

Dear Friends,

Recently I heard that Joyce Rupp always read with a pencil in her hand, so that she could note down thoughts and reflections that appealed to her.



I found this interesting, as I often do the same thing.

As the seasons of Advent and Christmas approach, I was searching for some suitable reflections, and found the following, which I would like to share with you. It is taken from an article I read some years ago.

In Evelyn Waugh's novel on Helen, mother of the Emperor Constantine, he has her in Bethlehem on the feast of the Epiphany. (Helen is tired of all the politics and divisions in her son's realm, so has come to the Holy Land to search for the true Cross.)

She attends Mass and listens attentively to the account of the Magi – they strike her as men who are clever and rich. Then, on reflection, she realizes that they are late arrivals at the manger – the shepherds, simple and rustic folk – were there long before the Wise Men. Even the cattle had come on time, she mused!

But the Magi? As Helen continues to reflect, she sees how slow their journey was – they had to cal-

culate the stars, study their maps, and even consult the wicked King Herod. They arrive late, and on account of their visit, many innocent babies will be put to the sword. However, the Christ Child welcomes them with the same love and joy as He had given to the shepherds, and He also accepts their gifts with the same delight.

At Christmas, people come to the Crib by different routes – some find the way quickly – others take time to rid themselves of the complexities and materialism of modern life. We too bring ourselves with our own experiences – we come with our failures, our broken promises and our weaknesses, and lay them at the feet of the Infant. To reach the manger, we may have travelled down difficult byways, sometimes going off course and losing sight of the Star. However, we come as we are, no matter how tangled or complicated our lives may be.

St Helen took the Wise Men as her patrons – patrons of all latecomers, of all who have had a tedious journey in life, of those who have lost their way through confusion or guilt. This Christmas, let us pray for all such people – and for ourselves – that by God's grace we may all find a "kneeling place in the straw" to offer Him our gifts of love and peace.

- Sr Liz

ST. AGNES OF ASSISI

Though much has been written on the life of Clare, we have almost nothing about her younger sister, Agnes.

According to historical records, Clare died on August 11, 1253. Agnes followed her on November 16 of the same year, and both are buried close to each other in Assisi. (The tomb of Agnes, in the church of Santa Chiara, has been the site of numerous miracles.)

Their lives and ideals were inseparable – one need only recall the rumpus over Agnes's efforts to follow Clare in the way of Francis, when he sent Clare to the Benedictine convent of Sant' Angelo di Panzo. Agnes joined her there at the tender age of 15. Family members followed, and tried in vain to force her to return to her home, but she was adamant and refused to go with them.

In a sense, Agnes was the first Franciscan "mis-

sionary”, since she was sent by her sister to Monticello, outside Florence, to found another convent of the Poor Ladies, as they were known then. Later, she founded convents at Mantua, Venice and Padua, and firmly supported Clare in her struggle for complete poverty in their Order. One can just imagine the



St. Agnes

amount of communication that was exchanged in those founding years. However, all we have today is one letter written by Agnes to Clare, probably around 1230. This is truly a remarkable document, and testifies to the profound and loving bond between these two blood and spiritual sisters. (This letter from Agnes to Clare can be found in “Clare of Assisi – Early Documents”). The two sisters loved each other, but they had a deep sense of mission. It is obvious that this commitment to God’s Kingdom came at great personal cost, for Agnes wrote:

“This sorrow is always afflicting me: this emotional tenderness is always torturing me: this ardent desire is always consuming me. As a result, distress utterly possesses me, and I do not know what to do, what I should say, since I do not expect to see you and my sisters again in this life.”

However, she did see Clare and the other sisters again, because she returned to San Damiano in 1253, the year both sisters died. Because both of them lived with a profound commitment to the Franciscan values of poverty, contemplation, minority and penance, they did whatever was necessary to extend the Reign of God, even if it cost them dearly. There is obviously a lesson here for each one of us.

