

FRANCISCAN LIVING

Meditation Must Give Rise to Action

By Francine Gikow, OFS

As Secular Franciscans, we are called to follow Christ the same way as the Gerasene demoniac did in Mark 5:18-20:

“...the man who had been possessed by demons begged him [Jesus] that he might be with him. But Jesus refused, and said to him, “Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown to you.”

Like the Gerasene demoniac, we are not meant to leave everything to follow Jesus; we are to stay where we are and share what we have with our family and friends. This is the vocation of a Secular Franciscan: to bring Christ to others or as in the words of our profession, “to go from gospel to life and from life to the gospel.” It directs us towards a life of action and apostolate.

St. Clare, in her letter to Agnes, outlined a program for her sisters in their way of life when she said: “Gaze [on Him], Consider [Him], Contemplate [Him], as you desire to Imitate Him.”¹ This is not just a method of meditation or contemplation; rather it is a *way of living* for Franciscans. It is a way of “*Being*” in the world and changing the world through our interaction with it. We are to bring Christ to others by being tabernacles of Him.

Franciscans have always been “doing” people. We are not a contemplative order such as the Carmelites or Cistercians. Rather, our contemplation leads to action. As Francisco de Osuna, OFM, the Spiritual Director of St. Theresa of Avila states: “Do not think it sufficient to follow him with your imagination by meditating on his life and the mysteries, for if your actions do not correspond to your thoughts, you are not a true follower of Him.”²

We must not be hypocrites by speaking of Him but not actually following Him. Love begets action, then action in turn begets love. As St. Catherine of Siena stated: “You are rewarded not according to your work or your time, but according to the measure of your love.”

This service for others always entails sacrifice. We are to offer ourselves as living oblations for others. As de Osuna continues: “There are many who follow Christ

in interior consolation but refuse to follow him in suffering”³ ...and we must follow Him with joy, as Francis illustrates in his story of True and Perfect Joy.⁴

Then *how* do we act? Francis gave quite specific instructions for living with others.⁵ These instructions however, are not just for those missionaries who go to foreign lands, for we also are missioners for the domestic church. Firstly, we are to accompany others on their journeys and profess that we are Christians. Our lives must reflect Jesus. I know what I do is not nearly as important as how I do it, but I forget this fact all the time! Our whole lives should become small “sacraments,” where we bring the love and mercy of Jesus to those around us. We may not be called to do great things, but we are surely called to do all things with great love! Think for a moment and reflect on this today: “Did I show love to *every* person in *every* moment?”

Francis goes on to say there is a second way of living among others: it is to use words when the Spirit inspires us to do so. We fertilize our spiritual lives through prayer, fasting and the sacraments so we can actually hear the voice of God, rather than our own. Francis trusted the Holy Spirit to lead him in what he was to do. and it was one of his last prayers for his followers that the Holy Spirit teach us what each one of us must do as well.⁶

I find in my life as a Secular Franciscan however, that going from gospel to life and life to the gospel, when taken seriously, is difficult. I love to meditate on scripture, but I have great difficulty allowing my meditations lead to action. I take the easy way out and tend to leave things where they are. Call it being spiritually lazy or inertia, but I am also sure there is an element of fear. I fear change at times, especially when it means taking a risk in doing something new or visible or difficult. I am not always free enough of my self-centeredness that I can unreservedly respond to God’s call to action. I pray to God that I can act when I discern a better way of being and doing...and loving!

¹ 2LAg 20

² Francisco de Osuna, OFM *The Third Spiritual Alphabet* transl. By Mary E. Giles from the Classics of Western Spirituality Series, Mahwah N.J.: Paulist Press, 1981. p. 462.

³ Francisco de Osuna, 463.

⁴ FA/ED I: p. 166

⁵ FA/ED I: Early Rule 5-7

⁶ FA/ED II: 2Cel. 214