



K O I N Ō N I A

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LIVING THE FRANCISCAN CHARISM IN TODAY'S WORLD

40 years after the *Seraphicus Patriarcha*

“GO WITH THE GOSPEL IN THE HEART AND IN THE HANDS”¹:

Franciscan Youth in the World

Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM

INTRODUCTION

By looking at what is happening in today's world it is easy to understand that people need courageous believers who seriously take up their identity as followers of Christ who lives and is present in the life of everyone. Even the emergence of so many Christian movements is a confirmation that many are thirsty for the Word of God. And it is true that people alone and without the help of God are unable to quench this thirst. But people must cooperate effectively and this happens through the contemplation of the Word of God in the Gospel.

THE GOSPEL HEART AND HELP OF OUR FAITH

The Franciscan family continues to grow in many parts of the world thanks to the experience of the evangelical life whose testimony is rendered daily by both the friars of the First Order and the TOR, and more generally by the entire Franciscan family. Of course, while we rejoice over this growth, we also need to ask what the Franciscan family would be without the Gospel. The Gospel is a rule of life. It is the heart and the help of Christians. The Gospel is the living Word that nourishes us and guides us in this earthly pilgrimage. Thus “*The secular Franciscan, committed to following the example and the teachings of Christ, must personally and assiduously study the Gospel and Sacred Scripture*” (Cfr. CC.GG. OFS Art.9,2). The secular Franciscan must also be available to allow “the Word come to dwell among us” (Jn 1: 1-18). So all believers are called to be the bearers of the Gospel, that is, bearers of the good news-which is Christ Himself. This implies the cooperation of all because

¹ (Cfr. Pope Francis to the youth, Pastoral visit to Assisi, 04/10/2014)

*“While helping the world and receiving many benefits from it, the Church has a single intention: that God's kingdom may come, and that the salvation of the whole human race may come to pass...For God's Word, by whom all things were made, was Himself made flesh so that as perfect man He might save all men ...”*²

A Christian who does not place the Gospel at the center of his life is a Christian without direction, and also, a lifeless Christian. The fact that we are baptized implies that we should be bearers of the Gospel. In fact, Christ himself sent his disciples to the world saying *“Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you”* (Mt 28:19-20). Thus every baptized to be a witness to the Gospel must die to himself and let Christ live in him, for *“They have been made living members of the Church by being buried and raised with Christ in baptism; they have been united more intimately with the Church by profession. Therefore, they should go forth as witnesses and instruments of her mission among all people, proclaiming Christ by their life and words”*.³

Sacred Scripture as a guide means to be in communion with God and to bear witness to one's faith. The secret of a united family lies in the fact that its members come together to pray together. And if this is true for the nuclear/parental family (father, mother, and children) it is equally true for the spiritual family (Franciscan). Prayer can really change life because it directs our attention away from ourselves by directing our minds and hearts toward the Lord. If we stop only to look at ourselves, with our limits and our sins, we immediately leave room for sadness and discouragement. But if we keep our eyes fixed on the Lord, then our hearts will be filled with hope, our minds will be washed in the light of truth. We then experience the fullness of the Gospel: it is for all, promise and life, as Pope John Paul II reminded us. All good works are the result of both individual and family prayer. This is the challenge that the Franciscan family face today, to let us be led by the spirit of prayer and devotion which are the guarantee of our Franciscan identity.

Franciscan Youth must always understand that they do not belong to a pious association, but rather to an Order in the Church, the Secular Franciscan Order, and their task, simple and at the same time profound, is to *“make the wisdom of the Gospels and its values come to life, and become a source of transformation for themselves”*⁴ and, consequently, for the world in which they live. This is possible when they are able to bring the Word of God into their hearts.

THE EFFECT OF THE GOSPEL IN THE LIFE OF FRANCIS

It was exactly in 1208, while Francis listened to the reading of the Gospel, which he began to understand that God was calling him to His service and from that moment on, he made a radical change in his lifestyle. He began to follow God by finding the courage to renounce the kind of life he was leading to welcome God in his heart. After this initiation, Francis, to *“get to know the will of God for him, had to go through many pathways and trials to be able to discover the life according to the Gospel as his way and life program and during this period he experienced several and subsequent «conversions»”*⁵. Francis chose to respond with ayes to the call to take a new direction in his life and

² Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium et Spes*, n° 45.

³ Rule OFS, 6.

⁴ The Nature of the secular Franciscan Order, Adapted by Bob Fitzsimmons, SFO, p. 3

⁵ creta.altervista.org/joomla/images/stories/francesco/Acausadellaguerra.pdf

this was the result of a deep listening to the voice of God, both before the cross of San Damian and in the reading of the Gospel.

