ST. FRANCIS: EMBRACING

AN ORDINARY LIFE

Sister Judy Nielsen, OSF

Community Guardian

Francis was a small man. An ordinary salesman in his family’s business. He was much like our favorite staff person we all find at our favorite store. The one who always remembers our name, knows just what we want and makes us feel like an important guest. He was also known as someone who loved parties, women and maybe his wine a little too much. He was occasionally troubled by a sense of helplessness about the problems of the people in his world.

He had grand ambitions of finding fortune and fame as a royal knight. He was captured, imprisoned, and considered somewhat of a failure as a knight. It was then that he sat in a small church expressing his disappointment that his plans had not been the success he had wanted for himself. He was alone.

It was a time when the public had grown weary of churches. Many had fallen into disrepair. As most of us have done from time to time he had looked for a place where he hoped God might explain Himself and provide him with success. There, in the little bedraggled Church of San Domiano Francis sat in front of the cross that would become known as the San Domiano cross. He got an answer: "Francis, go and repair My Church, as you can see, it is falling to ruins.”

Being all too human, Francis took the statement literally and promptly appropriated some of his father's goods to raise money to repair the church. The whole affair ended with Francis being called before the Bishop for the purpose of being reprimanded and repairing his father's embarrassment. Francis, being disowned by his family, had only God's family left to him.

Years later, he would retell the story to one or his companions and admit that it took a while for him to understand that it was a personal invitation to rebuild the Church one person at a time - not one brick at a time.

It was the beginning of an extraordinary relationship that would result in the Little Man of Assisi becoming best known as St. Francis and, somewhat to his dismay. ending up as the founder of the Franciscan vocation. His spiritual journey inspired many books. "The Little Flowers of Assisi" first printed in 1476 remains popular reading today.

It was an ordinary life that produced extraordinary results; some of it is fact, some pure legend and all of it inspiration for those of us who want our ordinary life to be in partnership with God. It produced three religious orders. The First Order for men only, the Second Order for women only founded by his friend Saint Clare and the Third Order for ordinary people

**The Third Order** consisted, as it does today, of men and women who had obligations to homes, spouses. children and employment, yet, still wished to pursue a personal committed walk with God. The Franciscan Family with its Three Orders and many branches remains among the largest of the religious families in the Church today.

A painting of a person

Description automatically generated

**So, what does it mean to be a Franciscan in today's world?**

It is said that St. Francis taught; n Teach the gospel at all times, if necessary, use words " He was a man of action. He was a man of prayer. He is often quoted as giving a very simple rule to those who wished to follow: “go from life to the gospel and from the gospel to life”. He was the example of our modern slogan: "Do the right thing." For Francis, it was not a good public relations motto, but an action intended to provide an example. He had in mind always striving toward becoming a reflection of Jesus as an Ordinary Man.

For me, it has meant becoming aware of the presence of God in my own ordinary life. Awareness has come through practicing the discipline of a rule of life that includes prayer, work, worship, and study founded on the principles of simplicity, purity, fidelity, and obedience. The mirror of the chastity, poverty and obedience of the monastery or convent.

A simple outline looks like this:

**Daily prayer** as communion and companionship with God.

**Work** in employment and do service in a manner that would reflect the presence of Jesus - by example not words.

**Study** of the Bible, social issues, and current events so I may respond as opposed to acting out of ignorance or misunderstanding.

**Strive** toward simplicity/poverty in not clinging to material things and by measuring my wants as opposed to my needs, practicing enjoyment without the need to possess, giving of my time and resources to improve the lives of others by honestly seeking the solution not a band-aide for the problem.

**Obedience** as it provides example in action: keeping commitments, doing the right thing, practicing self-responsibility to ensure that my words and actions are the same.

**What is in it for me?** From consciously striving toward these goals I have learned gentleness and acceptance of myself as a child of God. I have learned spiritual poverty is more difficult to care for than the lack of food or money. It has not been a road I must trudge toward perfection but the simple practice of being human as Jesus demonstrated it.

Do I fall short? Of course. Do I begin again? Always. I have received a lot. Lost little. The lessons have not always been easy, but they have always been simple. The rewards have been friendships that are priceless, help when it is needed, dreams that have come true, illusions that have been discarded and hope that is always available. A legacy from the life of an ordinary man called to live an extraordinary life.

Inquire about joining us at: **guardian@franciscancommunitydivinemercy.com**

*Note: Reprint from Cathedral Chimes 1998*