

THE YOUNG FRANCISCAN

Autumn Newsletter 2020

Vol #10

Rebuild My Church

Have you ever asked God the question “what do you want me to do in life?” If it happened that God actually responded to you and said “I want you to be a builder”, how would you respond? Perhaps you might raise a puzzled eyebrow and think to yourself “Gee that was random!”

As random as it may sound this is exactly what he asked of St Francis. When Francis was only a young man in his early twenties, he found himself one day resting in the abandoned and run-down church of San Damiano, just outside the city of Assisi. During this period of his life Francis was in the process of deep soul-searching and trying to work out what it was that God was calling him to do. It was also at this time that Francis became disillusioned by the worldly society he was living in. Although Italy had been a strong Catholic county, the people had moved away from the gospel message Jesus had taught and were living a life of self-centred pleasure, self-seeking interests, power and wealth.

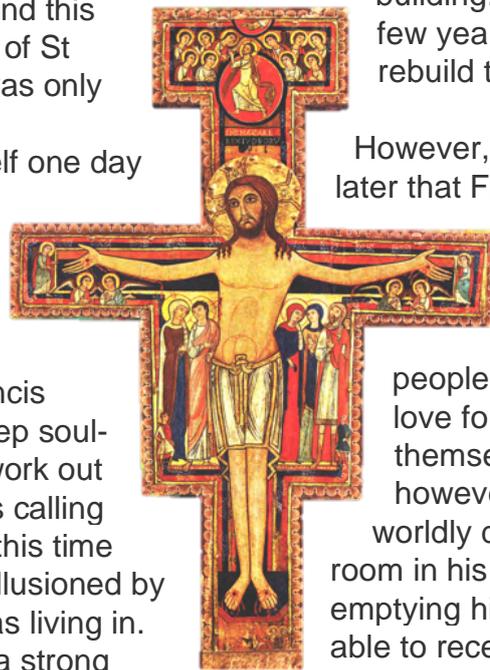
There in the poor church of San Damiano Francis heard the voice of

Jesus speaking to him from the crucifix saying, “Francis, go and rebuild my Church, which is falling into ruins.”

Francis was a very practical man, he didn’t need to go on retreat to discern what this message could mean. So instantly Francis got up, picked up the stones and started to repair the church building. Throughout the following few years St Francis went on to rebuild three other churches.

However, it wasn’t until some years later that Francis realised the deeper meaning to his call. God was calling him to repair the Church which is the people of God. Many people had filled themselves with a love for worldly goods and emptied themselves of God. Francis however, by emptying himself of all worldly desire, was able to make room in his life for God. Only by emptying himself of the ‘world’ was he able to receive all the riches of God.

St Francis’ new found way of life had such a profound effect on many, that within a matter of years Catholics throughout Europe had embraced Francis’ spirit of poverty and had come back to the gospel life. The Church was being repaired!



To Indulge Or Not to Indulge?

Imagine turning up to a big feast and excessively indulging on the first course. What will happen when you get to the main course? You will not be hungry anymore. The main meal which would have given you the most nourishment has now lost its appeal. You no longer have an appetite for it.

The same goes with our love for God. If we spend all our energy loving material wealth and only finding joy in items which come today and are gone tomorrow, then we lose our appetite for spiritual nourishment.

When St Francis gave up the 'world', God was able to fill him with a great spiritual joy. Francis realised that he had gained more in spirit than what the world could ever offer him. Francis' spiritual wealth was far greater than any material wealth. One could actually say that Francis was the wealthiest person on earth, not in material wealth, but in spirit, which far outweighs any worldly wealth.

Rebuilding the Church starts with me

Our world today does not seem too much different from that which St Francis lived in 800 years ago. Our generation seems to be quite concerned with the acquisition of material goods, wealth, excessive comfort and extravagant tastes. There is no doubt that the appetite for God has been lost in many people.

Most of us will not hear the voice of Jesus speaking to us so audibly as St Francis did, however it is true that God does speak to each one of us internally, it's just that quite often it is hard to hear his voice when we are living in a world full of noise and other enticing things that can distract us from God.

Each one of us has been called to contribute in rebuilding the Church – the people of God, however the rebuilding process must first begin in us. Each one of us is like a stone that builds up the church. We probably can't fix the entire 'building' on our own, but by fixing that one 'stone' we can bring ourselves closer to God and make a stronger church.

What are the things I can rebuild in myself? Do I need to declutter all those unnecessary things in my life that keep me filled so that I have little room for God? Are there unnecessary material things in my life that I love so much that they cloud my love for God and his love for me? Am I able to let go?

Letting Go

Naturally, there is nothing wrong with owning possessions and wanting to feel a sense of security. In fact, the possessions and wealth we have are given to us as a gift from God. St Francis recognised that all of creation has been given to us as a gift from God, and he certainly loved everything that was created by the hands of God. However, he never saw these things as his ultimate joy and security. Francis recognised that there was a gift far greater than anything the world could offer him, and the only way to accept this gift was to let go of everything else he was holding on to. When he was able to let go of the 'world' he was free to receive the greatest gift of all – God – his truest love, joy and security.

