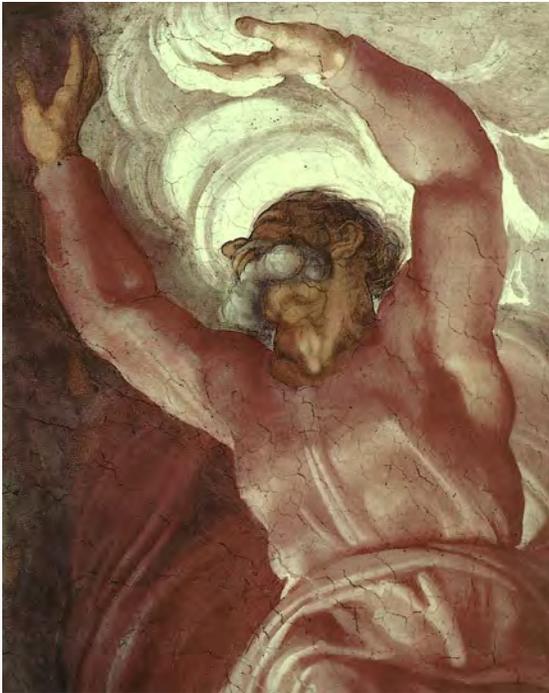




FORMATION COMMISSION

The Light of the World: We Are Called to See It and Be It

Layna Maher, OFS
National Formation Commission



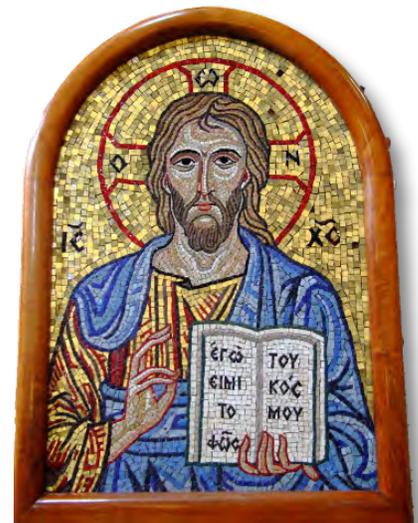
Michelangelo, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth—and the earth was without form or shape, with darkness over the abyss and a mighty wind sweeping over the waters—Then God said: Let there be light, and there was light. God saw that the light was good (Genesis 1:1-4).

The creation story begins with the goodness of light. Light was God's first gift to each of us. The birth of Jesus was announced to us with the light of a star. We read of light in many stories in scripture, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. In fact, if you looked for the the word light in the Bible, you would see the word light mentioned well over 200 times. Light surely is something important for us to recognize, study, and ponder.

Light symbolizes the many wonderful characteristics of God. Light is also a symbol for awareness, knowledge, goodness, and understanding. *We are each called by name (Isaiah 43:1) into the light and to shine the light from God into the world. We are called to be witnesses (Isaiah 43:10) to the world.*

Our Rule clearly outlines our Secular Franciscan way of life to do just that. The three chapters in our OFS Rule clearly guide us on understanding the Secular Franciscan Order, our Way of Life, and our Life in Fraternity. We hear St. Francis speak of light in his Earlier Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance (The first version of the Letter to the Faithful), the Prologue to our OFS Rule. St. Francis advises us in the words “All those, however, who are not living in penance.... They are blind because they do not see the true light, our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 FA:ED, pg. 50). We are called to see the true light and to live in the light. We have been given the gift of our Franciscan vocation and the love and support of our Franciscan family to assist us as we live our Rule. Let us recall these words said at profession, “Therefore, in my secular state I promise to live all the days of my life the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Secular Franciscan Order by observing its rule of life.” The Rule lights the path for us as we strive to live out the promise we make.



