

---

**Regular Meeting:** Sun. July, 8, 2:00 PM—South Rm. St. Helen's Christian Living Center.

**Council Meeting:** Sat. July 14, 9:30 AM—Arby's on west side of Rt 1, at 16<sup>th</sup> Place, Vero Beach.

**Agenda and Schedule for Meeting:**

- 2:00 Opening Prayer, Reports, Old/New Business
- 2:20 Blessing of our donations to the Food Pantry
- 2:25 Member Sharing how God is working in our lives
- 2:35 Ongoing Formation: Film on the Life of Saint Padre Pio followed by group discussion on a Scripture reading chosen by Donna Haro
- 3:10 Refreshments and break
- 3:30 Liturgy of the Hours
- 4:00 Closing Prayer and dismissal

**Refreshment Committee:**

- Snacks:** Andrea Cardoza and Sarah Hardy
- Beverages:** Donna Haro

**Minister:** Peggy Rysdyke, SFO  
**Vice-Minister:** Donna M. Haro, SFO  
**Secretary:** Elizabeth Smith, SFO  
**Treasurer:** Sarah Hardy, SFO  
**Formation Director:** Helen Caldarone, SFO  
**Councillors-at-Large**  
Ed O'Donnell, SFO, Fred Schaeffer, SFO, and  
Kathleen Van Buskirk, SFO  
**Spir. Assisitant:** Fr. Richard P. LaCorte, SFO  
**Vocation Director:** Kathleen Van Buskirk, SFO  
**Commissioners**  
**Work:** Donna M. Haro, SFO  
**Family:** Eugene Caldarone, SFO  
**Peace and Justice:** John Matthews, SFO  
**Youth:** Pauline Pavlick, SFO  
**Ecology:** Fred Schaeffer, SFO  
**Other:** Webmaster/Ed. Fred Schaeffer, SFO

**Remember in your prayers:** Julia McHugh, Jennie Donlin, George Thomas, Jerry Carey, Donna Haro, John Matthews, Fred Schaeffer, Marie Fee, Jack Solloway, and all professed Franciscans in our Florida region who are ill, as well as those members of our Fraternity who cannot attend our meetings regularly.

**Council Meeting Report:** It was suggested at the Council Meeting that we have a short period of time for sharing how God is working in our lives. Someone else's sharing often touches our own lives and helps us on our journey. Please come prepared to share.

In September we will start using the Christian Prayer book published by the Catholic Book Publishing Company for the Liturgy of the Hours. If you are not able to get the book by then, we can share.

**From the Minister's Desk:** God is always with us, but, sometimes we get so bogged down with the cares of the world that we forget the wonders that He evokes. Sharing our experiences of God's interventions can be the answer for someone else. Please, allow Him to work through you at our next meeting. God bless you.

---

## The Inner Life: Contemplation

by Fred Schaeffer, SFO

Many Christians shy away from the very mention of the word "Contemplation," because they do not understand it and they may have some notion what it really is not. As I mentioned in the first article "The Interior Life is for all Franciscans," this inner life is a gift from God. There are various forms of this interior life, this life of the soul, and contemplation comes to mind. Yes, anyone can have an interior life of contemplation providing you are serious about stemming the flow of sin in your life. Contemplation is also a gift from God.

People will stop me right there, and suggest Buddhist contemplation, or Zen contemplation. Well, we're only dealing with Christic contemplation here, which is nothing less than a deep love communion with the triune God. "By depth here we mean a knowing loving that we cannot produce but only receive. It is not merely a mentally expressed "I love You". It is a wordless awareness and love that we ourselves cannot initiate or prolong. The beginnings of this contemplation are brief and frequently interrupted by distractions. The reality is so unimposing that one who lacks instruction can fail to appreciate what exactly is taking place. Initially infused prayer is so ordinary and unspectacular in the early stages that many fail to recognize it for what it is. Yet with generous people, that is, with those who try to live the whole Gospel wholeheartedly and who engaged in an earnest prayer life, it is common."<sup>1</sup>

