

Spiritual Message: September 2010

During September we celebrate the Feast of the Stigmata of our Holy Father Francis on the 17th, as well as the memorials of St. Joseph of Cupertino on the 18th and St. Padre Pio of Pietrelcina on the 23rd of the same month. The Stigmata was Our Lord's gift to St. Francis and Padre Pio as a visible sign that the poor Man of Assisi and Capuchin priest had entered into mystical union with Christ Crucified. Though for most of us such spiritual union with God may never be our reality, we are called to unite ourselves with Jesus Crucified in our daily struggles to live the gospel life as Franciscans. Our Risen Lord beckons us to let our wounds be healed and transformed by the healing and merciful wounds of His Passion.

We know that St. Francis and St. Clare were both immersed in the self-emptying of Christ, particularly in the mysteries of the Crib, Cross and the Altar. Indeed it was in these mysteries of faith that Our Seraphic Father Francis experienced the reality of his aspiration that has become the motto for all Franciscans: "My God and My All".

As Franciscans we are called to constantly gaze upon Christ as St. Clare mentions in her letter to St. Agnes of Prague - to gaze upon the Crucified so we may be kept focused upon why we have accepted the invitation of the Holy Spirit to follow the path of Christ as Franciscans. We can easily be distracted or seek complicated and elaborated reasons to proclaim our Franciscan identity, but if it is not centred on our poor, humble and obedient Saviour, who emptied himself out of love for us in the crib, on the cross and upon the Altar, then we are not living this charism given to us by the Poverello. The mysteries of the Incarnation, Passion and the Blessed Eucharist manifest to us the goodness and love of God. This goodness of God we seek to proclaim through the example of peace and minority in our daily lives. We can help others to come into communion with the living Christ, and know the true freedom and love of His redemptive power.

The experience of Francis which climaxed in reception of the stigmata, reminds us of a daily dying to ourselves and embracing the wounds of Christ through our trials and ups-and-downs, to embrace the Cross in our daily experiences. Let us gaze upon Christ as St. Clare tells us. May we go before Him in the Blessed Sacrament, so we can grow in love of Him and the Church our Mother, who nourishes us with the living stream of Christ's grace through the Sacraments. The Church is exemplified in Our Lady as recalled by the Second Vatican Council. The same Council calls us to unite ourselves with Her, the Virgin-made-Church, so as to be supported by Her maternal intercession. Our Lady particularly as the Mother of Sorrows calls us to unite ourselves with Her at the foot of the Cross. The Sorrowful Virgin at Calvary calls us to learn from Her surrender to God's will: to be united with Christ in prayer when all seems lost; to trust that all that happens to us is for our greater good since our Heavenly Father seeks only our good and salvation. He is the God who loves us.

St. Francis, who bore the wounds of Christ, beckons us to surrender to Jesus Crucified each day in union with Our Lady. Only God can give us healing, hope and liberation in

our daily experiences that often leave us wounded or weak through the effects of the sins of others or ourselves.

May Our Eucharistic and Crucified Saviour, the source of all goodness, draw us into closer union with Him as our God and our All. May we joyfully bring His goodness to others especially those lost in the darkness of despair and hate. As we recall the Stigmata of St. Francis, the witness of Padre Pio, and the holiness of St. Joseph of Cupertino who soared into the Heavens, may we daily discover with joy the same Divine Love in the self-emptying of our Saviour in the Crib, on the Cross and especially in the Holy Eucharist