Like Francis, the young men of today have to open their hearts to hear the voice of God who often speaks to them in a subtle and tender voice both in everyday life and in the Gospel. So it is not enough to go to Holy Mass just because on Sunday everyone goes to church. Young people must cultivate willingness to understand the Sacred Scripture in order to rediscover the way to the truth-Christ. However, we must keep in mind that today many young people have become bitter because of the lack of work. Others often feel abandoned: their life is hopeless and without purpose and this often leads them to think that nobody listens to them or understands them. But God, the true Father, waits for them with open arms.

So we can say that the situation of young people today resembles the situation that the first disciples of Jesus lived after he announced his departure from world. But Jesus, seeing them distressed and bitter, reassured them and invited them not to lose their minds and to trust in him, for he would not abandon them (cf. Jn 14). This episode is one of the reasons why we talk about the effectiveness of the Gospel. The Word of God refreshes the soul, *“the very life of Francis had developed in immediate contact with the Scripture which he wanted to interpret and live literally”*⁶. In the Scripture he had found the way - Jesus himself - to follow; the way of love for lepers. It is from listening to Scripture that Francis succeeded in understanding that the *“Son of God, who is “love”, came to this earth for love, lived for love, radiating love, giving love, bringing the law of love, and he died for love”*⁷. So Francis could follow this way of love when he succeeded in drawing closer to the lepers, thus opening up new perspectives and a different approach to a society that marginalized and abandoned the lepers. As he approached them, Francis heard the voice of Jesus saying, *“I was hungry and you gave me to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger and you invited me in, I was naked and you dressed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to visit me”* (Mt 25: 35-36). Even today the world expects to see and find in us Franciscans these effects of the Gospel that for us is the form of life. In this crisis of vocations, both to the consecrated life and to the marital life, people expect the Franciscan family in general to go to the world, as Pope Francis says, with the Gospel in the heart and in the hands. This can only come from the *“courage and audacity to return to the essential of our experience of faith and our spirituality to nourish, through the liberating gift of the Gospel, our divided world, unequal and hungry for meaning”*⁸.

THE FRANCISCAN YOUTH IN A MATERIALISTIC WORLD

If we compare the time in which the young Francis of Assisi lived before his conversion and the time in which the young Franciscans of today live, we can find many similarities, both with regard to the concept of materialism and the interpretation of the consumerism that derives from it. However, in both cases, that of Francis' day and today, God continues to be revealed as the Father who always meets those who seek him with sincere heart. Francis was totally immersed in that world, but then he let himself be enlightened and led by Jesus, humble and poor. Francis denuded himself in front of everyone and started a new chapter in his life, abandoning the richness of this world for the kingdom of God. He entrusted himself to the providence of God, not to the things of this world, and slowly began to understand well that there is a great difference between the richness of this world and the richness of having God in oneself. *“If then you were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above,*

⁶Cfr. *Testamentum*, nr. 4 (BOHMER, *Analekten*, pag. 37)

⁷ <http://www.ilcristiano.it/articolo.asp?id=107>

⁸Cfr. *The Lord give you peace*, Final Document of the General Chapter OFM, Rome 1995, 2.

where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth”(Col 3:1-2).

Many young Franciscans today are open to imitating Francis and this is seen in their enthusiasm to find time for God. In their encounters it is perceived that the same Holy Spirit who prompted the young Francis to listen to God and follow His command to repair His house that was going to ruin still blows in today's world. Listening to the testimony of the members of YouFra in their various meetings, local, national and international, it is often seen that they are not totally lost in the materialistic world. They have a great need for a spiritual guide to better understand the importance of prayer, the value of the assiduous commitment to contemplate the Word of God in everyday life in order to free themselves from the slavery of materialism and to begin to rediscover the joy that the Gospel gives them. The OFS and the CAS must never forget that young people can regain the joy of contemplating the Gospel only with spiritual accompaniment and that they will thus enhance the meaning of the discovery of Christ in everyday life and understand the phrase “If we liberate the Gospel, the Gospel will liberate us”⁹. All this is possible only when we are available to listen to and meditate upon the Word of God. No doubt, Franciscan young people, although surrounded by consumerism, are able to find the courage to live their loyalty to the Gospel and to the Franciscan charism. Faithfulness demands a choice of life. Faithfulness is sustained by the courage and hope that Christ always comes to us to save us. Franciscan young people will always have the intelligence to understand that *“The Scripture is not only the product of a past history, but it is also, at the same time, a declaration or prediction of the future, which in part has already taken place and, in part, is still yet to come”*¹⁰. To go with the Gospel in the heart and in the hands is exactly this: *“motivated by the faith in Christ and live that faith in today's world and this is the faith that moves the mountains of materialism”*¹¹.