It is said, sadly, that only 15% of Catholics go to Church and receive the Sacraments. So I'm primarily addressing these writings to these 15%, and in particular to my fellow Franciscans. But that's not to exclude other Christians who experience their faith in a deeper way. One can only have a deeper relationship with Jesus when every effort is made to reduce sin in our lives. Many praise Jesus with their lips. But their actions do not follow through. Maintaining an inner life with Jesus is the best and only way to praise Jesus fully, by emulating His love for us completely. One does this by complete abandonment of things of the world and by not sinning mortally and making a solid effort to reduce venial sin. Jesus died for the small sins too.

Now what about the other 85% of people who were baptized Catholic and who are no longer, perhaps, going to church. Aside from missing Mass on Sundays, which is in itself a serious omission, don't you miss receiving Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar? Especially, when you know in your heart that He is there under the species of bread and wine, in Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity? And, that He desires for you to come back to Him? Think about it, about what you are throwing away. Think about the walls you've placed between yourself and Jesus, who loves you still, and the hurdles you now need to overcome to be re-united with Him. Give it lots of thought and please pray about it.

Christians who choose not to sin, or at least, to make every effort not to sin, are in a better place or disposition to experience an intimate love with Jesus. It is not overly important that I tell you about my own experiences with God's infinite love, except to say that I rarely write about matters I have no experience with. However, in the year 2002, I made a conscious choice based on great desire to serve Jesus better, and made a Vow of Obedience and Chastity. I take these vows very seriously although not required of Secular Franciscans. These promises are really the foundation or underpinnings of everything I do and I make a deep effort to love God and sin no more, and to love my brothers and sisters as I do myself.

The peace I find within myself is, first of all, a lack of fear or worry. I feel a peace I'm not able to define, except to say that God is with me and as His presence deepens within me, it becomes a mutual fire of love. Have you ever been in love? You have... now can you honestly say that you gave more of yourself than you expected or demanded in return? If so, your love was not an "ego trip." In the inner life with Christ, there is no room for ego trips of any kind. In fact, the life in Christ does not deal with what I *feel*, but what one perceives **God wants**. It is a prayer without words, an endless song of praise and understanding.

There are different stages of this infused prayer, this indwelling of the triune God. According to the great mystics, St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Avila, and others, some Franciscans too, there exists a classic text of St. Teresa of Avila, a Spanish Carmelite, called *Interior Castle*. According to Father Dubay, "...[Interior Castle] is also the all-time classic on the question of the development of prayer from its incipient beginnings to its mature fullness in the transforming union."<sup>2</sup> This text can be viewed at: <http://www.franciscan-sfo.org/Avila/0-InteriorCastle.htm> (but may I recommend that you finish reading this article, first).

I recall a Cassette Tape of a lecture, ***Principles of Spiritual Development***, by Father Benedict Groeschel, C.F.R., whom I've known for 45 years, in which he says that there is no weekend course in contemplation. It's true, the development of an interior life with Christ is so subtle and its origins and so permeated, initially, with distractions, that to study it in stages makes sense. St. Teresa of Avila speaks of seven stages which she calls seven Mansions. "St. Theresa's starting point is the absolute basic condition for a serious prayer life, an earnest continuing effort to rid oneself of sins, imperfections and attachments."<sup>3</sup> Before we get to the first stage of prayer life, a life of intimacy with God, St. Teresa tells us that this love-life needs to be very pure and unsullied by any selfishness.

Nowadays in the 21st Century, people tend to laugh at our 16th Century teacher and wonder what a St. Teresa, living a cloistered existence would know about "Life." I can tell you, after studying her writings (mostly when I was in religious life), she knew more about life than most of us do. Many people today live in a state of perpetual and deadly sin and maybe they don't even realize how dangerous that is. In truth, the world has become so secularized that the true meaning of God has taken on a gradually worsening definition. Turn on the radio or TV and it becomes clearly evident within 5 minutes that we live in dangerous times. Times where people have lost the ability to tell right from wrong and many do not care one way or the other.

