

THE LITTLE FLOWERS OF SAINT FRANCIS

CHAPTER XII

HOW ST FRANCIS GAVE TO BROTHER MASSEO THE OFFICE OF PORTER, OF ALMONER AND OF COOK; AND HOW, AT THE REQUEST OF THE OTHER BRETHREN, HE AFTERWARDS TOOK THESE DUTIES FROM HIM

St Francis, wishing to mortify Brother Masseo, that pride should not enter his soul, because of the many graces and gifts he had received from God, and also that, through the grace of humility, he should advance from virtue to virtue, once when he was residing in a solitary convent with his first companions, who were all examples of holiness, of which number Brother Masseo was one, he said unto the latter, before all the brethren: "O Brother Masseo, all these thy companions have the grace of contemplation and of prayer; but thou hast the grace of preaching the word of God and of pleasing the people. I will therefore, in order that they may give themselves to contemplation, that thou fill the office of porter, of almoner and of cook, and that, when the other monks shall be at their meals, thou alone shalt eat outside the convent-gate, so as to be ready to say a few godly words to such as come to the convent, before they knock at the gate, and so that none other shall be obliged to go out but thee; this thou shalt accomplish, through the virtue of holy obedience." Then Brother Masseo put down his hood, bowed his head, and meekly received and executed this order; filling for some days the offices of porter, of almoner and of cook. At this his companions, who were all men enlightened by the Spirit of God, seeing him thus employed, began to feel in their hearts great remorse, considering how Brother Masseo had reached a greater state of perfection than any of them, and how all the work of the convent fell to his share, and none to theirs. Then went they all to St Francis, begging him to divide among them those

charges, since they could not in conscience allow Brother Masseo to bear all the burden of the convent. At this St Francis, heeding their request, granted what they asked, and calling Brother Masseo, said unto him: "Brother Masseo, thy brethren wish to share the charges I have given thee, wherefore I will that the charges be divided among you all." Said Brother Masseo, with great humility and patience: "Father, whatever charge thou puttest upon me, be it small or be it great, I accept it as ordained by the Lord." Then St Francis, seeing the charity of the brethren and the humility of Brother Masseo, made them a most wonderful sermon on holy humility, teaching them that, the greater the gifts and graces we receive from God, so much greater must be our humility; for without humility no virtue can be acceptable to him. Then, having finished his sermon, he distributed the charges among them with great charity.

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United States Catholic Catechism for Adults

THE PURPOSES OF MARRIAGE

The marriage covenant, by which a man and woman form with each other an intimate communion of life and love, has been founded and endowed with its own special laws by the Creator. By its very nature it is ordered to the good of the couple, as well as to the generation and education of children. Christ the Lord raised marriage between the baptized to the dignity of a sacrament.

—CCC, no. 1660

The *Catechism* teaches that Christ's grace in the Sacrament of Marriage protects the essential purposes of marriage: the good of the couple and the generation and education of children. These purposes are protected and fostered by the permanence of the marriage bond and the mutual fidelity of the spouses.

"What God has joined together, no human being must separate" (Mk 10:9). We

have already noted that God's plan for marriage involves a permanent covenant embraced by the couple. The Church declares every valid sacramental consummated marriage to be indissoluble, that is, no one can dissolve the marriage bond.

The Sacrament obliges marital fidelity between the spouses. Love has a definitive quality about it. It is more than a practical arrangement or a temporary contract. Marital intimacy and the good of the children require total fidelity to conjugal love. This flows from Christ's own fidelity to the Church, which he loved so much that he died for her. By their mutual fidelity, the spouses continue to make present to each other the love of Christ and lead each other to greater holiness through the grace they receive from the Sacrament.

Married love is ordered to the good of the spouses and to the procreation and education of children. These are the unitive and procreative purposes of marriage. "By its very nature the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory" (CCC, no. 1652; GS, no. 48). The fruitfulness of married love includes the moral, spiritual, and faith life the parents hand on to their children. Parents, as principal educators of their children, are at the service of life.