CONCLUSIONS

In this brief reflection on the meaning of what Pope Francis proposes to the young people of today, namely, “to go with the gospel in the heart and in the hands”, we have tried to point out some points that can help us to understand better what Jesus reminds us when he says, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (Lk 21: 33). The Gospel, that is, the Word of God, must be welcomed in the heart, the heart that needs God. God gave us his son Jesus Christ, the living and effective Word for our salvation. The salvation that comes from him is free. However, our openness to receive it is fundamental because we can be transformed into what we believe, and thus become bearers of the Gospel to others.

⁹Cfr. With lucidity and audacity: in times of refoundation; report of the Minister general Fr. José R. Carballo, OFM, Extraordinary General Chapter, Verna-Assisi 2006, p.11

¹⁰Cfr. For this proposal the historical themes of Hex, XV-XVI, reproduced in Cap. I, par. 5

¹¹Cfr. With lucidity and audacity: in times of refoundation, Fr. José R. Carballo, OFM, p.17

NEWS - CHAPTERS – VISITS - MEETINGS

Guatemala – National elective Chapter

The national elective Chapter of OFS in Guatemala was held from 11 to 13 August in the Parish hall of Concepción las minas. There were 60 capitulars representing 20 Regions. The chapter was presided by Morenade Deleon, delegate of Tibor Kauser, OFS general Minister, who was assisted by Fr. Marvin Alex. Melgares M., OFMCap. delegated by the Conference of Spiritual Assistants (CAS). Mariano Rodríguez Revolorio was elected as national minister and international counselor. Two assistants were also present: Fr Ramón OFM, and Fr Marvin Alex Melgares M., OFMCap.

Thailand – National elective Chapter

The national elective Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) in Thailand took place from September 29 to October 1, 2017 at the “Portiuncola House of Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Holy Mother of God” (SFIC) in Ubonratchathani. There were 17 capitulars present for the Chapter. Fr. Francis Xavier Sutarja, OFM, delegate of the CAS, presided over the Thanksgiving Mass and Sr. Lita SFIC, the spiritual assistant of three local fraternities was also present. Augustine Yoon, Councilor of the Presidency of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS) presided over the Chapter. The new national council was elected on September 30 in the afternoon. Lucia Supanee Khamwan was elected national Minister, Teresa Aphiradee Samerphithak as Vice-Minister and Mary Magdalena de Pazzi Sujittra Phongvivat as International Counselor. The chapter was celebrated in a very fraternal spirit.

Hrodna, Belarus – III National elective Chapter

The 3rd national elective Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) in Belarus took place at the Diocesan Seminary of Hrodna, Belarus, from October 13-15, 2017, and was presided by Anna Sowińska OFS, delegated by Tibor Kauser, Minister general of OFS, accompanied by Fr. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR, general spiritual Assistant. The theme of the Chapter was “Be holy, for I am holy” (Lv 11: 45). The opening Mass was presided over by Archbishop Aleksander Kaszkiewicz, Ordinary of Hrodna, President of the Bishops' Conference in Belarus, in the Church of Santa Maria degli Angeli, served by the OFMConv. During the elective session 31 capitulars from 39 secular Franciscans convened were present, along with two national Spiritual Assistants (Fr. Antoni Porzecki, OFMConv and Fr. Jaroslaw Kryłowicz, OFMCap) and 5 Local Assistants. At the request of the outgoing national Council, Anna Sowińska made two presentations: “The Meaning of Honorat Kozminski’s Heritage for the Spirituality of OFS” and “The fidelity to vocation and love for people in the person of St. Maximilian Kolbe”. For his part, Fr. Amando was asked to present the topic “*Fidelity to the vocation to OFS in the modern world*”. On Saturday the Eucharist was celebrated at the Seminary Chapel with seminarians and their formators, presided by Fr. Aleh Shenda, OFMCap, Custos of Belarus, while the homily was entrusted to Fr. Amando. On the same day, Maria Etol was elected for a third and last mandate as national Minister. Anna Sowińska and Fr. Amando met with the newly elected Minister and national Council to present them several recommendations. On Sunday Fr. Antoni presided over the closing Eucharist at the Church of Santa Maria degli Angeli, during which the new Minister and the Council were installed by Anna Sowińska. The Chapter was continued with discussion and voting on the priorities for the next three years, and ended with a heartfelt thanks and a fraternal meal.