People who live in any type of a love relationship with God, with Christ, know deep down that the only way to God is by giving up selfishness. God is compassionate and merciful and His love is very great, but do we also love Him in the same way? Many people believe that praising the Lord out loud, visiting churches and reciting pious prayers brings them closer

to God. It would if our inner disposition motivated us to stay away from sin, knowing how sin is an affront to the love of God. People who say "Well, God understands me," they scare me. I am afraid that they are missing the point of God's infinite love and care for them. If we make a conscious effort to reduce sin, first serious sin, then venial sin, this can be achieved. With God's help and a firm commitment on our part, a full commitment, any healing is possible. But we have to give it our all! God doesn't just seek people who follow Him when the mood strikes them; He seeks people who go all the way in following Him.

St. Teresa's first Mansion in the development of prayer is clearly a beginning; it's where we don't yet know what it all means. These stages or Mansions can each take a long time for us to experience, and most of us don't get to the last two stages in this lifetime. I should explain here that this inner life relationship with Jesus is not felt emotionally. It is not felt by our senses. But if we have it, we will come to know and recognize His Presence in our lives. St. Teresa offers the beginner some solid advice: "You must not tire yourself by trying to think a great deal, nor worry about meditation...keep occupying yourself all the time with the praise of the Lord."

In the Second Mansion, which, under the Teresian concept of the inner life, we reach, we find people who have experienced some progress but who are still far away from their destination. In them, some growth has occurred. They experience perhaps, daily conversion of a soul seeking harmony and balance. The second stage is often one of conflict between the ways of the world and the call one receives from God to live a life leading to holiness. It is a time where you sort of feel yourself suspended over the abyss and Jesus holds you up and lifts you on one side and the devil pushes down on the other side! I've experienced this in a frightening way when I was in religious life, recalling the sins of my past and still feeling some attachment to those while my tendency was to stay away from the past and go forward toward Jesus. Satan is alive and he does not like people who love God more, and he makes this known to certain people, if not all, and so you must be very strong and reject him out of hand in the Name of Jesus. I know what God desired of me. He called me to total repentance. He asked me (through others) to repent and to take up my staff, and follow Him. It was an inner awareness what I had to do, and I did because I love God before all else and certainly more than the human condition that separated me from Him. All this happened while I was in religious life, first with the OFM where I left for personal reasons, and within a few months I then joined the Monks of Adoration, a contemplative rather than an active order. By the way, here the word contemplative has a slightly different meaning than what we're covering in this article. Here contemplative refers to the fact that these monks did their work for the Lord in-house, in the monastic enclosure.

In any event, after spending 6 months with the Monks in Postulancy, a few days before investiture in the habit of the order (which occurred on August 28, 1998), I was asked on a Sunday if I wanted to accompany my Superior and his parents to a healing service given by a well-known healer-intercessor which was held periodically at a Catholic Church in Worcester in Massachusetts (Our monastery was in Petersham). I was somewhat skeptical of healer-intercessors but figured it would in any case be an interesting experience so I agreed to come. In the back of the car on the way over, I began to pray and to think. I put a problem I had been experiencing at the foot of the Cross. And, Jesus gave me a sign, a moment of Grace. Today, and ever since 1998, I feel a wonderful peace and calmness. I know Jesus and our Mother, are with me. Praise God.

In order to find Jesus Christ and experience Him in this beautiful way, vigilance is a must. In this day and age it is ease to get distracted by things that are not of God. But as Franciscans, we have an advantage. It takes all our energy to follow the Rule of Saint Francis to the letter, so we won't have that much time to get off track. On this feast of Pentecost, I pray that you may find Him, and invite Him to be your Spouse in a deep inner life of the soul, a life of contemplation. It is a life that becomes the foundation of all you do as Franciscans! I say this to Secular Franciscans and the friars and our religious sisters and Poor Clares, alike. Isn't it great to be a Franciscan? May the Lord bless you and keep you. May He guide you to bring you closer to Him. Amen.

