



By Francisco de Zurbaran

The 800th Anniversary in 2009 – *What's it all about?*

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Each of the 30 Regions of our country are at some stage of preparation for celebrating the 800th Anniversary of the Founding of the Franciscan Movement in 2009. The International Conference of the Franciscan Family published a letter to the Franciscan Family entitled, *LIVING ACCORDING TO THE GOSPEL*. The leaders of our Franciscan Family make important observations. They say (in part):

- It is not a question of commemorating a figure, a Francis, Clare or any other person, but rather the calling to mind of the origins of the Franciscan Charism.
- The text presented by Francis to Pope Innocent III was a plan and a description of a life-style, rather than a regulation.
- Faced by a technological and computerized world, by its crisis of creeping wars, terrorism, poverty and globalization, the Christian faith is exposed to all the questions and challenges

about God, about His entering into history in the Person of Jesus, about the diversity of religions and their relationships, about the nature of the human being and about the meaning to be given to life and death. This situation of crisis is, at the same time, a great challenge to the Church to live the new evangelization and for the Franciscan Family to live its own identity, aware that its place and influence have become fragile and questioned.

- Our Franciscan Family has been weakened, particularly in the European world, because of its numerical reduction, of the uncertainty of our identity and through the temptation to turn-in on self and to become discouraged. The same Franciscan identity, however, is still a challenge to the world! It is our reference of self to the Gospel, of which the Rule is like a summary, which alone can help us to respond with trust, imagination and courage to the many and multiple challenges.
- The Franciscan spiritual current, like a river, broadening and being enriched in the course of centuries through a variety of contributions, never ceases to irrigate us and the Church itself.
- For all this and more, we communally join together in a joyful Act of Thanksgiving. It is also necessary to add the humble recognition of the distance between the Gospel proposal of Francis and the way it was lived during the course of our long and tumultuous history.
- Despite the ongoing efforts at beginning again and of reforms, our Franciscan Movement is not yet up to the demands of the Gospel. This dual moment, the act of thanksgiving for being called to live the Gospel and the purification of our memory, as recognition of the shadows present in our Family, should lead us all to face the challenge of re-foundation.
- We must find the roots, the foundations, i.e., discover in wonder the power of God, the Gospel, the Good News of the Love of God for us and of the communion with Him offered to us. Only on such a foundation can a solid structure be built, a true community in mission in the Church and in the world. This moment of grace, a *kairos*, which we are experiencing at the present, tests us by revealing weaknesses to us, but it also invites us to rely on the power of God.

***How will your region/local fraternity
Celebrate the Anniversary?***