Tahiti – National elective Chapter

The elective Chapter of the special Fraternity of Tahiti was celebrated on October 28, 2017 at the convent of the Sisters of St. Clare in Punaauia, Papeete. The chapter was presided over by Chantal Healy, OFS (New Zealand), delegate of Tibor Kauser, Minister general of OFS. She was assisted by Fr André Chicoine, OFM Cap. (Canada), delegate of the CAS. The two fraternities of Tahiti, that of Papeete and the emerging fraternity at Raiatea which is 229 km from Papeete, are currently assisted by Sr. Hélène Roy, a nun of the Poor Clares. 27 capitulars were present. The following were elected to animate and guide the Fraternity of Tahiti: Terorotua Lélia (Minister); Dauphin Moea (Vice-Minister); Teaniniuraitemoana Laysa (Secretary); Mateau Hulada (treasurer); Chand Mireille (Formator). The brothers and sisters of Tahiti have greatly appreciated the presence of Chantal Healy and Fr André Chicoine in the Chapter.

Rome, Italy - CIOFS Presidency Meeting

The second CIOFS Presidency meeting of the year 2017 took place at the International College of Seraphicum, Rome, of the Friars Minor Conventual from October 28th to November 3rd. All members of the Presidency were present. The various commissions, such as those of Formation, Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, Family, Communication and YouFra presented the results of their work and future prospects. The YouFra session on the WYD in Panama was attended by Fr. Jaroslaw Wysoczanski, the general secretary for missionary animation of the Conventuals. The councilors of each area presented the work done in the last six years and in particular on the national chapters. The Presidency has positively evaluated the various initiatives of the Africa Project. Fr. Amando TOR, president of turn of the CAS, presented the activities of the members of CAS. Time was also dedicated to discussing the celebration of the Jubilee Year of the Rule, which will start on June 24, 2018 and will end on June 24, 2019. Major share of the time of the meeting was dedicated to the planning of the General Chapter that will begin immediately after the meeting of Presidency. Various committees of the Presidency have been able to meet during these days. Everyone lived days of fraternity, collaboration and Franciscan joy.

Rome, Italy – XV Ordinary General Chapter of OFS

The XV Ordinary General Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order took place at the College of Seraphicum, in Rome, from 4 to 12 November 2017, with the participation of 124 people - including capitulars, observers, guests, speakers and support groups - from 75 countries. As a true international fraternity the capitulars celebrated the gift of the secular Franciscan vocation to “*rebuild*” the Church (*Const. 100.1*) and to build a more just and fraternal world (*Const. 20.2*). The opening Eucharistic celebration was presided over by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State, while the other celebrations were presided over by three general Ministers - Fr. Michael Perry, OFM; Fr. Marco Tasca, OFM Conv, and Fr. Mauro Jöhri, OFM Cap - and by the General Assistants. The proclamation of the Word of God, prayer and song meant that everyone felt truly members of one body, the body of Christ!

The work of the Chapter began with listening and discussing the various reports: the Minister general and Presidency of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS), general Treasurer and the Conference of general spiritual Assistants (CAS). The central theme of the Chapter was: “As You sent me into the world, I also sent them into the world” (Jn 17, 18) and was presented by

Michel Versteegh OFS (Netherlands), who shared his experience of faith lived in the family, in the parish, in his work as a cardiac surgeon and in the fraternity of OFS. His presentation highlighted the fact that his work and his professional preparation (cfr. *CC.GG* 20.2) are directly linked to his identity and mission as a secular Franciscan. One of the most anticipated moments was the presentation, analysis and discussion of the *Instrumentum Laboris*, entitled “How should be managed an Order like OFS at all its levels?” Work in groups and the subsequent discussions in plenary sessions have been decisive aspects for the results of the Chapter, together with the work of the Commission of the Concluding Document. The capitulars at various times have been invited to develop a sense of belonging and to act co-responsible to support the life and mission of the OSF fraternities at all levels. Regarding the reality and the perspectives of the Franciscan Youth (YouFra), the importance of the appointment of the fraternal animator of OFS and the promotion of the double belonging to OFS and YouFra was emphasized.