Quite often we are not able to receive all the spiritual gifts God has to offer us as we are frightened to let go of our love for material possessions which so often dominate our desires.

So the question for us is, are we able to recognise all the possessions we have as a gift from God, however not see them as our joy and desire? Are we able to live a spirit of detachment from our wealth and see God as our greatest desire?

Rebuilding the Church at ACYF

The opening address given by Archbishop Timothy Costelloe at the Australian Catholic Youth festival in December last year, spoke strongly about St Francis, who as a young man seemed to live mainly for parties and reckless adventure. However, when Francis found himself in the ruins of San Damiano and heard the voice of Jesus speak to him, he found in that church a reason to live and hope. Francis saw that the Church, the people of God, had lost its way and needed to rediscover the gospel message.

The Archbishop reminded the young people that our church today is also in a little bit of trouble. In our country today, the values of the Church seem to be challenged by a society that does not want to hold on to its Christian foundation. While the number of people identifying themselves as Catholics is decreasing, our material wealth is increasing, as well as an increase in violence, various levels of abuse and mental health issues.



These issues were no different in Francis' days. There seems to be a clear pattern – when we turn away from God and the Church our society begins to crumble.

The Archbishop spoke how God had asked Francis to 'rebuild' the Church, not to tear it down and build a new one. Francis did this by letting go of the things that don't matter so that he could concentrate on the things of God that really do matter. The example of St Francis is an inspiring way of life for each one of us to follow. We are all called like Francis to help rebuild the Church.



Secular Franciscan Order

ONE DAY YOUTH RETREAT – 2020



Enjoy a day of Franciscan spirituality
For young people 18-30

Inspiring talks • Activities • Mass & Adoration

**FREE
EVENT**

PERTH: JUNE 13

St Catherine's House of
Hospitality, Tuart Hill, Perth

SYDNEY: May 23

Shrine of the Holy Innocents,
Kellyville

BRISBANE: May 30

St Francis Church,
West End

**lunch
provided**

Click here to register through our website: bit.ly/ODYR2020

Email us at: national@ofsaustralia.org.au

Secular Franciscan Saints



St Zelig Martin 1831-77 St Louis Martin 1823-94

Sts Louis and Zelig Martin, most well known as the parents of St Theresa of Lisieux, each felt a call to consecrated life during their youth, however they found themselves wholeheartedly entering into the marriage vocation where they devoted themselves to God through family life. The Martins were naturally inclined to charity and invited the poor to dine in their family home. They generously donated to needy families, and defended the oppressed. They also taught their five daughters to treat the poor and underprivileged as equals. Each daughter in turn joined their parents in helping the sick. The deeply Christian life of the Martin parents saw them attend daily Mass at 5:30am, frequent confession, and participate in nocturnal Adoration. They recognised the sacredness of our Lord's day and closed their business on Sundays. Both Louis and Zelig were raised in strong religious households which shaped the way for the upbringing of their daughters who all became nuns. From the earliest of age Zelig taught her children each morning to offer their hearts to the Lord.

Bl Louise Albertoni 1474-1533

Louise was married to an illustrious man at a young age. Together they had three daughters whom they raised in a devout Christian household. Although their marriage was full of genuine love, she desired above all to please God. She lived a life of simplicity, dressing plainly, and avoiding pomp and luxury. After the death of her husband at the age of 33, Louise lived even more intensely for God, especially through the poor, by generously giving of her abundant wealth to provide food and support for those in need. Not wanting to draw attention to her generosity she would often hide coins inside the bread which she handed to the poor.

In order to better imitate Jesus, who, being rich, became poor, Louise remained unattached to her wealth and often lacked bare necessities herself. She had a great devotion for the suffering Jesus and was often found in tears from meditating on his agony. God had also graced Louise with the gift of miracles and frequent ecstasies.

Matthew Rossi d. 1271

Matthew Rossi was a knight of extraordinary piety and virtue. Once when St Francis was passing through Rome Matthew had begged the saint to come by his house to teach him how to save souls. St Francis spoke so impressively about the vanities of the world that Matthew fell at his feet and humbly begged to follow Francis in the Third Order. Throughout the years Matthew grew in holiness and contributed much to the spread of the Order. Many people soon after followed by his example and also became members of the Franciscan Third Order.

After some years Matthew brought his little son, John Cajetan, to St Francis for a blessing. Francis lovingly took the little boy in his arms, and to the father's astonishment declared, "This boy will one day be a religious, he will be a mighty ruler and protector of our Order." John Cajetan later became a priest, cardinal and protector of the Franciscan Order, and then in 1277 he was elected as Pope Nicholas III.



Like us on
Facebook

OFS Australia Website: www.ofsaustralia.org.au

Facebook: www.facebook.com/ofsaustralia

Email: national@ofsaustralia.org.au

