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## FORMATION COMMISSION

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### MAY THE LORD GIVE YOU PEACE

by Mary Anne Lenzi, OFS

We are so busy serving and doing what is expected of us that sometimes we run out of steam and grow weary. It is in this blessed state that we know we must return to the source of our strength and our peace—we *ascend into God* through prayer and Holy Scripture.

Are we brave enough to admit we have spent time in the desert—time when our faith has been tested? Even the great Franciscan St. Bonaventure experienced moments when the well ran dry and he longed for consolation.

In 1259, in a state of exhaustion, St. Bonaventure traveled to the mountain of La Verna to meditate on the vision and experience of St. Francis, and this is what he wrote:

*When therefore by the example of most blessed Father Francis I sought with a panting spirit this peace, I a sinner, who, unworthy in all things ascend to the place of the most blessed father himself ... after his transitus; it happened that with the divine permission ... I turned aside with the love of seeking peace of spirit towards Mount Alverna as towards a quiet place, and staying there, while I considered in mind some mental ascensions into God, among others there occurred that miracle, which in the aforesaid place happened to blessed Francis himself, that is, of the vision of the Seraph winged after the likeness of the Crucified. ... [Journey of the Mind into God – paragraph 2]*

To understand why St. Bonaventure chose La Verna for comfort and peace, we need to consider the experience of St. Francis on that holy mountain. From the beginning of his conversion, St. Francis had a deep devotion to Christ crucified. Two years before his death, he traveled to La Verna to fast and pray. While in a state of deep contemplation, he had a vision of a seraph with six

wings of fire descending toward him. After the vision receded, St. Francis was left not only with the marks of the Crucified Christ, but with a love so deep that this love inspired him to write the *Praises of God* that he gave to Br. Leo along with a personal blessing.

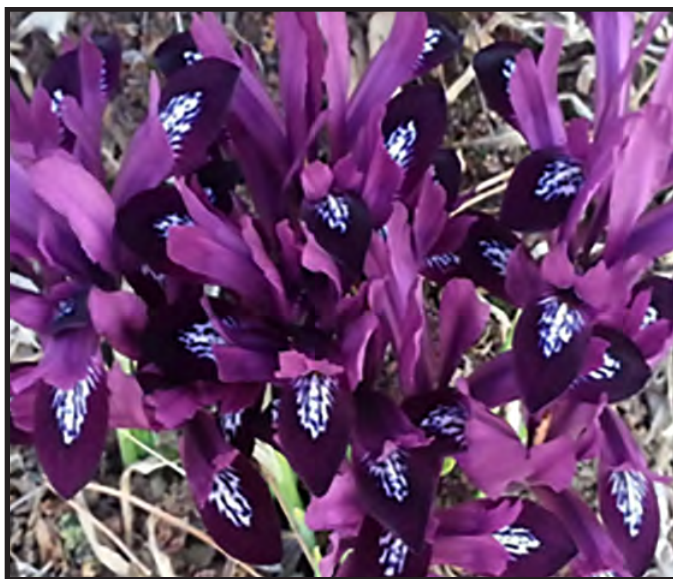


Andre Vauchez, a French medievalist, in his book *Francis of Assisi* writes: *In this short message, the Poor Man of Assisi, without making the least allusion to what he just lived through, limits himself to reproducing a passage from the Book of Numbers (Num. 6:24-26). But the choice of this text from the Old Testament is not without significance, since it evokes the manifestation of God to a person: "May the Lord bless you and*

*keep you! May he show his face to you and show mercy to you. May he turn his face toward you and give you peace!" Destined for Leo, this formula probably gives us an echo of the spiritual experience that Francis had just lived through and which had transformed him. (p. 130)*

Can anyone fully understand the experience of St. Francis and St. Bonaventure? I don't think so; however, we can have our own experiences of love, joy and compassion when we contemplate the love of Christ crucified and travel our own path to La Verna. St. Bonaventure wrote: *As the vision disappeared, it left [Francis'] heart burning with a marvelous ardor and impressed upon his body an image of the signs which was not less marvelous. There and then the marks of nails began to appear in his hands and feet, just as he had seen them in this vision of the crucified man (Chapter 13. Section 3).* When we journey with Christ, St. Francis' prayer for Br. Leo will be manifested in our lives—we will see the face of the Lord and be blessed with His mercy and His peace.

I used a medieval saint and a medieval historian to help me make sense of my journey through both the consolations and the deserts of my life. In my dry times I often wander with St. Francis and Bonaventure up to the mountain of La Verna. These two saints help me to contemplate the nearness of the Word and to persevere on my journey to fully live a life marked by Christ.



This article was inspired by a *Lectio Divina* prayed and shared in a recent Catholic biblical school class. The verse was: *"The word is very near to you, it is in your mouth and in your heart so you can do it. Deut. 30:14 (RSV)* and referred to by Paul in Romans 10:8. The verse took hold. I let the words settle within me. Then in the way of St. Clare, I went to the garden to gaze. There in the barren ground were the first blooms of the season, passionate petals, delicately imprinted, marked by the Creator. I am reassured, refreshed.

Take a few minutes with a verse from Holy Scripture. What does it say to you? Where does it lead you? How do you respond?

You can do it!

The Word is so very near to you.

He is in your heart.

You are blessed. Be at Peace.

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*Lectio Divina* is a way of praying with the Scriptures that allows us to enter into a personal conversation and deeper relationship with the living God. We listen and respond in prayer and contemplation. *Lectio Divina* traditionally follows these four steps: Reading a passage, reflecting on the words that capture our attention, responding in silent prayer and resting in the presence of the Lord.

Gaze. Consider. Contemplate. Imitate.

