



PROPOSITUM

September 9, 2022

Growing in universal love

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Peace and all Good!

*Within themselves. Let them always make a dwelling place and home for the Lord God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, so that, with undivided hearts, they may **increase in universal love** by continually turning to God and to neighbor. TOR rule 8*

The general assembly of the IFC-TOR held in Assisi from May 9-15, 2022 was indeed a time of renewal as we prayed, listened, discerned and prayed together with the theme, “Growing in universal love with undivided hearts”. The presentations were excellent and the times for “Sacrum Commercium” allowed all to share their own experiences and wisdom.

At the last meeting of the IFC-TOR council held on ZOOM on June 14, 2022, it was decided that the presentations of the general assembly were so rich that we would use this Propositum to share these talks with all the members of IFC-TOR. For those of you who were able to attend, this will serve as a reminder of the wealth of knowledge presented. For those who could not attend, it is our hope that you will be enriched by the written word and the links to the content on the website.

As you read this material and visit the website to hear the presentations, we hope that the flames of universal love will be rekindled within you once again and give you renewed fervor to reach out to God’s people in love and service.

God bless you!
Sincerely,

Sr. Frances Marie Duncan, President IFC-TOR
Sr. Daisy Kalamparamban, Vice-President
Sr. Beatriz Vásquez Mayta, Councilor
Sr. Maria Luisa García Casamián, Councilor
Sr. Rute Almeida Guimaraes, Councilor
P. Brian Terry, Councilor





275/300

Giornata mondiale di preghiera per la Pace - Assisi 27 ottobre 1986.

R. J. J. J. J.

This picture N. 275 is one out of 300 which were made for the world prayer day for peace when Pope John Paul II came to Assisi with the representatives from other religions on October 27, 1986. During a closing celebration at the Sacro Convento this picture was given to Sister M. Christiane Wittmers, FCJM, the first president of the IFC-TOR.

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May 2022 IFC-TOR General Assembly

Sr. Margaret Carney talk

Greetings to IFC-TOR

Dear Sisters and Brothers,
Pax et Bonum!

We find the following words in the Book of Deuteronomy, the book that chronicles the sealing of the covenant with Israel: “Know, then, that the Lord your God, is God. The faithful God who keeps mercy to the thousandth generation towards those who love him and keep his commandments.” (Dt.7:9)



When the various committees and commissions began the daring enterprise of creating a new Rule for our Order, I am not sure if those if we were, indeed, “the thousandth generation”. I am sure, however, that we experienced exactly what the author of Deuteronomy assured to his readers. For we experienced God guiding our work, preventing serious failures and humbling us by the continual manifestation of our need for humility and trust in this unfailing Providence.

You know that I had the privilege of serving on the committee that was known as “The Work Group.” Two other bodies, the International Franciscan Bureau and the International Franciscan Commission had the responsibilities to lead the project. The Bureau, made up of six general superiors of Third Order Regular congregations, would supervise the work and then submit the results to the Holy See. The Commission would organize the details and logistics of the international consultations. Four experts on Franciscan sources and history from the First Order and the Third Order Regular would assist the Work Group. The Work Group was drawn from various national federations or organizations and most of us had some experience of formation and

promoting the implementation of the Second Vatican Council. It was a carefully designed plan and we must never forget the generosity of time and resources that these leaders contributed. To those of us in the Work Group fell the task of organizing hundreds of responses to the various drafts. These came in multiple languages and manifested the care to include –as far as possible-- all members of the Third Order Regular. This was completely unprecedented in our long history as a religious Order.

It was a difficult assignment. How did we come to fulfill the goals given to us? We had guidance from the Bureau, we had our own life experience and studies, we had the rhythm of daily prayer and Eucharist, the unfolding friendships that emerged over meals and recreation and, finally, hours of intense listening.

The tireless work of the Commission members who spent late nights translating and typing new drafts was admirable. We debated with care all the proposals. Some, at times, had to be set aside. Those choices caused some pain or a negative response from an expert or from the sisters and brothers we represented in our home countries. We needed the virtues of prudence and fortitude. Our facilitator-translator, friar Jean-Francois Godet led our discussions with care and an open mind. He used his linguistic expertise to guide our deliberations and our translations of the Latin originals of Franciscan texts.

There were certainly times when it appeared we might fail altogether. Strong disputes, weariness caused by days and nights of ceaseless work, and our own cultural prejudices often blocked our ability to see the Spirit at work. Finally, however, through a series of visible conversions among us—among all three structures—we came to harmony with a draft to present to the General Assembly of the Third Order Regular in 1982.

The 1982 Assembly in Rome

That gathering included long days of debate and presentations, and many private consultations along the way. With careful exposition of the draft and eagerness to hear and respond to all objections, a final version was prepared. On March 8, 1982 the assembled general superiors approved the text with only two negative votes. Later, the Holy See requested the insertion of a chapter that explained the spiritual basis for our lives of chaste celibacy to be added. Then the text was placed before St. John Paul II. With the date of December 8, 1982, he gave his blessing. We, the brothers and sisters of the Third Order Regular were now sealed with a new covenant of Franciscan living, the *Franciscanum vitae propositum*. It had solid roots in the legacy of the ancient Brothers and Sisters of Penance who were an integral part of the earliest generations of Franciscans. It was capable of allowing even the newest foundation of the Order to form its members in the evangelical wisdom drawn from the words of St. Francis himself. And we were mindful that these words were also mirrored in the Rule of St. Clare. Thus our 20th century text shared in the language and intentions of the earliest Rules of Francis and Clare. No one who participated in those events could doubt that the Spirit of the Lord had accompanied us—the “thousandth generation.” A new page in Franciscan history had been written. The work of recovering the Gospel inspiration that Francis shared with all of his companions was now filling the Rule and Life text that we held at our profession, our jubilees, our retreats, in all our days as we strive for fidelity. An Order made up of more than four hundred distinct women’s congregations and the Third Order Regular friars and brothers was liberated from formalistic Rule texts which were the work of papal chancery offices in times past. Now we had an expression of a life founded in the spiritual treasures of continual conversion, minority, poverty and contemplation. These were the “living stones” which had built the Third Order Regular spirit and life through the centuries. It breathes with the spirit of Assisi, of the great saints who have gone before us and the holy ones and martyrs who have lived among us even in our modern era.

