



A Culture of Contempt

Fr. Christopher Panagoplos, T.O.R., CNSA

*“Grant all the faithful of the Church,
looking into the signs of the times by the light of faith,
may constantly devote themselves to the service of the Gospel.”
(III Mass for Various Needs)*

This Prayer of the Church and the Profession of the OFS Rule direct our witness and mission to build a more fraternal and Gospel-centered world. In St Francis’ day, and in our own day, the members of the Franciscan Family are in a continuous struggle to build an alternative society. The dominant paradigm in our world is division, polarization. Herein lies the challenge: Is our world God’s world? And in my own quirkiness, why can’t people stand each other?

Attitudes are difficult to change. One attitude has come across my radar: “We know...but so what?” Charmed, no. Chilled, yes. Such an attitude infects and poisons truth. Lying voices fly 24/7, while the truth of the Gospel at Sunday Mass gets less than 20 minutes...a week!

You’ve heard these voices. They tell you to swap personal integrity for what they sell. They persuade you barter your convictions for an easy deal; to exchange your devotion for a cheap thrill. “We know...but so what.” Lies and deception eat away at the human spirit, tear at the fabric of society. They taunt and tantalize; they flirt and flatter. It’s ok; don’t worry, no one will know.

Evil breaks down the doors of our hearts. Jesus stands and taps gently. The voices of lies and deception scream for our allegiance. Jesus softly and tenderly requests it. They promise shiny new objects. Jesus invites us to dine with Him at table.

Our Rule challenges us as Franciscans to build the Kingdom of God in temporal situations and activities. We do not live in two worlds, nor do we live two lives. We may not accept everything that people develop, nor embrace ideas that oppose the Gospel. Like it or not, we live in one world. And it belongs to God. (Thank you, dear brother, Father

Lester. May God be good to you as you have been to us!)

Our Constitutions reiterate the fact that we have membership “*both in the Church and in society as an inseparable reality*” (20.1). This world is where we implement the Gospel. Here is where we work to build the kind of society that offers light and life rather than darkness and destruction. Our political systems need to be constantly called to accountability. We will do our best to fulfill what the Gospel asks of us. We support the Church when we accept personal responsibility to be Gospel-oriented. We discard any approach that makes us two-faced.

Our Profession mandates that we be the best servants we can be. Formation in fraternity, enriched by life experiences, having intimacy with Jesus in prayer—these are key in being good and responsible Franciscans, whose primary contribution is to build a Gospel society.

St Francis experienced polarization in the Order, in the Church, and in the society of his day. It was painful indeed, but he showed us that pain can be quenched by mercy and forgiveness. Habits and temptations will always be with us. What’s needed is a change of heart, a heart filled with mercy and forgiveness.

Let us, then, pray with St Francis’ the *Salutation of the Virtues*, where he reminds us to take to heart and not forget the virtues—simplicity, poverty, humility, charity, and obedience, led by holy wisdom. May we stand firm in the challenge of social transformation, for a world governed not by sin and evil, but by virtues. Virtues proceed from the heart of God. We pray that we may have God in the heart.