

Franciscan Living

See, Hear, Become

by Francine Gikow, OFS

I love St. Francis' ability to find joy in everything! Francis used his senses to experience God's love. He looked at a bird and understood; he heard the bird's call and experienced the handiwork of God through the bird. What joy!

Being quite sensual, Francis had a unique way of seeing and hearing. Francis saw and heard God's beauty in creation—but to Francis, it was not *just* creation, rather it bore “*the imprint of the Most High...*” (Art. 18). Francis experienced LOVE incarnate in the everyday. For Francis, nothing was observed, heard, or experienced apart from God.

God was Francis' context. Every sound, every image, and every thought brought him into God's presence. Francis' profound relationship with God colored everything he viewed, heard, and experienced. Francis was able to remain in the presence of God throughout the day, night, and at all times.

So how can we live in the presence of God with everything that we see, hear, and experience? How can we bring this Presence into the commonplace? How do we “see deeply, hear deeply, and experience deeply” through the eyes of God?

As always, prayer is essential to retain God's presence in our lives—particularly praying with scriptures. As St. Clare instructs us, consider how Jesus gazed upon creation and other people. He saw past the outer trappings and peered into their eyes with His mercy, kindness, and love. Meditate on how Jesus listened intently to sinners, lepers, and even to the needs of the little children in scripture. Enter into each scene—when Jesus encountered the rich young man, (Matt 19:16-30) when he calls Mary Magdalene by name after the resurrection, (Jn 20:16), or looked into the eyes of Zacchaeus (Lk19: 1-10). See how Jesus loved them with his eyes and with his voice. See how he touched their hearts with compassion.

Then, as St. Clare continues her instruction: “contemplate Him!” Stay with God and rest in Him. Allow Him to heal you, to comfort you, and live in your soul.

Ask God to mold your heart and guide you as you interact with others so God's “Presence” can overtake you as you look, hear, and become a vessel of God for others. Allow God to empty yourself so that you become lesser and He becomes greater. As you finish your prayer time, pray that you may imitate what you have seen and heard so your heart might soften and be attuned to what you see and hear. Finally, at the end of each day, review your seeing, listening, and “being” in the Presence of the Holy One.

Being contemplative and mindful as we go through our day is bringing Christ into the world through our very lives. We *become* an instrument of God's love. This is what our Rule describes as “trusting in the Divine Seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon.” (Art. 19)

I have often heard Secular Franciscans describe our way of life as “it is who we are and be” —understanding that we do not have a unifying apostolate or “work.” Rather, we use ourselves and our lives to rebuild the church by bringing Christ into the world.

We bring Christ to the world if we *see, hear, and become* Christ bearers so others can experience God through us and give glory to God. As Secular Franciscans, we evangelize from the “bottom up,” meaning we evangelize not by preaching or apologetics but from our very “being,” which proclaims Christ personally to a hurting world.

Jan Novotka's song, “Presence,” sums up what our lives as Secular Franciscans should *become* by bringing Christ to others:

It's not what you do, but how you do it.

It's not what you see, but how you see.

It's not what you say, what you know or achieve

It's the Presence, the Presence you are!

“...that we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us...that our joy may be complete.” 1Jn: 3-4.