And as we gather here we know it is daily enriched by the cultures, the ministries and the holiness of life of thousands of our members.

Forty years! Four decades! How shall we give thanks for all the Lord has done for us? The International Franciscan Conference exists to continue the hard work of maintaining solidarity and spiritual bonds with our unique branch of the Franciscan family. Indeed, in those days in Rome in 1982 we saw that we were an example of the words of the Letter of Peter: “Once you were not a people -- that is, we had limited awareness and connection beyond our own nations or linguistic groups -- But now we were a people reborn. (cf 1Pt. 2:9-10). We continue to be the people set apart in the Franciscan family to continue the inheritance of works of mercy and a contemplation that leads to action on behalf of justice wherever we are.

May this Assembly celebrate—but, more importantly—may it dedicate our members to preserve and extend the IFC-TOR to continue to foster our “forma vitae” for the next thousand generations.

May the Spirit of Christ dwell among you these days and the blessings of Francis and Clare surround you. Happy Anniversary to all of us!



WATCH VIDEO

www.ifc-tor.org/en/general-assembly/ga-2022

Growing in universal love with undivided hearts (TOR Rule, 8)

Sr. Christina Muelling
Presentation May 10, 2022

1. To love God with your Whole Heart

God longs to make a dwelling and a home in our hearts. We believe in a triune God who in himself is supreme relationship and outpouring of love. So, we are invited to allow ourselves to be drawn more and more into the flow of the triune love, to become more and more co-lovers with God. God's will is love: for God in heaven and for people on earth. This love is enjoined on us by Francis in the *Regula non bullata*:

*Let us all love with a full heart and a full soul, with full mind and full courage, with full understanding and full strength, with full effort and full affection, with full emotion, full desire and will, the Lord God, who has given and gives to every one of us (our) whole body, all (our) soul, and all life, who created, redeemed, and through his mercy alone, will save us.*¹



Francis wants our love for God to be wholehearted, not half-hearted. Everything is to be directed towards God and permeated by God. For him, love of God is the most important. God is the source of love. It is from this love that we are to live and act. It is from this love that we are to become co-lovers with God. How this can manifest itself he describes in his explanation of the Lord's Prayer:

"Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven: that we may love You with our whole heart, by always thinking of You and with our whole soul, by always desiring You; with our whole mind, by directing all our intentions to You and by seeking Your glory in everything; and with our whole strength by spending all our energies and affections of soul and body, in the service of Your love and of nothing else and may we love our neighbours as ourselves, by drawing them all with our whole strength to your

love by rejoicing in the good fortunes of others as well as our own and by sympathising with the misfortunes of others and giving offence to no one."²

Here Francis has formulated the ideal of love to which we should always orient our lives, as with a compass. But he also knows that he, his brothers and all of us repeatedly fall short of this ideal, that under the onslaught of life our heart again and again becomes half-hearted and has to be realigned.

2. Cautious before God, not before people

But what makes us half-hearted? What divides our love? In that regard, we find many points for reflection in Francis himself and in the biographies.

Thus, in Admonitions 5 and 19, Francis warns against thinking we are somehow better, believing we are special. He does not want his brothers and sisters to boast about the good that God has worked through them. They are not to boast about their achievements and rely on others to think they are significant, but to attribute all good things to the Lord.

This is a serious reminder for us at a time when religious orders, at least in the Western world, are increasingly losing their relevance. Do we draw our significance, our standing, from the

¹ RnB 23. Translation of The First Rule of Saint Francis – (RnB, the Rule Unconfirmed by Bull) by Paul Schwartz, O.F.M. and Paul Lachance, O.F.M.

² Explanation of the Our Father, from: "The Inner Prayer Life of St. Francis", website of Secular Franciscan Order Inc. Australia

standing that God gives us - regardless of our performance - or do we seek our reputation in what we have formerly achieved? Do we think we are unattractive because we are perhaps old, small and powerless? How do we respond when we are asked who we are? With what we achieve, or have achieved – or with what we are before God? “*Blessed is the servant who does not regard himself as better when he is esteemed and extolled by men than when he is reputed as mean, simple, and despicable: for what one is in the sight of God, so much one is, and no more*”,³ Francis admonishes us. Let us have the courage to

say: Yes, we are old, some of us are weak and sick, but we are loved by God and that is our strength.

3. De-Rusting the Heart

In *Sacrum commercium*, the Sacred Exchange between St. Francis & Lady Poverty 23, Poverty speaks of the inertia of the defeated religious and compares them to the Israelites being led out of captivity. They want to return to what they let go of and walk along sadly. Resignation determines their lives. Without any strength of heart, they go about their duties and grow weary under the burden because they lack the Spirit. Do we, too, grow weary under the burden of growing old and dying, or do we follow in the footsteps of Jesus? In his humble descent into human frailty and brokenness, and in his patient suffering, he laid a trail of love for us to follow. The way we embrace our frailties and brokenness in love and accompany and bear with one another in love are powerful signals to the world. Until our death, we are called to become co-lovers with God, to give God's love a profile in our lives.

