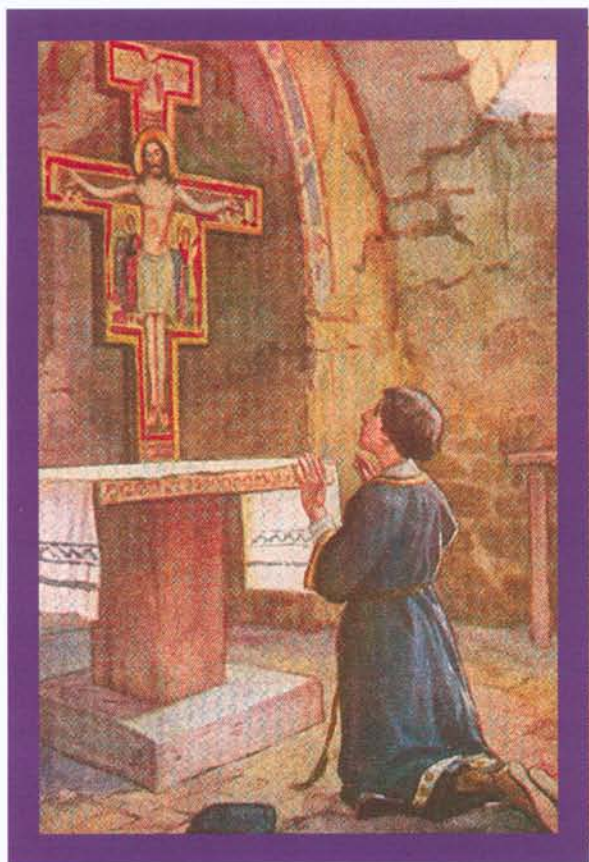


The Spirit of Secular Franciscan Life

Newsletter for Secular Franciscans - Assumption BVM Province

February 2007 - No. 8



Francis at prayer before the San Damiano Crucifix

Spirituality Comes Alive at the Places of Our Lives

Places, we believe, have a power that evoke meaning, direction and spirit. As we examine them thoughtfully we touch the heart of those whose presence ever remains. That is why it is often important for a husband and wife to visit the places where the childhood of the other has been spent. Each learns something of the other. Or, to visit the grave site of a loved one. New insights happen; spiritual energy is released.

There is the story of one of our friars who was born in Poland at the beginning of the Second World War. Shortly after birth he was separated from his parents, eventually found himself in an orphanage in Spain, then was adopted by a Polish family out of Buffalo, New York, and in time joined our Provincial community.

At the age of 37, through the help of the Red Cross and some Polish sisters, he learned of his birthplace,

that he had a living sister, and the location of the grave of his mother and father. Instinctively he asks to go to Poland to visit these places and whoever might be there; he feels he will learn something about himself and his identity.

Often the house where an author, an artist or other famous person was born is preserved and sometimes turned into a museum. Their trace can be found in these places that were familiar to them just as surely as it can be found in their works.

With this background I want to ask you to think about places that are important in your life, especially in relation to your spiritual journey as a secular Franciscan. Is there a particular place that has meaning for you and that can release spiritual energy every time you enter it?

Over the next several Newsletters I want to choose a place from the life of St. Francis or St. Clare and connect it with a place that has meaning for you in Franciscan life. In this Newsletter I've chosen San Damiano and Francis' experience before the crucifix as the event that brought special meaning to his life and to this place.

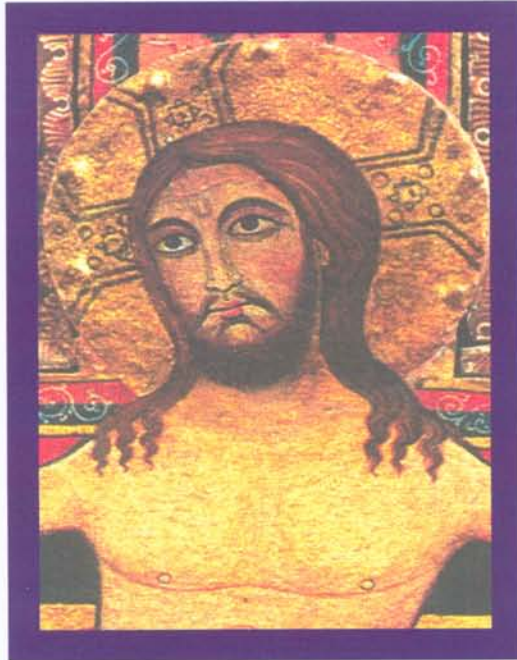
What you might do is create a space in your daily life that would help you touch into Francis' experience. This special place could be anywhere: your office, the kitchen table, a corner of your bedroom or living room, a quiet prayer space in your home, even the interior of your car. Enshrine an image of the San Damiano Crucifix; light a candle and listen to Christ speak to you.

Read first this brief passage from Thomas of Celano.

Francis was walking one day by the church of San Damiano, which was abandoned by everyone and almost in ruins. Led by the Spirit, he went in to pray and knelt down devoutly before the Crucifix... With the lips of the painting, the image of Christ spoke to him. "Francis", it said, calling him by name, "go rebuild my house; as you see, it is all being destroyed".

As you read this passage it is important that you allow yourself to listen deeply to Christ calling out your name as He called out Francis' name: "Mary, Bill, Bob, Susan, Carol, Joe, Carrie, Liz, John ... I need you ... go rebuild my house ... today!" This helps us reflect on the experience which marked the beginning of Francis' conversion.

With Francis, then, place yourself at Jesus' feet, look on Him with your eyes, contemplate Him with your heart, adhere to Him by your will, give in to Him in your dreams, imitate Him through your life. Like Clare and Francis, and countless Secular Franciscans throughout the centuries, hear the call to follow Christ as today He speaks to us through this image.



The image of Christ that spoke to Francis from the San Damiano Crucifix

It might be helpful to pray the words Francis prayed before this crucifix.

Most High, glorious God, enlighten the darkness of my heart and give me true faith, certain hope and perfect charity, sense and knowledge, Lord, that I may carry out your holy and true command. Amen.

Allow the gaze of the Crucified to question your heart:

What are my "darknesses"?

Who is at the center of my desires?

Do I live "a true faith, a certain hope and a perfect charity?"

What kind of obedience do I give to the "holy and true command"?

Make a commitment to translate and incarnate this prayer into everyday life, going from gospel to life and life to the gospel.

You can make your own the question that Francis frequently put before the Lord:

"Lord, what do You want me to do?"

As you connect the place of San Damiano with that special place in your every day life, you can rightfully ask: "Lord, what do you want me to do?"

If you do not have an image of the San Damiano Crucifix I would be happy to purchase one for you in Assisi. I am going there on March 8 to lead a pilgrimage and will return by March 24. The cross would be 10" to 12" in height, smaller or larger if desired, and cost would be \$10.00. I need your request and payment before March 8. Upon returning I would ship it to you and you would have the crucifix by Easter. Contact:

Fr. Roch Niemier OFM

9230 W. Highland Park Ave.

Franklin, WI 53132

414-349-6851 - roch@ofm-abvm.org



Sanctuary of San Damiano, Assisi, Italy

A Blessed and Grace-filled Lent to All!

Fr. Roch