.

One of the most important areas of life where intimacy has to be experienced is in marriage and the family. The SFO Rule, no. 17, states: *By living the grace of matrimony, husbands and wives in particular should bear witness in the world to the love of Christ for his Church. They should joyfully accompany their children on their human and spiritual journey...*

Encounters with God among the People!



Piazza Comune: Intimate Moments.



God is discovered as we open our hearts.

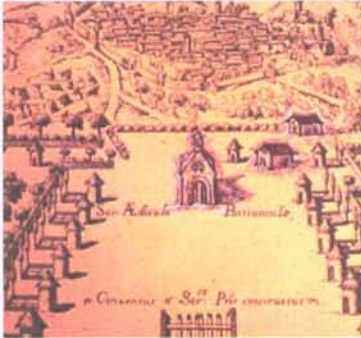


God is present in each of us.

Intimacy among the Brothers



The joy of a common vision.



Living together: the Porziuncola

Intimacy with God In Nature



Meeting God in a sunset



Mountains and fields: Rieti Valley

The General Constitutions, no. 24, offer further encouragement: *Secular Franciscans should consider their own family to be the first place in which to live their Christian commitment and Franciscan vocation. ... Married couples find in the Rule of the SFO an effective aid in their own journey of Christian life, aware that, in the sacrament of matrimony, their love shares in the love that Christ has for his Church. The way spouses love each other and affirm the value of fidelity is a profound witness for their own family, the Church, and the world.*

These sentiments are captured well in the opening paragraphs of the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order. Drawing upon Francis's own words the text reads:

Oh, how happy and blessed are these men and women ... who do the work of the heavenly Father (cf. Mt 5:45). ... They are the spouses, brothers, and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Mt 12:50).

We are spouses, when by the Holy Spirit the faithful soul is united with our Lord Jesus Christ, we are brothers to him when we fulfill "the will of the Father who is in heaven" (cf. Mt 12:50). We are mothers, when we carry him in our heart and body (cf. 1 Cor 6:20) through divine love and a pure and sincere conscience; we give birth to him through a holy life which must give light to others by example (cf. Mt 5: 16).

This is the meaning of Christmas in action which finds its deepest experience in the pursuit of intimacy at every level of life.

CHRISTMAS, the Feast of Feasts, the testimony of God's love whose only desire is to draw each of us into profound and eternal intimacy with Him. Who is this God who draws me into profound intimacy? Who is the God that fills all my yearnings? Who is this God whose embrace I desire more than anything? Who is the God that draws me onward? Who is the God who has undressed God's spirit, God's life, God's love and has given me the courage and desire to want the same? No words can answer these questions. Only Christmas and the mystery of God's Incarnate love!

NOTE: The pictures surrounding these words are scenes where intimacy can be found, with God, brothers and sisters, family, and our life with others in the everyday world.

A Blessed Christmas to All!

Published by
Fr. Roch Niemier OFM
 9230 W. Highland Park Ave.
 Franklin, WI 53132
 414-349-6851
 roch@ofm-abvm.org.

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The Face of God: the Poor and Outcast



Beggar at St. John Lateran.



Francis and a leper: Rivo Torto

Intimacy with God through Study



Pilgrims listen to a lecture: San Damiano