In a listless life, Francis sees the danger of no longer having one's heart and mind with God and of suffocating God's Word in one's memory.⁴ Instead, one begins to take pleasure in idle and empty words.⁵ If in Francis' time that still meant gossip, in the age of the internet and social media this admonition takes on a new meaning. There is often a very fine line between using the possibilities of modern media profitably and losing oneself in them. How much time do we spend in front of the TV or on the internet and how much with our sisters and brothers or in prayer? What entices us more? Thomas of Celano describes the disease of oversaturation as rust in the heart.⁶ Our heart and our prayer can also become rusty and need a rust-removal cure every now and then!

4. Living in the Present

The western congregations, at least, have been obliged by necessity to let go of many programs. And yet we still long for our old significance. We search for new paths and yet end up time and again in the old tracks. Is our progress paralysed because we cannot free ourselves from old structures, old importance? Because we still seek our justification, our prestige from people and not from God? In the Major Legend of St. Francis, Bonaventure speaks of the abuse of the present because the brothers live either in the past or in the future.⁷

- Do we still cling too much to the past or do we get bogged down in planning a fictitious future and miss out on the present filled with God?
- Do we grow weary with the toil of growing old and dying, with the burden of worry, and so miss the moment of love in the here and now?
- Do worldly worries blind our hearts so that we no longer have our hearts and minds on God?⁸

³ Admonition 20

⁴ Cf. RnB 17, 19

⁵ Admonition 21

⁶ 2 C 125

⁷ Cf. Legenda Major VI, 3,6

⁸ Cf. RnB 17, 19

5. To Develop a Culture of Love

Francis invites his sisters and brothers to develop and nurture a culture of love. On the one hand he warns us against the sin of envy.⁹ Often in our communities there is a culture of comparison and envy rather than a culture of broad hearts. Especially in large mother houses, social control often makes life difficult, narrow and loveless. St. Bonaventure describes begrudging one another as a sin against the Holy Spirit because all good comes from God. Thus, we are indirectly angry with God when he gives something good to someone. And we become blind to the good that is a gift to ourselves. Those who know they have been given a gift by God no longer need to envy another person's goodness.

And finally, Francis reminds us of the necessity of forgiveness and practicing the love of our enemies when he prays in the Our Father:

“As we forgive those who trespass against us: and whatever we do not forgive perfectly, do you, Lord, enable us to forgive to the full so that we may truly love our enemies and fervently intercede for them before you, returning no one evil for evil and striving to help everyone in you.”¹⁰

Often, rather than a culture of forgiveness and reconciliation, we cultivate a culture of injustice in our communities. We preserve the injustice we have suffered and swear that it will never happen to us again. And already we are in the prison of the injustice we have suffered, which will determine our behaviour in the future. If a superior has once hurt us, then no other has a chance to get close to us. Sometimes our hearts and hands are so full of what we hold against ourselves and others that God no longer has a chance to give us something new. But sometimes we are also so deeply hurt that we cannot forgive on our own. Francis tells us that the will to forgive is enough if we ask God to forgive completely. Perhaps you have also noticed that Jesus on the cross does not say to the executioners: I forgive you! He says: Father forgive them, for they know not what they do. Irreconciliation is still open to reconciliation. Irreconcilability, on the other hand, no longer wants to forgive, no longer wants to reconcile. We close ourselves off from the flowing love of the Triune God, there is an embolism that has repercussions for the whole community. A culture of forgiveness and reconciliation, on the other hand, makes the Triune life present among us. No one is to be excluded from this culture of love. That is why it culminates in the love of enemies.

“The Lord says in the Gospel, ‘Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you and pray for those who persecute you.’ He truly loves his enemy who does not grieve because of the wrong done to himself, but who is afflicted for love of God because of the sin on his [brother's] soul and who shows his love by his works.”¹¹

Also not excluded from this love are brothers and sisters who have cast the Order in a skewed light through sexual abuse or abuse of power. The whole Church suffers gravely from the wound of abuse.

Thomas of Celano has Francis say: *“The best brethren must die of shame because of the works of the bad brethren, and where they themselves have not sinned, yet they are judged by the example of the bad ones.”¹²* In the eyes of society, the whole Church, the whole Order is taken into collective custody. The victims must be heard and given their rights. The affected sisters and brothers still living must take responsibility, they may not be written off by the others.

“And all the brothers, ministers and servants as well as the others, should beware not to become upset or angry because of the sin of another, for the devil wishes to corrupt

⁹ Cf. Admonition 8

¹⁰ Explanation of the Our Father, 8

¹¹ Admonition 9

¹² 2 C 157,1

many through the sin of one. But they should help as best they can the one who has sinned, for: It is not the healthy who need a physician, but the sick.”¹³

We are called

- to make the triune love visible in our communities;
- to turn with all our heart and with all our strength to God who is love,
- and to let this love overflow into our lives. Let nothing hinder us, let nothing separate us from God, let nothing interfere.¹⁴

Therefore, let us always gather up anew our scattered heart¹⁵ and attune our heart to God¹⁶ so that His love song can resound through us in the world, so that we grow with an undivided heart, into the all-encompassing love.



WATCH VIDEO and panel response

www.ifc-tor.org/en/general-assembly/ga-2022



*Sr. Tulia Lopez Bedoya
Given in Spanish*



*Sr. Doris Lamontagne
Given in French*

¹³ RnB 5

¹⁴ Cf. RnB 23:10

¹⁵ Cf. 2 C 194

¹⁶ Cf. LM IX,1

Life in the Trinitarian Love

Sr. Christina Muelling
Presentation May 11, 2022

In this talk, I would like to focus on living in all-encompassing love.

The Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata* sees Christian life in a spiritual community, especially in the different forms of consecrated life in community, “as a human community in which the Trinity dwells”, as “sharing in the Trinitarian communion”.¹⁷

How did Francis find his way into this all-encompassing love, which is nothing other than the love of the Triune God? What does it mean for us concretely when God shows himself to us in the Trinity, i.e., as a God of relationship and overflowing love? And what does it mean when we are drawn into this triune God, to share him, live in him and from him?

My fellow Sister, Prof. Dr. Margareta Gruber anchored Francis' original Trinitarian experience in his encounter with the leper.¹⁸ The Legend of the Three Companions¹⁹ does not yet contain the miraculous disappearance of the leprosy, which makes the episode a mystical experience in the narrower sense in the later biographies by Thomas of Celano²⁰ and Bonaventure.²¹ The Companions simply describe an encounter between two people. But their report contains a signal that points to the divine quality of this human encounter: For the kiss of peace with which the leper returns Francis' kiss is not simply a gesture of gratitude. “Peace be with you” (Jn 20:19): The Resurrected Lord appeared in the midst of his disciples with this greeting and medieval readers understood: The kiss of peace of



the leper is the paschal sign, the experience of the Resurrected Lord whom Francis met in the leper. The transformation that took place through that encounter is described by Francis in his Testament: “The Lord granted me, Brother Francis, to begin to do penance in this way: While I was in sin, it seemed very bitter to me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I had mercy (misericordia) upon them. And when I left them that which seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body”.²²

Why is this experience trinitarian? Francis allows God in himself to love the leper, because the love that Francis gives here is not a natural love. After all, he found nothing more repulsive than to see lepers. He felt disgusted and afraid of them. This love is the divine love in him (“Love one another, as I have loved you. No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends”, Jn 15:12f), that removed the bounds of his own small love. And in the leper's kiss of peace he felt that God in the leper was returning that love to him (cf. Jn 20:19). Thus, two persons meet here and yet in this event God is in Francis and God is in the leper. And so, in mutual love, trinitarian life comes about.

¹⁷ Apostolic Exhortation: *Vita consecrata* No. 41

¹⁸ Prof. Dr. Margareta Gruber, *Kirche in der Gemeinschaft sichtbar werden lassen* [Making the Church visible in the community], in: Gruber, Mülling, Schneider, Zahner, *Gottes-Sehnsucht* [God's Longing], Munich 2005, 199-212

¹⁹ Legend IV,11

²⁰ 2 Celano 9

²¹ Life of Francis I,5

²² Testament 1-3

How this primal experience is to be lived out later in the fraternity is shown particularly clearly in the letter to a brother who was responsible for others as a "minister": *And in this I want to know, if you love the Lord and myself, His servant and yours, if you have done this, namely, that there be no friar in the world, who has sinned, as much as one could sin, that, after he has seen your eyes, never leaves without your mercy, if he seeks mercy. And if he would not seek mercy, you are to ask him, if he wants mercy.*²³ In the Latin text the word for mercy is *miser cordia*, as in the Testament. In reconciliation, then, the experience with the leper is to be repeated between the superior and the brother. What is important in this is that

Francis says: *"do not wish that they be better Christians"*.²⁴ Whether the brother responds to the mercy and, like the leper, returns the greeting of peace, remains an open question. Love is always a free gift and the reciprocity of love, in which the Trinitarian life becomes visible, always begins when someone takes the first step "gratis". For Francis, the reciprocity of love is the goal in the Fraternity:

*"And they should love one another, as the Lord says: 'This is my commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you'. And they should show the love they have for one another by their deeds..."*²⁵

When sisters and brothers love one another "in the love of the Spirit", as Francis says, a relationship develops among them corresponding to the model of the Trinity: mutual love between Father and Son, in which the Spirit is the bond of love. That is why Francis' trinitarian spirituality is shown in a special way and very concretely in fraternal togetherness in the spirit of Jesus.

Life in the Trinity is thus about opening up and connecting to the flow of love that connects everything to everything else. Nothing human can ever stop this flow of love, not even our gravest sin. God's love always wins. We cannot stop the ceaselessly flowing power of love. All thinking in categories such as "judgement" or "punishment", once seen through the lens of the Trinity, is overturned by the mercy of God and transformed into restorative justice. The Triune God is the epitome of relationship. Thus, salvation is the ability and the will to remain in relationship. As long as we remain in relationship, the Holy Spirit continues working.

Therefore, in the *Regula non Bullata* Francis considers it important to remain in love. *"And they should beware not to become upset or angry because of the sin of another; because anger and upset prevent love in themselves and in others"*.²⁶

This love that flows through them is the bond that unites the brothers.

In Thomas of Celano we read:

"His constant desire and vigilant striving were always to preserve the bond of unity among his sons, so that those whom the same Spirit had called, and the same Father had begotten might also be peacefully nurtured in the womb of the one Mother. The older should be one with the younger; the wise with the simple through brotherly cordiality; those present with those absent through the bond of love".²⁷

Trinitarian Spirituality and Franciscan Contemplation of the Crucified

Daily "Francis read in the book of the Cross of Christ",²⁸ and instructed his Brothers to do the same. Sr. Margareta elaborates further that the contemplation of the Crucified leads back to Francis' trinitarian experience of God.