FRANCISCAN SCHOOLS

Franciscan Schools Australia (FSA) is sponsored by the Missionary Franciscan Sisters and supported by Franciscan Leaders throughout Australia. The logo was created for FSA, using the TAU of St. Francis, and incorporating the Southern Cross, sun, moon and earth. Franciscan Schools Australia was

launched in order to assist teachers to spread the spirituality of St Francis in their schools.



There are currently 30 member schools from Queensland, NSW, Victoria, South Australia and Canberra. Sr Pauline Robinson has been the co-ordinator of FSA since 2006. The first National Conference was held in Brisbane in 2007. The next National Conference is planned for May 6-8, 2009, and will be held at the Baulkham Hills Centre for Reflective Living in Sydney.

The theme is “Our Sister, Mother Earth: Franciscan Creation Spirituality.” The keynote speakers are Ilia Delio, OSF from Washington Theological College in the United States, and Rev. Denis Edwards from Perth. Both are renowned authors and speakers on the environment.

On June 13, feast of St Anthony, the FSA launched its new website. There are 18 categories of Franciscan resources to be found on this website. The address for this website is www.fsa.asn.au

You can access the resources by entering your e-mail address. You will be e-mailed a password which you can change when you log in next time.

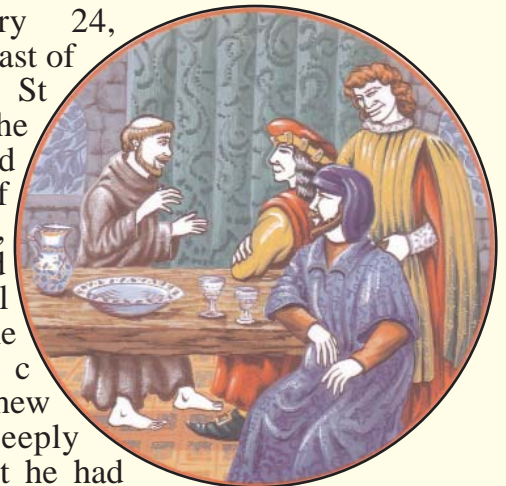
- Sr Pauline Robinson, MFIC
Co-Ordinator FSA



1208 – 2008

800 years since the birth of Franciscan-Clarissan Charisma.

On February 24, 1208, on the Feast of the Apostle St Matthias, in the recently repaired little Chapel of the Portiuncula, Francis listened to the Gospel message of the Apostolic Mission: Matthew 10: 7-9. Deeply moved by what he had heard, Francis cried out:



“This is what I desire, this is what I am seeking, this is what I yearn for from the very depths of my heart!”

On April 10 of that very same year, the first Brothers joined him: Bernard of Quintavale, Pieter Catanii and Egidio of Assisi. They opened the Book of the Gospels at random and found in it the following verses –

Mark 10.21 (Go and sell everything ...)
Luke 9.3 (Take nothing ...)
Matt. 16.24 (... let him renounce himself.)

The year 1208 therefore is the year when Franciscan-Clarissan was born. Let us thank God for these 800 years of Franciscan fidelity throughout the world.

1209 was also a significant year, for this was the year that Francis obtained the oral approval from Pope Innocent III for a Rule for the Friars Minor. This approval on the part of the Church, marks the moment when the “First Order”, or the Friars Minor, came into being.

THE CANTICLE cont'd



Francis, the little poor man from Assisi, lay dying upon Mother Earth. With nothing to call his own, he was the wealthiest of all – the love of God and of his brothers surrounded him. He requested the brothers to sing for him the CANTICLE, the melody of which he himself had taught them. After they had done so, Francis praised God for Sister Death with the following words, and thus completed the CANTICLE –

*All praise by yours, my Lord through
 Sister Death, from whose embrace
 No mortal can escape.
 Woe to those who die in mortal sin!
 Happy those she finds doing your will!
 The second death can do no harm to them.
 Praise and bless my Lord,
 And give Him thanks,
 And serve Him with great humility.*



*God, help us to live simply,
 To move slowly.
 To look softly,
 To allow emptiness,
 To let the heart create for us.
 Amen.*

- Leunig

THE CHRISTMAS CANE

I'm sure all of us have seen the candy cane in our Christmas decorations every year – hanging on Christmas trees and in stockings. But not many know the true meaning behind its making, which I am going to share with you.