FROM THE CATECHISM

1. Why is the family called "the domestic Church"?

The Christian home is the place where the children receive the first proclamation of the faith. For this reason the family is rightly called "the domestic church," a community of grace and prayer, a school of human virtues and of Christian charity. (CCC, no. 1666)

2. What is essential in the consent of those to be married?

The parties to a marriage covenant are a baptized man and woman, free to contract marriage, who freely express their consent; "to be free" means:

—not being under constraint;

—not impeded by any natural or ecclesiastical law. (CCC, no. 1625)

3. Why should the couples be prepared for marriage?

So that the "I do" of the spouses may be a free and responsible act, and so that the marriage covenant may have solid and lasting human and Christian foundations, preparation is of prime importance. . . . It is imperative to give suitable and timely instruction to young people, above all in the heart of their own families, about the dignity of married love, its role and exercise, so that, having learned the value of chastity, they will be able at a suitable age to engage in honorable courtship and enter upon a marriage of their own. (CCC, no. 1632)

Together with their children, parents form what the Second Vatican Council called the domestic church. The Church lives in the daily life of families, in their faith and love, in their prayers and mutual care. The *Catechism* notes that "All the members of the family exercise the priesthood of the baptized in a privileged way" (CCC, no. 1657).

Not all married couples are able to have children. "Spouses to whom God has not granted children can nevertheless have a conjugal life full meaning. . . . [and] can radiate a fruitfulness of charity, of hospitality and of sacrifice" (CCC, no. 1654).

EFFECTS OF THE SACRAMENT

The first effect of the Sacrament of Matrimony is the gift of the bond between the spouses. "The consent by which the spouses mutually give and receive one another is sealed by God himself" (CCC, no. 1639). "The marriage bond has been established by God himself in such a way that a marriage concluded and consummated between baptized persons can never be dissolved" (CCC, no. 1640).

The grace of this Sacrament perfects the love of husband and wife, binds them together in fidelity, and helps them welcome and care for children. Christ is the source of this grace and he dwells with the spouses to strengthen their covenant promises, to bear each other's burdens with forgiveness and kindness, and to experience ahead of time the "wedding feast of the Lamb" (Rev 19:9).

From Poverty & Joy – Wm Short OFM

5. 'THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER AND HOLY DEVOTION'

Francis and his companions 'followed the footsteps' of Jesus also by integrating prayer with preaching, work and travel. They set aside time daily for liturgical prayer and took opportunities for prayer alone, in hermitages, apart from the surrounding society and towns. In this chapter we will examine some of those activities considered the 'spiritual practices' of the Franciscan tradition.

But we should use that term cautiously, because it suggests a dichotomy between the 'material' side of that tradition (work, travel, relationships) and the 'spiritual' (identified with practices of prayer or meditation). Hopefully, at this point in our treatment of the Franciscan tradition, such a division seems artificial, as it should. Prayer, contemplation, life in the hermitage: these are a part, but only a part, of the 'full gospel' spirituality of Francis, Clare and their followers.

Francis is not notable in the history of spirituality for developing or teaching techniques of prayer or meditation. His preferred phrases describe a basic attitude toward prayer as an underlying condition of life: to have 'the spirit of prayer and holy devotion'; to desire 'the spirit of the Lord and his holy operation'.¹ Preserving this spirit was to take precedence over every kind of work, and every other concern, including the study of theology.² It was not identical with practices of prayer, since some say 'many prayers' but easily grow angry when criticised by others: they are not truly 'poor in spirit', the condition for all genuine prayer.³

Scripture Reflection

Ephesians 3:14-21

Prayer for the Readers.

¹⁴For this reason I kneel before the Father,

¹⁵from whom every family* in heaven and on earth is named,

¹⁶that he may grant you in accord with the riches of his glory to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner self,

¹⁷and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, rooted and grounded in love,

¹⁸may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth,

¹⁹and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

²⁰Now to him who is able to accomplish far more than all we ask or imagine, by the power at work within us,

²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.