²³ Letter to a Minister, 9f

²⁴ Letter to a Minister 8

²⁵ *Regula non Bullata* (RnB) 11,5

²⁶ RnB 5 & RB 7,3

²⁷ 2 Celano 191,1-2

²⁸ Bonaventura, *Life of Francis* IV,3

What he lived throughout his life is condensed in Jesus, the Crucified. This life can be summed up in three attitudes to life, as the late Bishop of Aachen Klaus Hemmerle did, referring to the greatest Franciscan theologian and mystic of the Middle Ages, Bonaventure:²⁹

- Jesus is totally the Son who wants and does the will of the Father in everything. He is completely turned towards the Father in the attitude of *contemplatio*.
- He is fully the messenger of the Father who fulfils his mission for the world in the giving of his life. He is completely turned towards the world in the attitude of *missio*.
- He is fully the brother of humankind, who keeps nothing back for himself and lays down his life for his brethren. He is completely turned towards the other in the attitude of *communio*.

These three attitudes characterise a life in the overflowing love of God. Whereby we must always remain aware: We all - not you or I as individuals, carry the Trinity within us, the necessity of a life in absolute relationship.

Trinitarian Spirituality in a Franciscan Community – some concrete examples

1. Movement into the Depth: *Contemplatio*:

“Place your heart in the figure of the divine substance.

And transform your whole being into the image of the Godhead itself through contemplation! look upon that mirror each day... and continually study your face within it ...”³⁰

When, in the 3rd Letter to Agnes, Clare asks us to look at ourselves daily in God's mirror and to let ourselves be transformed and reshaped by Him, then the image of God that I have as a mirror is essential.

If I look into the mirror of a judging and condemning God, I will walk and develop in a different direction than if I look into the mirror of a loving God. That is why it is so important to have a well cleaned mirror. To have a sound theology and a good image of God is most important for us! *“And all of us, with our unveiled faces like mirrors reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into his image that we reflect in brighter and brighter glory; this is the working of the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3,18).*

Our deepest being is formed in this mirroring process and it is our task to say goodbye to images of God that subjugate and diminish us and to remain in the reflection of the triune God whose essence is love.

Our mission is to truly receive our inner image and then reflect God back into the world, in:

- Loving relationships to one another.
- Loving concern for one another and all of creation.
- A living togetherness, including across national and denominational borders.

2. Movement Outwards/into the World: *Missio*

A community is not there for its own sake, but so that the world can believe. It is about evangelising modern culture by living the Gospel, so that *“what is bitter is changed into sweetness”*.³¹ Social injustice, the plight of refugees, preservation of creation, commitment to peace on a great and small scale and finally the crisis of the Church must not leave us untouched. Trinitarian, overflowing life always also has a political dimension.

3. Movement Inwards/Towards One Another: *Communio*

This is about the concretely shared common life, especially about reconciliation. For the brothers and sisters should *“maintain peace in soul and body for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ”*.³²

²⁹ Cf. Hemmerle, *Gerufen und verschenkt*, München 1987, 19ff

³⁰ 3 Agnes 12; 4 Agnes 15

³¹ Cf. Testament 3

³² Admonitions 15,2

If in any point we try to stop the flow of love within us that wants to flow through us into the world, then we actually fall into sin. And this is about a basic state of mind, not a momentary behaviour. Sin is a state in which we are closed or blocked and therefore refuse the flow of love, which is our actual destiny. Through a hardened heart, through the hatred that divides us, through irreconcilability, through the exploitation of people and nature, we cut ourselves off from this stream. Sin is always a refusal of relationship, a persistence in separation. As soon as we refuse relationship, as soon as we are no longer attuned to receiving and giving, then the Holy Spirit is always missing from our lives. Separation always prevents the flow of love.

To live such a life in relationship means choosing to live in vulnerability. It is risky to live without a protective wall and in constant openness because that means others can actually hurt us. In his incarnation, Jesus chose this life of vulnerability in order to lay a trail of love that enables us to grow into all-encompassing love. Only when we decide to take the risk of vulnerability do we also allow the opposite: that we are blessed, liberated, and even loved. Every wall we build around our hearts, our homes, our countries to become invulnerable, also keeps love out! The key to growth in love lies in vulnerability.

When, beckoned by the Spirit, we allow ourselves to be drawn more and more into the essence of the triune love that embraces everything and everyone, then that power of love works, flowing through us, out of us and beyond us. The Holy Spirit makes us grow and keeps us vulnerable to life and love!

For reflection:

- Where and how do we experience the flow of love in our communities and what hinders it?
- Into which mirror (which image of God) do we look in order to allow ourselves to be transformed by Him?
- Do we dare to be vulnerable so that love can flow?



WATCH VIDEO and panel response

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*Sr. Jane Bertelsen
Given in English*

*Fr. Amando Trujillo Cano
Given in Italian*

The Root of Love in the Undivided Hearts that makes us Grow

Sr. Ivoni Fritzen, FCR
Presentation May 12, 2022

“Always make in yourself a home and dwelling place for Him, who is the Almighty Lord, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and thus, with an undivided heart, grow in universal love, continually converting yourself to God and neighbour” TOR n. 8

We, sisters and brothers, are human, free and open people. We are endowed with intelligence and will. We are creatures made in the image and likeness of God. We are beings of communion who relate to all creatures, ourselves, others, the cosmos and God. Therefore, we are called to fraternity. The word **“always make”** indicates an order, and this order directs that the action be carried out in fraternity. "Make yourselves a home for Him, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." The term "let there be" is present in the accounts of creation where God gives orders and life comes to be (Gen. 1:1-31). The usage "let there be" reminds us of Mary who gives witness to the concrete reality of fruitfulness by conceiving Jesus in her womb. St. Francis of Assisi reminds us of this event when he says "make in yourselves" the dwelling place of the ONE and Triune God. The term "make in ourselves" has the original primacy of the very God who orders and makes it happen, God who was, is, and will be for all eternity.

