

## DAILY CONVERSION TO CHRIST

### Have on hand: O.F.S. Rule



Artist unknown: San Damiano Cross/Crucifix, Byzantine style, 12<sup>th</sup> century

### Our Opening Prayer:

#### *The Prayer before the Crucifix*

**“Most High,  
glorious God,  
enlighten the darkness of my heart  
and give me  
true faith,  
certain hope,  
and perfect charity,  
sense and knowledge,  
Lord,  
that I may carry out  
Your holy and true command.”<sup>1</sup>**

In the Gospel, (*Luke 9:23*) Jesus enjoins us: “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”

We Secular Franciscans were called “Brothers and Sisters of Penance” by Francis to help us understand our role of ongoing conversion to the Lord in the circumstances of our daily living.

Participants should read the following three Articles from the *Rule*: #1; #4; and #7.

Thomas of Celano wrote this about St. Francis: “The restoration of that church [St. Mary of the Angels, the Portiuncula] took place in the third year of his conversion [before he had his followers]. At this time he wore a sort of hermit’s habit with a leather belt. He carried a staff in his hand and wore shoes.

“One day the gospel was being read in that church about how the Lord sent out his disciples to preach. The holy man of God, who was attending there, in order to understand better the words of the gospel, humbly begged the priest after celebrating the solemnities of the Mass to explain the gospel to him. The priest explained it all to him thoroughly line by line. When he heard that Christ’s disciples should not possess gold or silver or money, or carry on their journey a wallet or a sack, nor bread nor a staff, nor to have shoes nor two tunics, but that they should preach the kingdom of God and penance, the holy man, Francis, immediately exulted in the spirit of God. ‘This is what I want,’ he said, ‘this is what I seek, this is what I desire with all my heart.’ ... Immediately, he took off the shoes from his feet, put down the staff from his hands, and, satisfied with one tunic, exchanged his leather belt for a cord. After this, he made for himself a tunic showing the image of the cross, so that in it he would drive off every fantasy of the demons. He made it very rough, so that in it he might crucify the flesh with its vices and sins. He made it very poor and plain, a thing that the world would never covet. As for the other things he heard, he set about doing them with great care and reverence. For he was no deaf hearer of the gospel; rather he committed everything he heard to his excellent memory and was careful to carry it out to the letter.”<sup>2</sup>

In *The Legend of the Three Companions* we find: “That cardinal [Bishop of Sabina, named Lord John of St. Paul] then went to the Curia and told the Lord Pope Innocent III: ‘I found a most perfect man, who wishes to live according to the form of the holy Gospel, and to observe evangelical perfection in all things. I believe that the Lord wills, through him, to reform the faith of the holy Church

throughout the world.’ Hearing this, the lord pope was greatly amazed and had the cardinal bring blessed Francis to him.



Benozzo Gozzoli: Scene 5 from the Life of St. Francis, 1452

“On the following day, ... He [the Pope] blessed them saying: ‘Go with the Lord, brothers, and as He will see fit to inspire you, preach penance to everyone. When almighty God increases you in number and grace, come back to us. We will grant you more, and entrust you with a greater charge.’

“Drawn by divine inspiration, many people, well-born and lowly, cleric and lay, began to cling to blessed Francis’s footsteps, and, after they had abandoned the concerns and vanity of this world, to live under his discipline.”<sup>3</sup>

In the *General Constitutions*,  
Article #13, we read:

1 “*Rule 7* Secular Franciscans, called in earlier times ‘the brothers and sisters of penance,’ propose to live in the spirit of continual conversion. Some means to cultivate this characteristic of the Franciscan vocation, individually, and in fraternity, are: listening to and celebrating the Word of God; review of life; spiritual retreats; the help of a spiritual adviser, and penitential celebrations. They should approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation frequently and participate in the communal celebration of it, whether in the Fraternity, or with the whole people of God.

2 “In this spirit of conversion, they should live out their love for the renewal of the Church, which should be accompanied by personal and communal renewal. The fruits of conversion, which is a response to the love of God, are the works of charity in the interactions with the brothers and sisters.

3 “Traditional among Franciscan penitents, penitential practices such as fasting and abstinence should be known, appreciated, and lived out according to the general guidelines of the Church.”

Q1. How much of Francis of Assisi’s life was spent in “conversion”?

Q2. As an O.F.S. member, what is the primary meaning of the title given me by St. Francis?

Q3. Do I live this “penance” from a sense of duty, or of a love relationship? How so?

Q4. What does it mean when it is said that being “brothers and sisters of penance” means that the spirit of Lent is not just for 40 days a year?

Q5. In what ways do change, metanoia, and conversion require detachment and humility (a form of poverty)?

Q6. Explain why the first three lines of *Our Opening Prayer* are appropriate throughout our lives.

You might also want to consult the *Catechism*, §1427 and §1431.

<sup>1</sup> FA:ED, *The Prayer before the Crucifix*, 1205/06, Vol. I, p. 40

<sup>2</sup> FA:ED, *The Life of Saint Francis, First Book*, 1228-1229, Vol. I, pp. 201-202, Chapter IX, vs. 21-22

<sup>3</sup> FA:ED, *The Legend of the Three Companions*, 1241-1247, Vol. II, p. 96, Chapter XII, vs. 48-49; and p. 99, Chapter XIII, v. 54