



CNSA

News & Views

Franciscan Life in the 21st Century
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A few ideas on Devotions

Devotions hold a special place in the Catholic Church. There are devotions that honor the Virgin Mary - rosaries, chaplets, novenas, shrines, and special prayers. Individual cultures have specific devotions to Mary and other saints. Some groups have devotions particular to their group. St. Francis and St. Clare are honored with numerous devotions. The BVM and various saints are patrons for specific groups who support ministries of daily life, e.g. patrons of doctors, lawyers, ecologists, married life, television, cancer patients, hopeless cases, clergy etc, etc.

The Church approves devotions for feasts of Jesus - from the incarnation to epiphany; from the passion to the resurrection and remembrances of events in Jesus' life. Liturgical time like advent and lent invite special prayerfulness that focus on the birth, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. Such devotions draw us to Jesus and his message of love.

Devotions may grow from dedication to a saint or the private revelations of an individual. Devotions enter our lives through family or parish practices as well as through personal experiences or other sources. Devotions should ultimately lead to a richer intimacy with Jesus and the Trinity as well as a sense of choices that serve to develop unity among all people.

Franciscans also reflect on the limitations of devotions. Sometimes personal devotions become more important than Jesus and his Gospel. The USA Bishops give this bit of guidance:

When it (devotions/private revelations) leads us away from him (Jesus), when it becomes independent of him or even presents itself as another and better plan of salvation, more important than the Gospel, then it certainly does not come from the Holy Spirit, who guides us more deeply into the Gospel and not away from it.

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Our Franciscan commitment to Jesus and the Gospel are vital! *Devotions among Franciscans* should draw us to an enriched *response to the Gospel!* Devotions draw us to imitate Jesus and his gospel life. Our devotional prayers call us to a deeper intimacy with Jesus and a beatitudinal way of life. E.g. Mercy Sunday devotion calls us to show mercy to all people - *not always easy*. But if no conversion occurs in our

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lives; if we are not more merciful; if the beatitudes are not lived more effectively - something is lacking in our devotion to the Mercy Sunday celebration.



Devotion to Mary, for example, calls us to imitate her attitude: *Let it be done to me according to your word.* (Luke 1:37). The OFS Rule points out the result of devotion to Mary: *The Secular Franciscans should express their ardent love for her by imitating her complete self-giving and by praying earnestly and confidently.* (OFS Rule #9)

Devotions support a process of conversion, moving to act in ways that accord with the spirit of the Gospel. *The Rule and life of the Secular Franciscans is this: to observe the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of Francis of Assisi, who made Christ the inspiration and center of his life with God and people. ... Secular Franciscans should devote themselves especially to careful reading of the Gospel, going from Gospel to life and life to Gospel.* (OFS Rule #4) ... *a sense of community will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on an equal basis with all people, especially the lowly for whom they shall strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ.*" (OFS Rule #13).

The contemplative gift, in which we embrace intimacy with the Trinity, moves us to show love in our care and concern for one another. If a devotion stands in isolation, without a deepened sense of love for God, neighbor and self, it is probably not coming from the Holy Spirit.

Just having a devotion is not enough for living the Franciscan spirit. Devotions ought to help us imitate the words and actions of Jesus. Reflect on their influence in your life. *Prayerfulness* (contemplation) and *social action* are partners in living as Franciscans.

If devotions do not enrich our lifestyle, attitudes, compassion, forgiveness, generosity, dialogue, or the ability to show greater love for God, self and neighbor - something is missing. To love a devotion but ignore the call of the Gospel, shows a lack of something in our Franciscan vocation. Our "call" is to listen to Jesus, the "beloved" of the Father. *This is my beloved son, in whom I take delight, listen to him.* (Matthew 17: 5).



Jesus sees his Father as the source of his ideas, life, words and actions. People concerned with social



issues can sometimes neglect prayerfulness. Organizing social programs can seem more important than a spirit of contemplation. But it is *prayerfulness* (contemplation) and *practice* (together) that model a wholesome Franciscan life.