The process of growing up with an undivided heart

Growing in LOVE with an undivided heart, is for us sisters and brothers, to always be in the attitude of gratitude that welcomes, receives, recognizes the WORK of GOD and at the same time responds with availability and readiness to this great and perfect LOVE. To grow in Love with all one's heart is to aspire and breathe in the atmosphere of the One and Triune God at every moment of one's existence and in every act of daily life. God totally gives himself and comes to us.

Growing in Love is the original dynamism of life, the dynamism of the root of the spiritual and universal path. It is enough that we just walk this path. Growing in the light of the Word (Mk 4, 26-34) is like the seed thrown into the ground that germinates sprouts and grows freely. Likewise, when a human being is conceived, the child develops in the mother's womb, but its growth involves Mother, Father, those close to them, the environment and the entire atmosphere of creation. Growing up is part of the art of the process from "being to becoming", of being a beloved creature, daughter and son. This process is grounded in life in a specific situation, time, space and culture with its values and limits.



Friar D. Fassini, OFM reminds us that "the 'way of operating', means, the way of doing, acting, planning and working every day, as an artisan works"³³. On this path, we are invited to grow by assimilating the values of the Rule: penance, poverty, humility, prayer and life in fraternity.

Growing in the Franciscan consecrated life implies a commitment to a life of prayer, contemplation and spiritual transformation in ceaseless conversion. Each day we must ask the

³³ Fassini, Frei Dorvalino. Spiritual reading and Franciscan formation. 1996. Vozes, RJ

Lord to “give our brothers and sisters a new mind, enlightened by the gospel that allows them to think as Jesus thinks. Give our brothers and sisters a new heart that makes them capable of worshiping the Triune God and loving others following the example of Christ, with a new conscience which impels them toward the service of God and the Church and guides all their conduct according to the requirements of the faith and in accordance with their specific vocation-mission”.³⁴

The Heart is the reference. The more the human being becomes ONE the more universal he/her is!

The heart is central: “for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks” (cf. Lk 6:45). Biblically, the heart can be considered as something that encompasses the totality of our intelligence, emotion and will (Mk 7:20-23). People know things in their hearts, (Deut. 8.5), they pray, meditate, listen, believe and sing by the power of the heart. The human being, loved and saved through Jesus Christ, is called to walk the spiritual path in the light of the Gospel. When one does this, they recognize the goodness, joyfulness and a call to conversion. One also experiences a joyful, repentant, humble and ardent heart for the Word, a heart totally given over to God. “My God and my all”.

GROW in the light of the parable of the seed

Human/spiritual growth is a process that accompanies us in **every time and place**, like the seed that continues in the process, from BEING to BECOMING, until it becomes a tree, and even after becoming a tree continues its process for new phases.

It starts with a seed that has all the potential in it. It can produce 30, 60 or 100-fold, as the Word of God reminds us. When the Word of God enters the human heart, it saves and then sends the person, and in the process, he is born to new life. The person continues to change every day, at all times and in all circumstances and, thus, it broadens one’s path to include many others. Initially the person is weak and needs care throughout the journey of growth. The seed goes through the process of being in the mud, darkness, silence and solitude. Fertilization time! The first challenges are difficult and there is a lot to learn. There are lot of exercises it has to do in order to overcome obstacles.

It gains solid roots over time, it becomes increasingly firm in dimension by expanding its roots deep into our mother earth, and thus, growing in relationship. It’s not different with us too, the deeper we go into the mystery of life facing storms, rain, cold, drought, sun, light and darkness the more rooted we will be in Jesus. We, too, face great difficulties that defy faith, but God helps to overcome them. We have gone through times of drought and rain, light and darkness, storms and even pandemics. However, the seed is being formed with solidity and beauty. It grows strong and becomes a robust tree with leaves and flowers that herald a new time. God’s time, to give shade, to produce fruit, to beautify the work of creation, finally, this new time requires care, docility, attention, contemplation in the light of God’s Word, in the light of life experience and in the light of Kingdom values for all humanity.

The seed bears fruit, the fruits are visible in the life of those who believed “for I know the one in whom I have put my trust,” (2 Tim.1, 12). To be Religious/or Franciscan is to model oneself on the virtues of the One who called us and consecrated us, Jesus, the Son of God. Whoever has one, has them all (praise of the virtues). Seeds becoming plants, thereafter trees with fruit are part of a universal habitat but later they do not belong to themselves but are transformed into food, health, goodness, lightness and joy. Therefore, it is with our life when it is offered to be set aside to live with goodwill like St. Francis of Assisi. Our life does not belong to us, for we fully belong to God and humanity in creation.

³⁴ Comments to the Rule/Martinho Conti. Identity of TOR Brothers and Sisters – 1992 Vozes, p. 72

Growing in “Franciscan” spirituality.

To grow in the grace and knowledge of our poor and crucified Lord is to “become imitators of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11). To live religious consecration with intensity: Those who profess the Evangelical Counsels should initially try to love the God who loved us first (cf. 1Jn 4:10) in all situations of life and strive to promote life hidden with Christ in God from where love of neighbour for the salvation of the world and the building up of the Church springs and acts.³⁵ To remain in the dynamic of formation is not to forget the starting point but to have the clarity of ordinariness which is present in all situations and is the root of the original spirit: to be available and docile on the path.

