

# FRANCISCAN LIVING

## FROM GOSPEL TO MY LIFE AND MY LIFE TO THE GOSPEL

By Francine Gikow, OFS

*I was the man who fell victim to the robbers. I was stripped, beaten and left for half dead. A priest happened to come by and I thought: "He is a man of religion and compassion. He will help me... but the priest not only passed me by but even moved over to the other side of the street as if I had a contagious disease! The same thing happened again with a Levite—another important leader in the temple. Same result—avoiding me and refusing to approach me while I called out for help! I felt abandoned, invisible and neglected. Those I counted on as friends did nothing to help. I felt alone.*

*Finally, an immigrant stranger approached. Not only did he help me, but he brought me to a room where I could receive care and slowly regain my health. In fact, he paid for it all, since everything I once had had been stolen from me! He saw me as a person, not a victim. He made me whole again!*

*As I reflected on this meditation of the Good Samaritan, it caused me to consider how the man felt who had been robbed of his whole livelihood and even his health. He had nothing left and was forced to depend on the kindness of others. How disappointed he was in the supposedly "good" people from his society to whom he turned in trust and hope. How grateful he was to the immigrant stranger who saw his humanity and responded to it. Oh, how he rejoiced in the goodness of God for showing His mercy by sending him a complete stranger who was willing to do for God what others refused to do.*

*I sat with these feelings for a while and then tried to be available to hear what God wanted me to hear from the message of this gospel. I felt God wanted me to be more sensitive to each person I meet and not to ignore, avoid or pass by others in need of an ear to hear or a caring touch. I ended the meditation with a resolution to be more sensitive to others—to be an instrument of God's love and concern for those who have nothing or are in need.*

This was my personal meditation/dialog with God about the "Good Samaritan" gospel from scripture. I love to use St. Clare's method of meditation; Gaze upon Him, Consider Him, Contemplate Him as you Imitate Him. *Gazing*, in the medieval sense is not just looking but "gazing from the heart," which engages more of the senses: hearing, imaginative seeing, touch and smell. *Considering*, I like to think, is entering into the scripture and considering how you would feel or how the people involved would have felt being

in that situation. If we allow time for listening to God, He can speak to us, giving us little inspirations or thoughts. *Contemplating* is moving toward lifting our hearts to God, resting in His love and allowing God to love us back. *Imitation* is the resolve to do what God has asked us to do. This is classic Franciscan meditation. In fact, Francis entered into imaginative meditation so personally that he decided to recreate the nativity in Greccio!

So do you read scripture and meditate on it like this? Can you hear the Living Word of God speaking to you in scripture? Do you let the gospels direct your life by going from Gospel to life and life to the Gospel? Do the Gospels soften you, direct you, and change you? After all, this is what we say we do as Franciscans! But do we?

The very first paragraph in "The Way of Life of our Rule" is this: "to observe the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ ..." and that "Secular Franciscans should devote themselves to careful reading of the gospel, going from gospel to life and life to the gospel" (Rule II: 4). This means we should read and meditate on the gospels, preferably *daily*. It should be a priority in our life because this is how God speaks to us as the Living Word of God.

The imaginative meditation prayer is different from *studying* scripture as an intellectual exercise (although study has its place in our spiritual development). The goal of our scriptural prayer as Franciscans, moreover, is to *make a difference in the way we live our lives!* Meditating on scripture should be a personal dialog with God about the meaning of the passage for YOU. Again, it is all about relationship—our relationship with God through His spoken, living Word.

Yes, it takes time. Time, which we have to prioritize to ensure that this special time is reserved for our relationship. Time to just sit with our Lord, be ready to hear His Word for us, "waste time" with Him, love Him... and let Him love us back.