Rabe!, CC BY-SA 4.0, via
Wikimedia Commons

We can each light the way for others with our actions by living the gospel. To live the gospel, we must know the gospel. OFS Rule, Article 4 states “The rule and life of the Secular Franciscans is this: to observe the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of Saint Francis of Assisi, who made Christ the inspiration and the center of his life with God and people. Christ, the gift of the Father's love, is the way to him, the truth into which the Holy Spirit leads us, and the life which he has come to give abundantly. Secular Franciscans should devote themselves especially to careful reading of the gospel, going from gospel to life and life to the gospel.” Christ is the Light of the world. The Gospel gives us so many wonderful examples of how to reflect the light and love of Christ into the world.

We look to the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew 5:13-16, the Similes of Salt and Light. ¹³“*You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.* ¹⁴*You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden.* ¹⁵*Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house.* ¹⁶*Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.*” We then ask ourselves, what flavor am I bringing into the world? Am I bringing the light and love or darkness and condemnation?

We can turn to the Parable of the Lamp in Mark 4:21, where we again hear Jesus talk about a lamp, saying “*Is a lamp brought in to be placed under a bushel basket or under a bed, and not to be placed on a lampstand?*” We see the Parable of the Lamp again in Luke 8:16 “*No one who lights a lamp conceals it with a vessel or sets it under a bed; rather, he places it on a lampstand so that those who enter may see the light.*” Jesus shared this parable with us to tell us that because we have received the Gospel, we have an obligation to live it and share it with others.

In the Gospel of John, we hear these words from Jesus: “*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life*” John 8:12, and “*I came into the world as light, so that everyone who believes in me might not remain in darkness*” John 12:46.

We are blessed with many more recent words of guidance and goodness. In *Lumen Gentium, Light of the Nations*, Chapter IV, The Laity, we read we are called by God...”led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven. In this way they may make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity. Therefore, since they are tightly bound up in all types of temporal affairs it is their special task to order and to throw light upon these affairs in such a way that they may come into being and then continually increase according to Christ to the praise of the Creator and the Redeemer.” We ask ourselves, are our lives bringing God’s love and compassion into the affairs of our lives? Or are we bringing darkness and condemnation?

In *Caritas In Veritate, In Charity and Truth*, Benedict XVI, expanded on charity as he wrote “Truth is the light that gives meaning and value to charity. That light is both the light of reason and the light of faith....” Coherence... means dynamic faithfulness to a light received. The Church's social doctrine illuminates with an unchanging light the new problems that are constantly emerging.” We then ask ourselves, are we bringing the truth of God’s love and compassion into charitable works with problems we see appearing? Or are we bringing darkness and condemnation?

Pope Francis tells us in chapter III of his encyclical *Laudato Si, On Care for Our Common Home*, “May the power and the light of the grace we have received also be evident in our relationship to other creatures and to the world around us. In this way, we will help nurture that sublime fraternity with all creation which Saint Francis of Assisi so radiantly embodied.” We are challenged again, and ask ourselves are we living in a way brings love and compassion to care for God’s creation? Or are we bringing darkness and condemnation?



Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Public domain,
via Wikimedia Commons

We can turn to the Holy Spirit, our advocate, to light the way, to inflame and light our heart on fire with the love of God. As believers, we trust we are *“a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises”* of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” 1 Peter 2:9.

We can choose to be the light in the way we live and respond to others, our fraternity, and all of creation. We can choose love and compassion or darkness and condemnation. When we choose to look and listen with empathy and understanding, offering compassion instead of condemnation, we can be the light. As we submit ourselves as servants of Christ, we can allow the light from the love of God, our creator, to illumine our eyes to see the beauty of creation and the goodness that God created in the world. As disciples of Jesus, following in the footsteps of St. Francis, we can shine that light into the world and illuminate everywhere we go and everything we do with the love and compassion of God. We can study our Rule article by article to examine our lives and ask what we are bringing. A few years ago, our national theme was *“See Christ! Be Christ!”* Today we are challenged to *“See the Light and Be the Light”* until our last day, when *Night will be no more, nor will they need light from lamp or sun, for the Lord God shall give them light, and they shall reign forever and ever* Revelation 23:5.



Anonymous Unknown artist, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons