

# The Spirit of Secular Franciscan Life

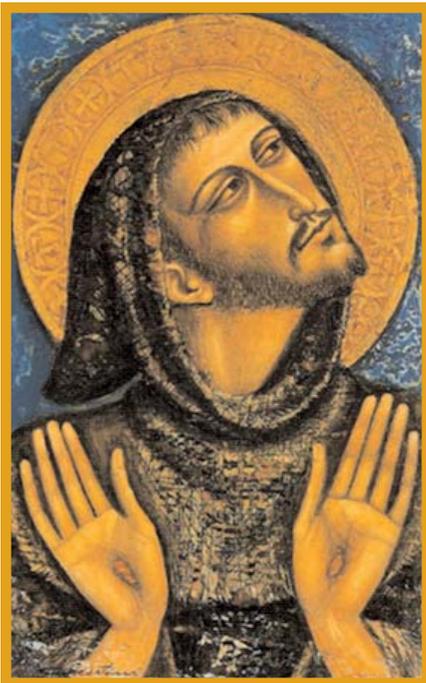
Newsletter for Secular Franciscans - Assumption BVM Province

October 2009 - No. 23

## ST. FRANCIS... A New Kind of Fool

October 4, Feast of St. Francis

*These reflections are from a homily given at the Tomb of St. Francis.*



St. Francis of Assisi. Artist: Piero Casentini

The first time I knelt in the Crypt Chapel in the Basilica of St. Francis, I looked up at the Tomb of St. Francis and said: "Francis, speak!" It was a plea that his spirit, encased in a stone sarcophagus, would break through, enter my spirit and transform my heart. In time I would learn that I was asking the impossible because only Jesus can transform my heart and renew my life.

An Indian friar by the name of Christopher Coelho has written a book of reflections and music entitled *A New Kind of Fool*. He uses the title in reference to Francis who enjoyed being a fool for God. Francis accepted Christ and the Gospel as completely as anyone ever could. For his time he truly was a "New Kind of Fool" for Christ. The question one might ask is: What would such a fool look like, especially in our time. Scripture readings for celebrating the feast of Francis, something quite apropos when praying at his tomb, lead us towards some answers.

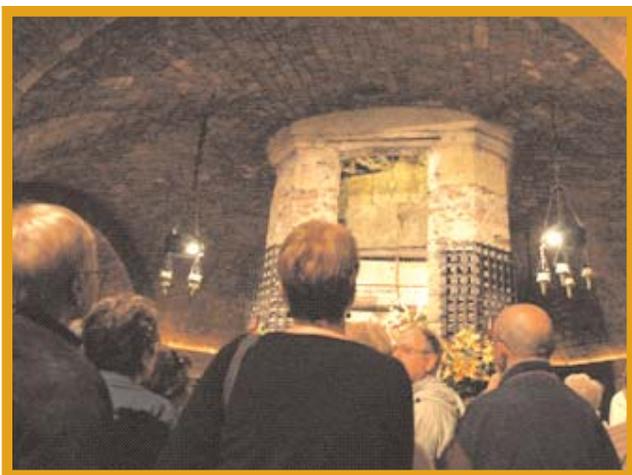
The first reading, from Sirach 50:1-4, describes one who renovated the house of God in his time. He "fortified the temple," "laid strong foundations," "considered how to save the people from ruin," appearing "like the morning star among the clouds," "like the sun shining on the temple of the Most High," and "like a rainbow gleaming in splendid clouds"

This fits Francis because in his time he renovated the House of God through his simplicity, humility and openness. Through him the Gospels were made new and visible. Living stones, alive with faith, were raised up. People were personally confronted with the realities of Gospel life in the person of Francis. They were in the living presence of peace, forgiveness and compassion.

