



# Franciscan Living

## Why After You?

by Francine Gikow, OFS

“Brother Masseo, wanting to test how humble he [Francis] was, went up to him and, as if joking, said, ‘Why after you, why after you, why after you?’ Masseo goes on to say in clarification: ‘I’m saying why does the whole world come after you, and everyone seems to desire to see you and hear you? You aren’t a handsome man in body, you aren’t someone of great learning, you’re not noble; so why does the whole world come after you?’”<sup>1</sup>

Francis’ response to Masseo may not seem to shed much light on this question, however. In fact, Francis states that God has chosen him *because of his vileness and insufficiency*. Francis expands this thought when he continues, saying: “...so that it may be known that every virtue and every good is from Him, and not from the creature, and no person may boast in his sight. But whoever boasts must boast in the Lord to whom is every honor and glory forever.”

God gave Francis great gifts. He gave Francis, an ordinary person born in the middle ages, great gifts of preaching, humility, and courage, not only because Francis made use of them, but also because Francis became a conduit for God’s love for us: The Lord and Creator shone through his creation of Francis. Truly, Francis became an “instrument” for God to work through so He could reach out and touch others through the human face of Francis.

God can work through us as well when he gives us “gifts” to use so that we can attract others to Christ. Thaddée Matura, OFM, warns us, however; “What one must beware of above all is the temptation to appropriate for oneself the good that belongs to God... one must acknowledge the origin of these gifts, rejoice over them, promote them; but once this is done, one

must ‘render’ them, restore them to the One to whom they belong in an act of praise and thanksgiving.”<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps one of us has been given the grace to actually “see” God working through us, but detachment from personal ownership of our gifts is needed. We must be fully aware that we have been given *everything* by our loving God. We cannot appropriate that which is God’s, and we “own” nothing apart from Him.

We can still rejoice over these gifts we have used for God’s benefit, mindful that their Source is our loving God and not ourselves. These gifts are reminders of the intimate care and love of the Father who gives us all good things. He loves us!

We should also promote and use the gifts God has given and not “hide them under a bushel basket,” because it is by these gifts that people can come to know Christ through us. Like Francis, we can become a conduit to God, since these gifts are really God’s gifts, not our own. We can become the “face” of God to others and evangelize by our actions.

Acknowledging the true Source of any of the gifts we “appear” to own, we should return all praise and thanksgiving to the One who is GIFT Himself and the Source of any gift He has given us to use. Instead of accepting accolades for ourselves, we refer to the true Giver of Gifts in rejoicing and praise! Franciscan joy!

People were attracted to Francis because they were attracted to God’s gifts that they saw in Francis. Francis was well aware that he was not the owner of the gifts, but “He [God] has chosen me to confound the nobility and the greatness and the strength and beauty and wisdom of the world...”<sup>3</sup> Do likewise with joy!

<sup>1</sup> LFl:10 in FA:ED II, p. 583.

<sup>2</sup> Thaddée Matura, OFM. *Francis of Assisi: Writer and Spiritual Master*. transl. Paul Lachance, OFM. (Cincinnati OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2005), 49.

<sup>3</sup> LFl:10 in FA:ED II, 0.583.