Consecrated religious life is dynamic by nature. We need to renew ourselves towards the full stature of the body of Christ. Only He can maintain the constant freshness and authenticity of the origins and instill in us the courage to respond to the signs of the times. Let us allow ourselves to be guided by the Spirit of the Lord! Only in the Lord do we become united and therefore universal.

To grow is to experience the gifts and fruits of the Spirit

“The fruits of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.” (Gal. 5: 22-23) Every day surrender oneself in the Father’s arms. To grow is to be in “order” and to live the Gospel based on the example of the washing of the feet. We need to follow His path because “God Himself is the way”,³⁶ the way of virtues.

To grow is to live the theological virtues in an attitude of gratitude.

“We must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.” (2 Thess. 1:3). To grow is to share insecurities and weaknesses and joys and hopes. It is to believe in “Fratelli Tutti”,³⁷ which calls us all to be brothers and sisters.

To grow is to be on the path of Jesus as an itinerant, to walk always, to walk through the villages and outskirts of cities to announce peace and to show solidarity with others. To grow is to give life at every moment of our existence. It is to die for Love, with Love and for Love, that is the Lord. It is to sing: “Love is not loved”.

To grow in the root values of St. Francis is to welcome his Words of the Rule of Life with the original vigour. It is to keep the heart free from any and all kinds of appropriation. It’s to keep oneself free and detached from things and manners, all kinds of power and authority, the goodness that the Lord works in each one, sin and boasting in proclaiming the very Word of God.

Points for reflection:

1. The growth in universal love demands from each one of us to make and remake ourselves as we walk on the path of the love of the ONE TRIUNE God. How do we perceive this reality in our lives and fraternities?

³⁵ Vaticano II. Perfecta Caritatis, n. 6

³⁶ Testament of St. Clare, 5

³⁷ Fratelli Tutti,

Other references: Franciscan sources: Writings, admonitions, praise of the virtues, Rule not bullied (...), Holy Bible and Church Magisterium. Starting from Christ. Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Apostolic Societies. Paulines, p. 45)

2. In the process of growing with an undivided heart, what does the parable of the seed teach us?
3. What do we understand by “not being indifferent”, in the face of injustice, hunger, and big business in the world that seeks to destroy nature and discard the poor?



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Sr. Sheeja Kolacherril
Given in English



Sr. Catherine Takotshe Wandjow
Given in French

The Life of the Trinity as an Experience of Everyday Life

Sr. Ivoni Fritzen, FCR
Presentation May 13, 2022

“Always make in yourself a home and dwelling place for Him, who is the Almighty Lord, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and so, with an undivided heart, grow in universal love, continually converting yourself to God and neighbour” TOR n. 8

THE HUMAN BEING is the Lord's dwelling, the Trinity's dwelling. The human being is a house of synodal communion of love that is interrelated and lives interconnected. Therefore, we are creatures who have the breath of LOVE and the Holy Spirit breathes in us to love with one heart the UNDIVIDED, TRINITY.



In the anthropological, unitary, multidimensional, interdependent and holistic vision, the human being is a unit with multifocal capabilities that allow him/her to have open relationships for the care of life. In biblical theology, we understand the human being as “the image and likeness of God” and it is the abode of the Holy Spirit, therefore, s/he is a spiritual being. In the ecclesial community, the human being is a living corner stone, a co-worker, a disciple or apostle, part of the people of God and an instrument of God's love.

The human being who dwells in the Lord has the glow of simplicity in his eyes, joy of self-surrender and strength to go out to meet others and love. Each creature is the image of the One and Triune Creator, and is the dwelling of the Lord.

This form of existence requires an attitude of humility and humanity. No one is above the others to subjugate, discriminate and condemn. The path that the Word points out to us requires an urgent and necessary passage from selfishness to altruism, from exteriority to interiority, from divisions to unity, from indifference to compassion. It requires from us an attitude of silence, deep listening and contemplating the mystery of Jesus' life in the poor and crucified of our societies. We can dive deep into the mystery of the Most High, Omnipotent, Good Lord, manifested in simplicity, humility and humanity.

To be the Lord's Dwelling is to be intimately connected, linked and united with the Creator, who in His divine mystery incarnated himself in our midst and came to rescue our fraternal humanity.

Let us ask ourselves: Am I the dwelling of the Most High? Are we committed to the process of personal, fraternal, environmental and global conversion? Does spirituality in our fraternities really have its foundation in the contemplation and action of the ONE and TRIUNE God?

MAKE YOURSELF the dwelling/abode of the Most High

The Christian faith understands salvation as the progressive self-giving of the Triune God in history. Salvation is an open invitation to human beings to the infinite communion of the love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In Latin American Trinitarian Theology, situations, history and praxis are emphasized based on the option for the poor and the excluded.³⁸ This understanding of God as communion is essential, for God identified Himself with the excluded from the community, expelled from the city, abandoned, condemned and killed. He surrendered Himself to death and was resurrected. The Triune God is the God of creative love, who creates the world and the human being as recipients of his all-embracing, infinite, communicative and communal love. The revelation of the infinite, open and all-encompassing love of the Triune God in Christ becomes an experience of salvation and a call that summons the Spirit to build his kingdom of communion with all races, languages and peoples. And we, before the mystery of God, remain silent. We realize that thoughts have ceased in our minds. But praise fires the heart and worship bends the knees.

To reflect: Does the Trinitarian dynamic of LOVE help us in fraternal commitment of hope, prophecy and to live the Gospel? What signs of light do we see at a global level in our planet in the face of sickness, extreme poverty, institutionalized violence and many other mechanisms of death that surround us?

