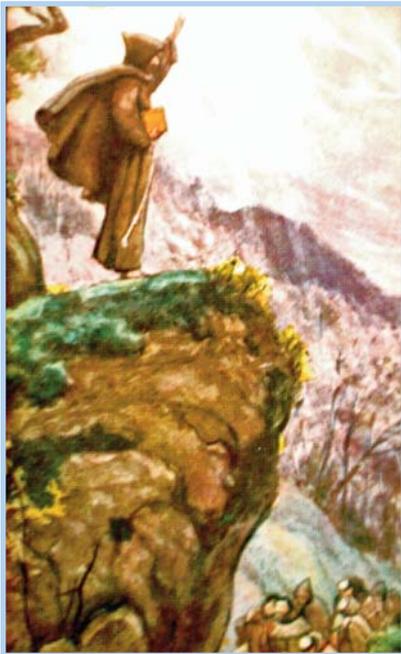


The Spirit of Secular Franciscan Life

Newsletter for Secular Franciscans - Assumption BVM Province

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Mountain Spirituality



Francis upholding the Rule from the mountain of Fonte Colombo, Italy

[The Lord came to Elijah] 'Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.' Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. (I Kings 19: 11-13)

SFO RULE, 8

As Jesus was the true worshipper of the Father, so let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do.

Note: This edition of the SFO Newsletter is being sent by e-mail to all who have given me an e-mail address. All others will receive the newsletter by surface mail.

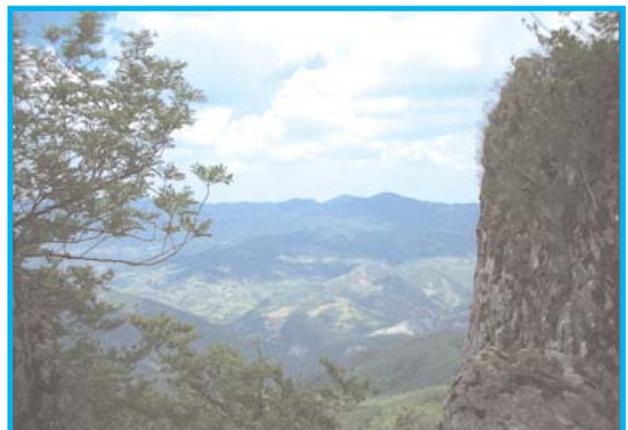
Poggio Bustone is the most northern and highest sanctuary in the Rieti Valley. It is perhaps the most impressive of all the Franciscan places in this region, set as it is in a high, rugged and remote area. The surrounding mountains cast a mystical spell over anyone who ascends its heights, whether it be by bus, car or on foot. Its setting for prayer is unmistakable. Francis, it is said, found a small deserted hermitage on his first visit, probably in 1209 after his meeting with Innocent III.

Poggio Bustone, as other mountain vistas in Francis's life, lends itself to a consideration of what one might call "mountain spirituality." Moses first met God on a mountain in his experience of the burning bush. He descended with a commission from God to liberate the people from slavery in Egypt. After this Passover from Egypt was completed, Moses went up and came down from Mt. Sinai with the law for the regulation of the people's religious, civil and social life.

Elijah was overwhelmed by God on Mount Horeb. We know the story well.

The stories of Moses and Elijah give us examples of the extraordinary spirit and dynamism associated with mountains, as if somehow on a mountain one could encounter the presence of God more readily. There is a mysticism that seems to beckon every courageous soul.

Mountains are particularly important in Matthew's Gospel. Jesus preaches a sermon on one (5-7) and is transfigured on one (17). Jesus goes to a mountain alone to pray (14), and prayer on a mountain is the onset of his suffering (21). Jesus' last words to his followers are delivered from a mountain as he commissions his disciples for their work in continuation of his own (28).



Top of Mt. La Verna overlooking the Tuscan Valley.

In their mission, the followers of Jesus are the embodiment of Jesus' mountain revelation. Matthew's picture of Jesus is that of a new Moses, bringing freedom and new life.

In a similar fashion mountains are important in Francis's life. Francis experienced God on a mountain at Poggio Bustone. Francis was inspired to finalize his Rule from a mountain at Fonte Colombo, another sanctuary in the Rieti Valley. Francis was also inspired to reenact Bethlehem on a mountain at Greccio. Francis met Christ crucified on a mountain at La Verna. Francis experienced God in prayer on numerous other mountains: the Carceri, Speco di Narni, Belegra, Celle di Cortona, to name a few.



Faggio di San Francesco: site of shelter during a terrible storm

“Mountain spirituality,” calls forth deep contemplative prayer. Heart centered prayer is not so much our praying or speaking to God as it is becoming aware that it is God who is pursuing us and praying in us, drawing us upward. It is God who comes in search of us and who loves us passionately.

Over and over Francis called God “Most High,” as if stretching physically for his Lord. He allowed God to pray in him, change him, empower him, overwhelm him; and he knew nothing could ever

separate him from the love of God given to us through His Son.

Whoever has the stamina to climb a mountain should do so. It offers a more complete spiritual experience of

Thomas of Celano describes one such event:

One day he was marveling at the Lord's mercy in the kindness shown to him. He wished that the Lord would show him the course of life for him and his brothers, and he went to a place of prayer, as he so often did. ... He began to lose himself; and that darkness disappeared which fear of sin had gathered in his heart. Certainty of the forgiveness of all his sins poured in, and the assurance of being revived in grace was given to him. Then he was caught up above himself and totally engulfed in light, and, with his inmost soul opened wide, he clearly saw the future. As that sweetness and light withdrew, **renewed in spirit**, he now seemed to be **changed into another man**.

Notice the expressions: he **began to lose himself** ... he was **totally engulfed in light** ... his **inmost soul opened wide** ... he now seemed to be **changed into another man**. It seems that he cannot help but be drawn into the embrace of an omnipotent, yet tender, God.

Anyone who has an opportunity to “climb a mountain,” or even a small hill, can enter into mountain spirituality. The experience makes us aware of our burdens and perhaps all the baggage we carry throughout life. We begin to sort out what is necessary and what we can let go of. The reduced baggage allows God to draw us into mystery and contemplation, as God did for Moses, Elijah, Jesus and Francis.

SFO RULE 11

Trusting in the Father, Christ chose for himself and his mother a poor and humble life, even though he valued created things attentively and lovingly. Let the Secular Franciscans seek a proper spirit of detachment from temporal goods by simplifying their own material needs. Let them be mindful that according to the gospel they are stewards of the goods received for the benefit of God's children.

mountain spirituality. We can touch into the feelings of awe, grandeur and power. We can allow the mountain to overtake us, draw us up, and overwhelm us so that, like Elijah, we are led to silence. Our spirit can then begin to absorb the presence of God. Nothing else will matter.

*Have a
safe and
blessed
Summer!*

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