

# FRANCISCAN LIVING

## How to Go Among the Saracens in Our Lives

by Francine Gikow, OFS

St. Francis is known as a peacemaker, and for the Peace Prayer, which, although not written by St. Francis, reveals his thoughts about peacemaking. However, I still have questions about how St. Francis actually demonstrated this in real life. What *did* he “do” to become an instrument of peace? How *did* he show love when hatred was all around him? How *did* he show pardon when he experienced injury and finally how could St. Francis travel to the Holy Land, which was occupied by the Saracens (who killed any Crusader they met) and live to tell the tale?

Our society also marginalizes and kills as Francis’ medieval society did long ago. Only our society marginalizes and “kills” in its expressions of anger, distrust and intolerance. We are quick to resort to anger, while demeaning, shaming, isolating, and depersonalizing others when they do not agree with the favored viewpoint. In fact, new terms and methods have arisen to describe this marginalization, such as “cancel culture,<sup>1</sup>” “ghosting<sup>2</sup>,” and “gaslighting.<sup>3</sup>” Our society has become verbally and sometimes physically violent, disparaging and divided.

Unfortunately, since we are part of this society, it is too easy for us to fall into society’s mores and forget our own Franciscan values from our Rule: “...*trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon.*”<sup>4</sup>

In his early rule, Francis outlined for us how the friars should go among the Saracens and other non-believers, and I believe it holds many lessons for Secular Franciscans living in our society: “**One way is to not engage in arguments or disputes but to be subject to every human creature for God’s sake.**”<sup>5</sup>

I believe there are three crucial points to consider from this initial way of going among the nonbelievers (or our enemies.)

Firstly, **we must not engage in arguments or disputes.** Arguing has

never changed a person’s mind. In fact, it just solidifies the person’s thinking. I am reminded of the old saying, “the devil is in the details.” Yes, the evil one *wants* us to engage in detailed arguments and disputes, because he wants to sow doubt, anger, error, and chaos into the mix. He wants us to forget about seeing the “divine seed” in everyone and the transforming power of love and pardon.

Secondly, **Jesus wants us to LOVE our enemies.** He wants us to show His compassion and love to them. If we are so involved in our arguments and disputes that pushes out His love and the chance for a relationship with the other. It is in this relationship—the give and take—that God can enter into the process. It has been truly said: “Compassion is the most effective response to hatred and violence.”<sup>6</sup>

Finally, peace in our relationships takes **humility:** to be subject to every human creature for God’s sake and know and realize that it is not all about “me” but rather it is “all about us” ...in Christ. We must meet the “other” as an *equal* brother or sister, without condescension, and with God’s compassion and love.

Remember the Peace Prayer? “Where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is injury, pardon, where there is doubt, faith... for it is in dying (*i.e., to self*) that we are born to eternal life.” Do we really mean what we pray and live accordingly?

I recently read the following, and it resonated within me.

*“... we don’t really take Jesus seriously. We don’t love our enemies. We don’t turn the other cheek. We don’t forgive seventy times seven times. We don’t bless those who curse us.... We say: I am not a saint. We say: this Gospel stuff can’t be meant for everybody. We say: The Gospel is an ideal. But the Gospel is not merely an ideal.*

*For the followers of Christ, the Gospel is the Way.*<sup>7</sup>

PAX ET BONUM



Giotto, *St. Francis Before the Sultan*

<sup>1</sup> [Cancel culture] is often said to take the form of boycotting or shunning an individual... who is deemed to have acted or spoken in an unacceptable manner.

<sup>2</sup> Ghosting happens when someone cuts off all online communication with someone else, and without an explanation.

<sup>3</sup> the act of using psychological manipulation to get another person to question their own feelings, perception, or sanity

<sup>4</sup> OFS Rule, 2 #17.

<sup>5</sup> ER: XVI, 5-7.

<sup>6</sup> Gerard Thomas Straub, OFS. *The Sunrise of the Soul.* Brewster MA: San Damiano Books, 2020. p. 158

<sup>7</sup> Gerard Thomas Straub, OFS. p. 63.