During the Chapter, the Minister general announced the opening of the Jubilee Year (24.06.2018-24.06.2019) which will commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Rule OFS that Pope Paul VI approved on June 24, 1978, with the Apostolic Letter *Seraphicus Patriarcha*. In the middle of the program, the capitulars went to Monte Subiaco to visit the abbeys of St. Scolastica and St. Benedict, a place where St. Francis had lived for some months, and at the end they celebrated the Eucharist. Two round tables presented both practical examples of the experience of the Rule of OFS in the world and topics related to the future management of the Order. The capitulars were then edified by the presentation of the biography of two members of OFS who are beatified by the Church: Lucien Botvasoa and Frans Jägerstätter, and by the explanation of the process of the postulation of the saints. The capitulars also celebrated fraternal evenings in which they joyfully shared their cultural diversity and exchanged gifts from their nations. In the last session, the capitulars approved various resolutions resulting from the work of the Chapter and the budget for the next three years. After the final liturgy, the capitulars took part in the last fraternal evening for the thanksgiving and the convoy.

Siracusa, Sicily – Tempo forte (CAS)

The annual meeting of verification and planning of the general Assistants of OFS-YouFra - was held at the College of Santa Maria of Syracuse of the friars of TOR, from 13 to 18 November, 2017. Arriving from Rome to Cataniaby flight, we took a taxi to Syracuse. From Tuesday 14 to Friday 17, have been days of intense work; but also were of fraternity and sharing according to the agenda that we have adopted and approved at the beginning of the work. For lack of internet connection, we have always exchanged texts with pen drives. We have been adapted very well. We made an assessment of our work during the year 2017 and the just concluded general Chapter. We also discussed and decided several things regarding the work of the Conference of General Assistants (CAS): our liturgical tasks during the forthcoming meetings of the CIOFS Presidency; the themes of the Koinonia bulletin for the year 2018; our collaboration in the projects and commissions of the Presidency; the way to make our pastoral visits more effective etc. In addition, we planned our commitments for the next year. Tempo forte in Sicily was an opportunity for many of us to get to know the Sicilian reality. So, in our free time, we visited some symbolic places such as the Basilica of Santa Lucia and the Greek theater. On Friday 17, the memory of St. Elizabeth, patron saint of OFS, we celebrated Mass in the Shrine of Madonna delle lacrime. All four Assistants are very grateful for the fraternal and generous welcome received from the fraternity of TOR during this time of work. As the work finished, we returned to Rome on Saturday 18.

Greece – National elective Chapter

The Chapter of the Fraternity of Greece was celebrated on 10 December 2017 at the Convent of the Friars Minor Capuchin at Iera Moni Aghiou Frankiskou, Athens. There were 13 members including 6 capitulars and the others were aspirants. Fr. Iosif Dalesios OFM^{Cap.}, the spiritual Assistant of the fraternity was present during the Chapter. It must be said that he is a friar who has been in a wheelchair for almost 25 years, after a fall in the void of an elevator. The Chapter began with the celebration of Holy Mass with the parishioners, presided by Fr. Giulio, the guardian of the convent and concelebrated by Fr. Alfred Parambakathu OFM^{Conv.}, General Assistant OFS-YouFra and Fr. Iosif Dalesios, OFM^{Cap.}. The Chapter was presided over by Attilio Galimberti, the CIOFS Presidency Councilor for the Area. At the beginning of the Chapter the outgoing minister, Marthi Voutinou, presented a report on the last three years. After brief messages by Attilio and Fr. Alfred, the capitulars proceeded to the election. Maria Varthaliti was elected Minister (first term) and Nona Villanueva was elected Vice-Minister.

The fraternity of Athens is composed of seculars who come from the Philippines and from Albania, other than the Greeks. In this sense it is an international community. The Chapter was held in a climate of Franciscan fraternity and familiarity.

Rome – Christmas wishes

The Exchange of Christmas wishes was done at the seat of the CIOFS Secretariat on Thursday December 14th in Franciscan simplicity and Joy. This time, 11 persons in all were present for this fraternal event that is has become tradition: 3 General Spiritual Assistants, (Except Fr. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR, out of Rome); the OFS Minister general, Tibor Kauser; the General Secretary, Isabella di Paola; the General Treasurer, Lucio Monti and his wife, Giovanna; Benedetto Lino, OFS, ex-General Councilor; the Assistants to the General Secretary, Isabella and Laura and Madam Antonella. The official part began at 12:45p.m. with Midday Prayers lead by Fr. Francis Dor, OFM^{Cap.}, during which Fr. Alfred Parambakathu, OFM^{Conv.} gave a very brief reflection on the Word of God and Christmas. Then followed some Christmas carols, prepared and lead by Br. Pedro Zitha, OFM. Then came the lunch, prepared as usual by Lucio with much attention, this time he was assisted in the kitchen by Madam Antonella. The General Secretary, Isabella, offered Christmas gifts to all in the name of the General Minister. Everybody parted with fraternal embraces and wishes of a happy Christmas. All ended at about 3:30 p.m.