Some seculars are unable to be involved in physical social action because of human limitations. It remains true that a Secular Franciscan needs to embrace *prayerfulness* (contemplation) and *practice* as partners. They work together to create a wholesome spiritual life for individuals and fraternities. It is the model of a Spirit-filled Franciscan life.

The following questions may help your reflection on ways to combine a prayerful spirit and action, not only in our individual lives but also in fraternity life.

1. What changes do you make in your personal life because you say a daily rosary or practice other daily devotion(s)? If you have a special devotion to a saint, how does it assist conversion - as required by the OFS Rule (Article #7)?
2. If I am comforted by adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, is that all there is to it? If not, what else is expected in my spiritual development?
3. Do your social actions find expression based on a Spirit-filled heart? If not, what is their driving force?
4. List some qualities that age (young, old, or in-between) brings to your inter-action in fraternity life? Do your personal actions, speech, and attitudes draw seculars together or diminish unity? What changes seem to be needed?
5. In your mind, is prayerfulness (contemplation) or activity more important? Why? How do your opinions affect your life or color your relationship with other people? (Be honest in your evaluation.) How do fraternity relationships support your Franciscan growth? Is there need for personal conversion? Why?
6. Do you impose ideas/opinions on others or openly share them (which includes "listening") with an open mind and heart? What difference does *dialogue* make in fraternity life?
7. If you think some issues are inappropriate to our Franciscan life, how do you reach such conclusions? Are you always right? What is the source of your infallibility? Does your *dialogue* with others help you to see the situation in a different light? Do you *listen* with an open or closed mind?
8. Do you find it possible to blend differing ideas or do you simply choose to ignore them? Why would you refuse to listen to others' ideas or opinions? If you are one of the "others" in a dialogue, how do you feel when your ideas are rejected out of hand?
9. If you are physically unable to participate in social action, how can you blend prayerfulness and action in your life? Talk it over with other Secular Franciscans



and see how you can help each other.

10. What action can a local fraternity council take to keep the members alert to the work of bringing ministry and contemplation (prayerfulness) together within fraternity life?

11. How do animosity, stubbornness, opinionated ideas, refusal to consider conversion or to dialogue, etc. diminish OFS unity? What (Who?) needs to change?

Franciscans owe it to the Church, to the call from the Holy Spirit, and to one another, to show people the spirit we Franciscans are called to follow. We are not "holier-than-thou" Catholics. We are "gospel-Catholics," enlightened by a Rule approved by the Church, with a history of living the spirit of Francis and Clare.

Ignorance of the OFS Rule, failure to follow the OFS Constitutions, being unwilling to assist one another in our Franciscan pursuit - is NOT something to boast about. Some people can be violent, selfish, more concerned about self than community. Some people seek domination rather than dialogue; they use violence rather than persuasion; they hoard earth's gifts instead of sharing them with others. Through OFS profession we consecrate ourselves to show fresh, loving, and positive ways of dealing with issues that bring people together in loving union. We are called to live a Franciscan life that brings hope, love and unity to a fearful, hate-filled, sometime faithless world. Evaluate your progress on this journey!

ON THE MOVE:

CNSA members on the move.

Fr. Matthias Wesnofske OFM Cap has recently moved to a new friary. Fr. Kevin Queally TOR moved to Florida a few years back. Fr. Steve Gross OFM Conv recently moved to a new address. Bro. Bob Brady OFM remains in Oakland, CA. As a CNSA emeritus, I also moved to a new friary! I find that moving is most demanding when unpacking and trying to figure out what material I put in which box!

Madison, WI was my home for the past decade. Our five-member Capuchin community at San Damiano, in accord with our provincial pastoral plan, moved to other places as of January 15, 2015. I moved from a city of 233,000 people to a town of several hundred people. The countryside has its own beauty. I am blessed with a good Capuchin community. My new territory is commonly called the "Holy Land" with many catholic parishes. The loving Trinity is filling my life with blessings and joy.



My new address is:

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