Such a person in today's language would be a refounding person, calling all to conversion by his or her life. A refounding person inspires a renewed vision of Gospel life. Some might say: "Franciscan life is useless, the Church is out of touch, Christianity has no place in today's secular world. It's foolish to stay with it." A fool today, however, takes up the Gospel, takes it seriously, and invites others to the same. The foolish one rebuilds, refounds, calls others back to the Gospel. The words from Sirach apply: "Behold him who in his life repaired the house ... and fortified the temple."

### SFO Rule 14

**Secular Franciscans, together with all people of good will, are called to build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively.**



Pilgrims praying at the Tomb of St. Francis, Assisi.

A second text for the Feast of St. Francis is from Galatians 6:14-18. Paul says: "May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ... I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body."

A "fool for Christ," then, would be one who takes up the Cross of Christ, finds purpose and meaning in the Cross. This implies obedient and full surrender to others. It is a love that gives them a right to make demands on us, to use us. Taking up the Cross implies a willingness to suffer by being non-violent. It implies an extravagant, generous, self-giving of one's life that doesn't count the cost. It is an extravagant opening of one's arms to embrace all, a self-giving that is patient, that seeks justice and one that resists the cycle of lashing back by imitating Christ. Foolish?

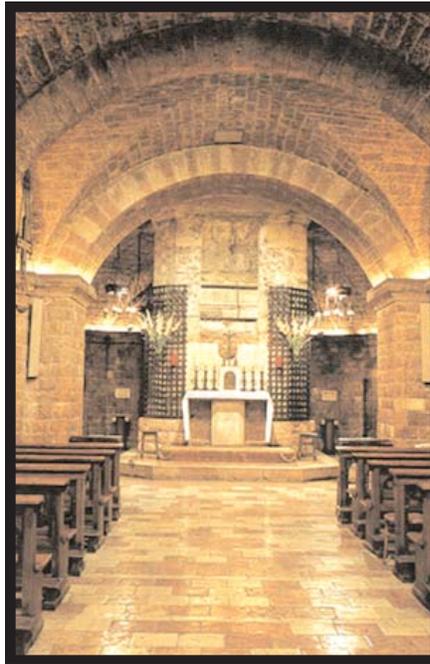
When we read the Passion of Christ, how did He respond? He opened his arms to a cross and on the cross. Jesus had no macho image to maintain, no political cause to defend, no high position to guard, no pride to protect. It was not his concern to be proved right, only to be true, to maintain his integrity, to love to the end and show the world the only way to diffuse the violence in our nature.

## SFO GC 10

**"Christ, poor and crucified", victor over death and risen, the greatest manifestation of the love of God for humanity, is the "book" in which the brothers and sisters, in imitation of Francis, learn the purpose and the way of living, loving, and suffering...**

greatest folly in human eyes was the Cross. Remember Paul's words: "May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." Such is the boast of a "Fool for Christ."

The Gospel for the Feast is from Matthew 11:25-30. Here we discover that a "Fool for Christ" is willing to convert to childlikeness in order to receive the revelation of God. Jesus



Crypt Chapel: Basilica of St. Francis

said: "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will."

Some say the genius of Francis was that as an adult he converted to childlikeness and took on all the simplicity and openness that this required. It meant being willing to receive, to let go and let oneself be ministered to, to leave roles behind and like a child welcome new discoveries. This is probably the most difficult kind of foolishness to submit to for in our adult sophistication we would say such thinking is demeaning. Yet in a unique way a child has the eyes and spirit to "see" and "receive" the revelation of God.

There is so much said about Francis of Assisi that one can easily focus too much on him. It is important to realize that the center of our attention is never on Francis but always on Jesus Christ and the Gospel. Francis is like a finger pointing us to Christ. On entering the crypt chapel, directly in front of us is the altar, which points us to Christ and all the mysteries of His life. The Tomb of Francis would not be immediately noticed nor is it the first object that captures our attention. Yet nestled above the altar between two immense stone piers lie the remains of the man we so admire, whose spirit attracts us, whose spirit leaps out from the stones encasing him and shows a way to live the Gospel as a fool for Christ in our time.



The Passing of St. Francis

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