Rev. June 2007

1. *Fire Within*, Thomas Dubay, S.M. 1989 Ignatius Press, Chapter 5 "What is Contemplation."
2. *ibid.*
3. *ibid.*

This article can be found at: <http://www.franciscan-sfo.org/in/Inner03.htm>

## **Formation program for the Eighth Centenary of St. Elizabeth of Hungary**

### **Year One: The life of St. Elizabeth**

#### **Month 6. Her conscience and her sense of justice**

Elizabeth was taught by her confessor, Conrad of Marburg, to always follow the dictates of her conscience. She did this when she refused to eat the food from her husband's lands that was extorted unjustly from the poor.

She knew that the poor did not need only our compassion, but justice as well. This understanding of justice would later lead her, after her expulsion from her dower lands and castle, to refuse the sustenance her brother-in-law, now ruling Thuringia, would have offered her. She did this, her handmaid Irmgard said, because "she did not want to receive her nourishment by theft and by taxing the poor, as was so often the practice at the courts of princes."

Elizabeth also did everything she could to preserve the dignity of the poor people she came in contact with. Knowing that the poor often did not have shrouds, she would provide shrouds of the best linen and prepare them for burial with her own hands.

She understood that the right to work is one of the things most conducive to human dignity. When famine struck Thuringia in 1226, she made sure that all the poor were not just fed, but had the proper clothes and tools so that they could work and prepare for the new harvest.

At that time, the lives of mothers-to-be and their children were often threatened by poverty as they are today. Elizabeth provided for pregnant women, making sure that they had enough food, money and clothing to care for themselves and their children.

Spiritual reflection:

Elizabeth saw that each poor or sick or marginalized person she came across was a child of God, and a brother or sister of Christ. Because of this, each and every human life was precious to her; each of the poor, sick and handicapped was a person of unique dignity, including the unborn children. As St. James, said: "Did not God choose those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that he promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor person (James 2:4-5)." Today's culture of death desperately needs to learn this truth.

Recognition of human dignity requires us to act not just with charity and compassion for the unfortunate but preservation of their human rights and assuring justice for them, including the right to work. Elizabeth is also our example in this.

---

#### **Month 7. Meeting the poor**

Elizabeth lived as a rich woman in a castle, but did not ignore what went on in the outside world. She became aware of the human misery that surrounded her. She went out to encounter and help the poor, and they in turn, changed her.

In his Testament, St. Francis said that the true beginning of his conversion was his encounter with the lepers. He saw the suffering of Christ in them. Elizabeth too saw Christ in the lepers. According to a legend, Elizabeth once placed a leper in the bed she shared with her husband. When Ludwig look at the bed, he saw Christ on the crucifix there. Elizabeth cared for the lepers by washing their feet, comforting them and giving them alms.

In 1226, during her husband's absence in Italy, there was a terrible famine in Germany. Elizabeth fed all of the poor by distributing her husband's personal grain harvest in our four corners of his domain. She also gave the food from her own mouth to those in need.

Elizabeth also founded a hospital for the poor at the foot of the Wartburg, and tended the sick, even the worst cases, with her own hands. She was not deterred by the terrible smells. She was so kind and affectionate that all the poor children would run to her and call her "mother."

Spiritual reflection:

Our encounter with the poor should lead us to see Christ in others, especially in their suffering. It should lead us to give them the most personal and loving attention, as we would to Christ, for they are his brothers and sisters. Our encounter with the poor should change us as well, by teaching us to sacrifice for others and live in a simpler way.

Gospel: "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me. Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Mt. 25:35-36, 40)