- a) **Conversion** is a condition for growing in universal love. It is a **FUNDAMENTAL ATTITUDE OF THE DISCIPLE/SERVANT WHO FOLLOWS IN THE STEPS OF JESUS**. The word conversion comes from the Latin “conversio” and indicates the action of altering, modifying, giving new meaning, orienting towards the path, towards a direction. It is the act of transforming. Thus, in Franciscan language, this act of conversion that results in transformation leads back to the source of our faith in the practice of the Word of God. “Repent, because the Kingdom of God is at hand”. (Mt.13: 1-2). **Metanoia**, therefore, is the transformation of thought. We see in the life of St. Francis: what used to be bitter “looking at the lepers” has become sweetness of body and soul; what was once heroism, glory, recognition “being a gentleman” now he finds them in simplicity, humility and service; what was once proper principle has now become the Will of the Lord found in the Holy Words of God; what was once personal and/or familial has now become a fraternity of younger brothers and sisters; what was once wealth has become poverty in the splendour of grace. And what was poverty has become great wealth; what was previously created as nature has become universal brotherhood. All creatures are now sisters and brothers. It was in the encounter with Jesus, the poor and crucified, that his eyes were fixed on Him (Heb. 12:2-4) and everything was converted to the values of Our Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom. Everything realized in “Let us make” (Gen.1) reminds us that the first initiative belongs to God.
- b) **Universal Love** - Love “is the primordial force of the spirit endowed with volitional activity, an affirming and value-creating force. It is, at the same time, the most powerful force to communicate a noble structure to the totality of human life and to perform in all its fullness the moral order”.³⁹ God is love, the centrality of the heart is love, growth takes place in love.
- c) **Centrality of love** - In Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical, “Deus Caritas est”,⁴⁰ God is Love. The Pope claims that 1 Cor. Chapter 13 summarizes all the reflections he makes throughout his Encyclical Letter. This Hymn to Love “must be the Magna Carta of all ecclesial service” (no. 34) says the Pope. St. Paul teaches us that charity is always something more than a mere activity. Practical action is insufficient if love for the human being is not palpable in it, a love that is nourished by an encounter with Christ. Benedict XVI insists that love should not be restricted to giving something to others, love is much more: it is about giving oneself, “being present in the gift as a person”. And Pope Francis

³⁸ Boff. Leonardo - *Vozes*, 2009; Boff, Leonardo. *A Trindade e a Sociedade*, Petrópolis, 1999, p. 19

³⁹ W. Bruger in *Dicionário de filosofia*, Herder, S. Paulo, 1962, pp54-56

⁴⁰ Encyclical Letter DEUS CARITAS EST of the Supreme Pontiff BENEDICT XVI. To Bishops, Priests and Deacons, Consecrated Persons, and to all the lay faithful about Christian love.

embodies this reality of love in his decisions, in his concrete gestures since the beginning of his pontificate.

- d) **The cry of the reality of being loveless:** “Social life in harmonious and peaceful coexistence is seriously deteriorating (...) due to the growth of violence, which manifests itself in robberies, assaults, kidnappings and, what is more serious, in murders that destroy more human lives daily and fill families and society as a whole with pain”.⁴¹ Let's not even talk about drugs that spread like crack. The document, however, not only records the misfortunes of the world we live in, but teaches us the way to face this harsh reality: “The radical nature of violence can only be solved with the **radical nature of redemptive love**”. We must proclaim that the “radical” cultural axis of a new society is to give oneself totally in love to solve all types of conflict. We need to promote the “Civilization of Love” as advocated by Pope Paul VI.
- e) **Laudato Si's Cry** - “The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development...”⁴² Pollution affects us every day. Fires, waste produced, debris from land and of goods, injustices, diseases, poverty and misery grow every day for many people. The loss of biodiversity implies lack of life in the future. The deterioration of the quality of human life and social degradation is also caused by urban “chaos”, by a policy that has lost its sense of the common good, by planetary inequality. In “Querida Amazônia”,⁴³ Pope Francis reveals a great love by encouraging us to dream and work for the the realization of Dreams: A social dream that integrates and promotes all the inhabitants in order to consolidate the “good living”; A cultural dream that cultivates without uprooting, makes it grow without weakening identity, promotes people's lives without invading respect; An ecological dream that recognizes that everything is interconnected (LS.no.16; 91; 117; 138; 240) and that there is a close relationship between human beings and nature; An ecclesial dream that continues in the indications and decisions of Vatican II, in the proclamation and witness of the Gospel of Joy, being a Church in exit, towards the one who is different, especially of the poorest. Among so many other challenges, Franciscan Religious Life has as its reason for existence, the vocation as a sign of God's way of being in the world. Reveal the primacy of love for humanity, especially those who suffer most. Let us remember that, at the origin of all Congregations, the voice that echoed came from the world of the poor, assumed with audacity and became the charism and mission. Therefore, at the root of all foundational charisms is the cry of threatened life.

In conclusion, I recall the document Fratelli Tutti which shows us the practice of love with evangelical roots and concreteness in communion among peoples for the abundant life of all. Thus, remaining in the dynamics of formation consists in being centered on the focus of the Trinitarian love that opens itself to the clamour of the world and which in this historic time needs discernment, prayer and renewed vigour.

⁴¹ V Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Episcopate – Aparecida-BR, 13-31 May 2007, no. 78.

⁴² Encyclical Letter “LAUDATO SI’ of the Holy Father Francis on the care of the common house, no.13

⁴³ Post Synodal Exhortation of Pope Francis. Querida Amazônia: To the people of God and to all people of good will”, Paulus. 2020



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*Sr. Rosa Amelia Misnaza Campaña
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