

# Conference of National Spiritual Assistants

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## **CELEBRATING 40 YEARS THE RULE OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER (Part 5)**

### *Fraternity and Joy*

Totally committed, by a perpetual promise, to love God and to live in fraternity, the Secular Franciscan fulfills the two Commandments of God: “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind*”; and, “*Love your neighbor as yourself*.”<sup>1</sup> In this way, the Secular Franciscan is committed to the building of the kingdom of heaven on earth - a “civilization of love.”<sup>2</sup>

*The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order*<sup>3</sup> states:

“A sense of community [fraternity]<sup>4</sup> will make them **joyful**, and ready to place themselves on an equal basis with all people, especially with the lowly for whom they shall strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ.”

Towards this end, in the past, the Secular Franciscans, hand in hand with the friars,<sup>5</sup> and in their own right established works of charity.<sup>6</sup> This constant attitude of charity and joy found in the Letter of St Paul to the Philippians: “*Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may be innocent and pure, as God’s perfect children, who although you live in a world of corrupt and sinful people, you must shine among them like stars lighting up the sky.*”<sup>7</sup>

**Cheerfulness** is a Franciscan trait, along with the grace of courtesy and friendship. It is this joyfulness that qualifies our sense of Fraternity; it is this sense of joy which should shine forth for all the world to see. Joyfulness in the Lord is the crowning glory of the theological virtue of HOPE, that unbreakable bond of faith, which believes, that in the end, love shall conquer all.

St Francis is the only religious leader who tried to legislate joyfulness<sup>8</sup> in his followers. We find this in the Rule of 1221 of the friars:

Wherever the brothers may be, and in whatever place they meet, they should respect spiritually and attentively one another, and honor one another without complaining. Let them be careful not to appear outwardly as sad and gloomy

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 6:5; Luke 10:27; Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30. The Ten Commandments are reduced to two. The first three Commandments refer to our relationship with God and the rest refer to our relationship with our neighbours.

<sup>2</sup> Saint Pope Paul VI, *Regina Coeli* Address, May 17, 1970. “It is a civilization of love and peace which Pentacost has inaugurated – and we are all aware how much today the world still needs love and peace!”

<sup>3</sup> OFS Rule 13.

<sup>4</sup> The word “fraternity” has a franciscan sense of intimacy that does not seem to be there in the word “community.” This might be an interesting discussion point at a meeting and cause a lively debate.

<sup>5</sup> The famous Soup Kitchen in Detroit

<sup>6</sup> The famous Hospital of St. Paul in Florence.

<sup>7</sup> Phil 2:14-15 as found in the Psalter Vol III Week 3 Saturday, Morning Prayer.

<sup>8</sup> Regis Armstrong OFM Cap., *St Francis of Assisi, Writings for a Gospel Life*. Crossroad Publishing Company. New York, 1998. pp. 77 & 78.

hypocrites, but show themselves **joyful, cheerful** and consistently **gracious** in the Lord.<sup>9</sup>

On one occasion St Francis encountered a friar with a sad face.<sup>10</sup>

“Once St Francis saw a companion with a sad and depressed face and, not taking it kindly, said to him: “It is not right for a servant of God to show himself to others sad and upset, but rather always pleasant. Deal with your offenses in your room, and weep and moan before your God. But when you come back to your brothers, put away your sorrow and conform to the others.” A little later he added: “Those who envy the salvation of humankind bear a grudge against me, and when they cannot disturb me, they try to do it among my companions.” He so loved the brothers and was so filled with spiritual joy, that at one chapter he had these words written down as a general admonition: “Let them be careful not to appear outwardly as sad and gloomy hypocrites but show themselves joyful, cheerful, and consistently gracious in the Lord.”

The Secular Franciscan Rule<sup>11</sup> speaks of how Secular Franciscans should “*joyfully accompany their children on their human and spiritual journey.*” In the light of St Francis’ teaching about being joyful, enthusiastic and generous with time and energy. Our commitment to God and Fraternity should make us great parents. In fact, just as “fraternity and joyfulness” of spirit are fundamental elements in Franciscan spirituality for the friars, so too, for the Secular Franciscans “family and happiness” are fundamental elements in their Franciscan spirituality. Indeed, “family” and a sense of all Franciscans together being a family is the crowning glory of the Secular Franciscan Order.<sup>12</sup>

Let us be positive and make sure, first of all, that our fraternal meetings are occasions of sincere love and respect for each other. “*Let us not use harmful words in talking. Use only helpful words, the kind that build up and provide what is needed, so that what you say will do good, to those who hear you. Get rid of all bitterness, passion, and anger. No more shouting or insults. No more hateful feelings of any sort. Instead be kind and tender-hearted to one another, and forgive one another, as God has forgiven you in Christ.*”<sup>13</sup> Saint Francis goes so far as to say that the friars should be like mothers to each other<sup>14</sup> in their attitude. He was never afraid of using feminine language in trying to give expression to concepts and ideas that speak of loving care and concern for each person. Let us be careful and really think about what we can do to make our fraternity meetings joyful, alive and welcoming.<sup>15</sup>

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***PLEASE distribute this Monthly Spiritual Message to all MEMBERS of your FRATERNITY including Spiritual Assistants and isolated members.***

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<sup>9</sup> Rule of the friars 1221. RNB Ch VII. In Italian the word “rivedersi” is used to indicate “see each other again.” It should be a joyful encounter like seeing a brother again who has been away and who has returned. “E ovunque sono i frati e in qualunque luogo si incontreranno, debbano **rivedersi** volentieri e con gioia di spirito e onorarsi scambievolmente senza mormorazione.”

<sup>10</sup> See the Following: 2 Celano 128; Legend of Perugia 97b; Mirror of Perfection 96a.

<sup>11</sup> OFS Rule 17.

<sup>12</sup> Cf: Pope Benedict XV, was a member of the Third Order of St Francis. In his Encyclical 6/1/1921, *Sacra Propediem* No. 4. he noted: “The striking and immortal services rendered by Francis to the Christian cause, ... found, as it were, their coronation in the Third Order.”

<sup>13</sup> The Letter of St Paul to the Ephesians 4:29-32.

<sup>14</sup> Rule of the Friars 1223 Ch 6:7&8. “Wherever the brothers may be and meet one another, let them show that they are members of the same family. Let each one confidently make known his need to the other, for if a mother loves and cares for her son according to the flesh, how much more diligently must someone love and care for his brother according to the Spirit!”

<sup>15</sup> Bring flowers, your best smile, food, a cheerful heart, more food, a kind word, and a cake or apple pie for the friars. Does anyone read the footnotes?