

News Views

Franciscan life in the 21st Century
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A meaning of hope.
The journey of conversion.

HOPE

For some people *hope* is an orphan and *conversion* is talked about but not always achieved. Our age has seen many ways that diminish hope. Destructive tools like sexual slavery, threats of death, or other ways of domination are used to win control over others. With modern armaments hundreds of people can be wiped out at once. This is no way to develop hope! Groups can be misled by half-truths; negative personal experiences; the power of money; or even the development of technology. People find ways to dominate others both individually and collectively.



Franciscans, relying on the power of the Holy Spirit, deal gently with people (even themselves). Personal reflection helps them discover what will build Franciscan and local communities. *Hope* builds on relationships with the Trinity - *Father, Son and Holy Spirit* - and - with each other.

Vaclav Havel, a leader who spent time in prison under communist rule, offers some reflections about hope.

I should probably say first that the kind of hope I often think about (especially in situations that are particularly hopeless, such as prison). I understand it above all as a state of mind, not a state of the world. Either we have hope within us or we don't; it is a dimension of the soul, and it's not essentially dependent on some particular observation of the world or estimate of the situation. Hope is not prognostication. It is an orientation of the spirit, an orientation of the heart; it transcends the world that is immediately experienced, and is anchored somewhere beyond its horizons.

Hope, in this deep and powerful sense, is not the same as joy that things are going well, or willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously headed for early success, but rather, on ability to work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed. The more unpropitious the situation in which we demonstrate hope, the deeper the hope is.

Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the sense that something makes sense regardless of how it turns out. In short, I think that the deepest and most

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important form of hope, the only one that can keep us above water and urge us to good works, and the only true source of the breathtaking dimensions of the human spirit and its efforts, is something we get, as it were, from "elsewhere." It is also this hope, above all, which gives us the strength to live and continually try new things, even in conditions that seem as hopeless as ours do, here and now.

Disturbing the Peace - Vaclav Havel

Hope is a spirit within us. It does not require that everything turns out well. *We do what is good* whether it turns out well or not. We believe that *choosing what is good* is vital. When things turn out well it's wonderful, but not essential for having *hope*. The source of persistent *hope* is the indwelling Trinity. The Trinity dwells in us whether our particular *hope* finds success or not. We do not lose *hope* if things fail to turn out "our" way. Our trust in the Trinity remains and we seek other ways and means that God prompts us to seek. Check the "good things" we persistently seek - *justice; compassion; unity; charity; peace; forgiveness; reasonable compromise; understanding; friendship; love; generosity; etc.*

These words of the Appalachian Bishops, can add to our understanding:

Our human dignity can never be separated from community with our sisters and brothers, nor from our community with the rest of creation. We are never solely individuals, devoted only to competition or selfishness. Rather we are always members of the community, truly responsible for our sisters and brothers, and also for God's sacred Earth.

*At Home in the Web of Life
Appalachian Bishops - Page 74*



We may still be uncertain about how to practice *hope*. It may call for a contemplative spirit that allows us to let the Trinity draw us to trust them.

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The ultimate aim of the quest must be neither release nor ecstasy for oneself, but the wisdom and the power to serve others. One of the many distinctions between the celebrity and the hero is that one lives only for self, while the other acts to redeem society.

The Power of Myth - Joseph Campbell & Bill Moyers - Page XV

CONVERSION

As we begin this topic, *let us pray*. (I don't know the author of this prayer, but it is appropriate):

Dear Lord: So far today, God, I've done all right. I haven't gossiped, haven't lost my temper, haven't been greedy or grumpy, nasty, selfish or over-indulgent. I'm really glad about that! But in a few minutes, God, I'm going to get out of bed and from then on I'm probably going to need all the help I can get. Thank you, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Having prayed, examine whether you are gossipy, lose your temper, are greedy and grumpy, nasty, selfish, over-indulgent, arrogant, unforgiving, or whatever. If these things ring a bell for you, you have a head start on naming things in your life that need *conversion*.



Most of us sense the meaning of *conversion*. We check on things that we need to change as new information or experiences become available. We honestly recognize the need to change some previously held ideas, opinions or relationships. In some cases we assumed we were "right" and the other person was "wrong." *Conversion* invites us to listen to the

Trinity calling us to an honest dialogue with that particular *neighbor* (or neighbors). Loving our neighbor, whenever opportunities spring up, allows us to build relationships through personal *conversion*, that is, our change of heart.

Vinal Van Benthem OFS, wrote the following article in her weekly article, "*Working with the Scriptures*" for the *Compass*, the diocesan newspaper of the Green Bay, WI Diocese - March 29, 2015. She reflects on *Isa. 50:4-7; Phil. 2:6-11*. Take time to notice ways in which *conversion* develops in Tess's everyday experiences.

I suppose we should have seen it coming. A star athlete in high school, Tess quit the team when it became evident that the school was more focused on winning than encouraging students to enjoy the sport. Her coach was not happy but Tess was more interested in the integrity of the sport than in how much money it could make for the school. And so the die was cast.

Graduating at the top of her class, Tess went to college, choosing a school where social concern and a concentration on the values of citizenship were integral to its mission. Tess blossomed and, again, graduated at the top of her class. Her family was delighted. They looked forward to their daughter embarking on a career that would bring her both financial success and personal satisfaction. For the next few years Tess did her best to fulfill their expectations. She took a job that required passing exacting exams - and she passed them with flying colors. But something was missing. Her training and education had prepared Tess for service. She felt isolated and alone in her tiny cubicle, trapped by a system focused on financial success, while in

her heart she felt certain she was being called to serve.

And so Tess moved on again, eventually taking a job defending the rights of workers and minorities who had no one else to speak for them. Here, too, Tess rose quickly to the top of her field. But this time it was different. Now the girl who had previously been the star money-maker and recipient of much praise, found herself despised and rejected - often by the same people who had previously supported her! Tess had become the antithesis of what much of the consumerist society around her believed in and it wasn't winning her any popularity contests.

God had given Tess a "well-trained tongue" that she might "speak to the weary," but as often happens to those who follow this path, Tess, too, now found herself "buffeted and spit upon." Tess had found her voice. I suppose we should have seen this coming!

Question: How do you feel about Tess' choices? Do they match choices you make? How do you deal with choices that change things in your life? Need help? Need faith? need courage? What? Isaiah offers some help:

The Lord God has given me the tongue of one who has been instructed to console the weary with a timely word; he made my hearing sharp every morning that I might listen like one under instruction. The Lord God opened my ears and I did not disobey or turn back in defiance

Isaiah 50: 4-5

Listen to God's call in the various articles of the OFS Rule. For example, **Article 11**.

... Let the Secular Franciscans seek a proper spirit of detachment from temporal goods by simplifying their own material needs. Let them be mindful that according to the Gospel, they are stewards of the goods received for the benefit of God's children. ... in the spirit of "the beatitudes," and as pilgrims and strangers on their way to the home of the Father, they should strive to purify their hearts from every tendency and yearning for possession and power.

The OFS Rule invites *conversion* of the heart.

Parents take time for prayer and dialogue to implement, in family life, the ideas of this article. Young people decide on their attitudes toward minorities and other people, offering them friendship. Older folks can dialogue, searching for ways to continue a loving concern as age diminishes physical or psychic energy. We are called to implement God's call in the Gospel, and the OFS Rule. A Franciscan community dialogues about ways to model love and its consequences for others to see. *This is what Franciscans do!* Your response to God's call will invite *conversion* in your life. *Remain faithful to God's call - and conversion happens!*



The world needs to see such example and we are called to provide it.