

## LIVING A GOSPEL LIFE

### THE GOSPEL OF OUR LORD, JESUS CHRIST

These are good words to remember:

“In that love which is God, I beg and implore you to hear these fragrant words of our Lord Jesus Christ with humility and love, putting them into practice with all gentleness and observing them perfectly.” *St Francis in his Letter to All the Faithful*

“life became a continuous process of allowing the words of the Gospel to enter profoundly into every fibre of his being: their sound, articulation, imagery, and meaning.” *Regis J Armstrong OFM Cap – The Franciscan Tradition [page xxiii]*

"He became totally immersed physically, cognitively, emotionally and spiritually in the Word. The Gospel helped Francis move closer in love to Christ. His entire life being transparent with the Holy Spirit's activity of inspiring us to live as children of God." *Regis J Armstrong OFM Cap – The Franciscan Tradition [page xxiii]*

“Francis embodies the Gospel journey from violence to non-violence, wealth to poverty, power to powerlessness, selfishness to selfless service, pride to humility, indifference to love, cruelty to compassion, vengeance to forgiveness, revenge to reconciliation, war to peace, killing enemies to loving enemies. More than any other Christian, he epitomizes discipleship to Jesus. His witness continues to shine throughout the world.” *John Dear : You Will Be My Witnesses Saints, Prophets, and Martyr*

### GOSPEL TO LIFE AND LIFE TO GOSPEL

The Secular Franciscan Order Rule 4 says: “Secular Franciscans should devote themselves especially to careful reading of the gospel, going from gospel to life and life to gospel.”

This rhythm is the foundation of the symphony of our lives.

- The Gospel gives us perspectives with which we interpret life.
- The Gospel offers us values that guide our actions.
- The Gospel gifts us with the inner spirit that governs our relationships.
- The Gospel helps us take action that reflects gospel attitudes on social issues and the judgements we make in daily life.

## **THE RHYTHM OF LEARNING AND DOING**

We do not presume to know the Gospel completely nor do we implement it with perfection. Daily life is where we continue our growth both in knowledge of the Gospel and its implementation. Our Franciscan symphony combines the rhythm of learning and doing the Gospel – day after day after day. We commit ourselves to this process. Without the Gospel we would be lost, feel isolated or threatened, inadequate or despairing.

If we only READ the Gospel and never APPLY it, we would be hypocrites with big words but small actions. If all we did was act without knowing the Gospel, we might simply be going through the motions. One role of fraternity life is to nudge us to go from gospel to life – life to gospel!

## **TO BE A GOSPEL SERMON REQUIRES CONVERSION**

Franciscans are ordinary people. We work to develop a gospel image. That requires a regular change or conversion. The OFS Rule 7 puts it this way: “Motivated by the dynamic power of the gospel, let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the gospel itself calls ‘conversion.’ Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily.”

We are gospel people and the Sacred Scriptures are vital to our lives. Since we desire to implement the Gospel, we have to know the Gospel. Bible knowledge does not come magically. It takes work.

We are NOT fundamentalists who can quote chapter and verse.

Instead we show the implications of the Gospel by the way we live.

Neither are we Lone Rangers using Scripture texts to support what we want to do, nor are do we group together as a club to subdue others in an argument.

Our goal is not to be intellectual biblical scholars but people who practice what we learn from the Bible.

We avoid using the Bible as a club to judge and punish others or win arguments.

It is not an exercise to see how many texts we can memorize.

We will never exhaust the full meaning of Scripture. Hence our lifelong commitment is to continue the journey of learning and applying the Gospel in daily life.

Bible Reading isn’t just for indoors! Take it for a walk – feel the words within Creation.

### A number of things are required of Secular Franciscans in relation to the Bible:

1. Our guidebook is the Bible – we use it!
2. Jesus and his words have special value to us. We listen to him.

3. In fraternal gatherings we share insights and reflections for implementing the Gospel in everyday life.
4. When we are puzzled about texts, we seek competent help.
5. We avoid fundamentalist attitudes that limit the power of Scripture.
6. We work to deepen our understanding of Scripture.
7. We avoid attitudes that use Scripture to condemn others or identify them as non-salvageable.
8. The circle of our love must never become narrow. We seek to include rather than exclude people.
9. We use Scripture for prayer as well as study, letting its power touch us and soak into our lives.

The Gospel is our guide when we assess the values and attitudes of society that are in conflict with the Gospel.

- We face situations where our commitment to gospel ideals will be challenged.
- Our awareness of personal weakness keeps us from judging other who experience the same weakness.
- We are called both to confront in love and to walk with people who are struggling.
- Our culture may canonize people for the wrong reasons.
- Greed is not a virtue.
- Profit-making does not make people good.
- Isolationism doesn't reflect the gospel call to welcome others.
- Tough mindedness may be needed at times, but it is not a lifestyle to be embraced when it diminishes people's dignity.

Following the Gospel is neither easy nor simple. It may be difficult to confront a generous benefactor whose business practices are counter to the Gospel. Friends we care about are not always gospel-value people and it's hard to deal with them lovingly. Our own failures are not easy to address. There is little doubt that we need another's help on this journey.

### **THE GOSPEL IS LIVEABLE AND JOYFUL**

Francis, Clare, Thank you.

Thank you for proving that the gospel is liveable and joyful.

Thank you for showing that simplicity is a gem not a burden.

Thank you for teaching us that poverty is not a trap, but a gift that frees.

Thank you for helping us with suffering that cannot destroy joy when embraced with love.

Thank you for keeping Jesus at the centre of life and for your trust in the Holy Spirit.

Thank you for responding to God's call with such wholehearted love.

Thank you for the warmth of your friendship with each other.

It helps us realize the importance of relationships.

[Lester Bach OFM Cap]

All Text from paragraph titled Gospel to Life and Life to Gospel : Come and See [Page 6 and 9]  
Lester Bach OFM Cap & Teresa V Baker OFS.