

Reflection – Feast of St. Francis
October 4, 2019
by S. Shirley Krull

I have lived with Francis my whole life. At least I feel that way. I can see habited friars from my earliest memories. Every time I went to mass, there was the priest with the capuch at the neckline over the mass vestments. The few times I saw a non-Franciscan priest celebrating mass, there was always a part of the dress missing!

Every time we walked the streets by school, by church, by the shops there were sandled friars in their Franciscan habits. There were friars on the busses that took us to the Cardinal knothole games. It is so easy for me to picture them and feel the spirit of the humble and poor Francis as a part of my earliest life.

In receiving the feast day letter from the General Council, and their inviting us to “think of someone who is humble and meek and then asking us to describe that someone”, I thought “I got it”. I invite each now to follow through on the request of the general leadership of our congregation. “Think of someone who is humble and meek. What words do you choose to describe them.” We will take a moment.

In one of Father Richard Rohr’s more recent reflections he wrote “Francis said through his lifestyle, ‘I will delight in powerlessness, humility, poverty, simplicity, and failure.’ I did not recognize all of those descriptive words in the neighborhood friars when I was young. But some I did, like poverty. And those words are the Francis I had in mind when I worked with Melanie on the hymns for today’s mass. Fr. Rohr says that ‘Francis lived so close to the bottom of things that there was no place to fall. Even when insulted, he did not take offense.’ That is freedom, or what Francis called ‘perfect joy’.”

Back to my memories of Friars. On my class kindergarten photo, (now that is a long time ago) Father Bernard sits in the middle front. There he is in his Franciscan habit, the weight pouch below his knotted rope cincture at the waist, his gentle smile. I don’t even have that photo any more and I can picture him and know fatherliness and care.

The friars were in our classrooms, they taught religion when I was a high school student. It was most likely not a Franciscan theology. But it was a spirit of simplicity, poverty and joy. I loved the St. Francis stories. They felt like freedom to live without burdens. My father gained that spirit also and said to us children many times. “If it was not for you, kids, I would be a poor Franciscan monk.” And so, I imbibed the spirit of Francis in school, in church, at home, on the neighborhood streets and I wanted to live that life.

That immersion into the experience of Francis everywhere in my youth, I interpret to be what Karl Rahner maintains as a deep primordial experience that haunts the center of our hearts. It is of a God who remains holy mystery, the word that illuminates our spirits and the love that embraces us. It is the experience of God in our daily lives. (As children, teenagers, young adults into our aging). We are like sponges in water. I realize now that I was experiencing God through the realization of friars and Francis in my life. As Rahner says “God-above-us (holy mystery), God-with-us (enfleshed Word), and God-in-us (Holy Spirit).”

So to Wheaton I came already filled with a Francis spirit. I have been blessed to continue to be surrounded with this Franciscan spirit in the charism of Mother Clara.

I will express this spirit in the thoughts and words I am taking from Sr. Ilia Delio. I have been contemplating with her from her book *Franciscan Prayer* sentence by sentence for years. For me Ilia and this book are Franciscan treasures. Here I want to say and finish my reflection with a paragraph that she wrote in Father Richard Rohr's latest newsletter.

From Sister Ilia "When Love takes hold of us, we begin to yield and let Love direct our lives. Such is the experience of God in our daily lives. Such was the life of Francis of Assisi. Love took hold of his heart, it opened his eyes to see the world with new vision. In the poor he saw an icon of Christ, in the leper Francis tasted the goodness of God, (that particularly fills me with feeling), in the earthworms he saw the humility of God, and in the birds he saw the divinity of being a creature of God. Francis revered every creature as the very presence of Christ. He embraced each one passionately, returning love for love."

This is our Franciscan life - returning love for love - returning only blessing - as we celebrate today our brother, Francis!