A candy maker in Indiana wanted to make a candy that would show how much he loved Jesus and what Jesus had done for him. Thus he made the candy cane – a candy that would symbolize the life of Jesus.



Turned upside down, the candy became a “J”, representing the name of Jesus and the celebration of His birth. Turned upright, the cane became a shepherd's staff – Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd and we are His sheep. The pure white candy reflects Jesus' holiness and reminds us that He was free from sin. Thinking that the candy was very plain to look at, the candy maker stained it with red stripes – the small stripe represents the five wounds – the large stripe represents the cross

on which Jesus gave His life for us.

Unfortunately, the candy's true meaning has been forgotten, and the candy eventually became known as the candy cane – a meaningless decoration seen at Christmas time. Even though the candy's true meaning has been forgotten, let us not forget the true meaning of Christmas.

*Into this world,
This demented inn,
In which there is absolutely no room
For Him at all,
Christ has come uninvited.
His place is with those others
For whom there is no room –
Those who do not belong,
Those who are rejected,
Who are denied the status of persons,
Who are tortured,
Bombed,
Exterminated.*

- Thomas Merton

ADVENT

Our southern Advent is a season of hard joy and peace,

A beginning time of the Church's year

In the frantic end time of our social calendar,

And so

We watch, we wait!

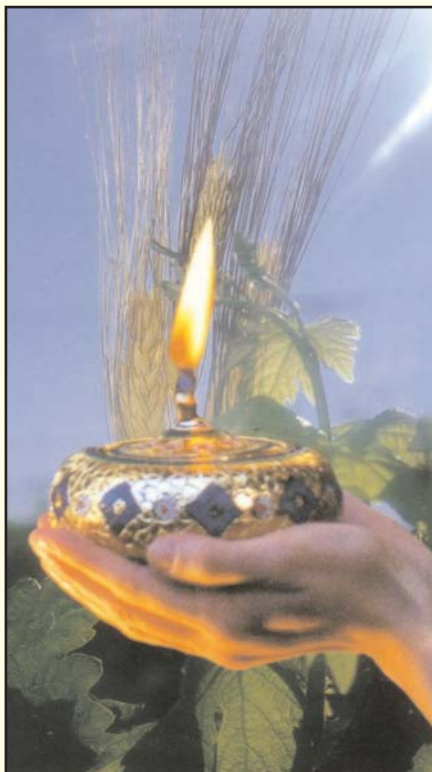
We seek in these days to prepare a way into its mystery,

Lest the Word be far from us,

Lest He come unrecognized.

And so

We watch, we wait!



ANAM CARA

There is very little needed in order to develop a real sense of our own spiritual individuality. Two things are absolutely necessary – silence and solitude. Solitude is one of the most precious things in the human spirit. It is different from loneliness.

When you are lonely, you become acutely conscious of your own separation. Solitude can be a homecoming to your own belonging – we cannot continue to seek outside ourselves for the things we need from within.

The blessings for which we hunger are not to be found in other places nor in other people. These gifts can only be given to you – by yourself. They are at home at the hearth of your soul. (P. 130)

- John O'Donoghue



As we move into this precious season of the Church's year, let us remember –

Every time a hand reaches out to help another ...

That is Christmas.

Every time someone puts anger aside and strives for understanding ...

That is Christmas.

Every time people forget their differences, and realize their love for each other ...

That is Christmas.

Love and prayerful wishes,

- Sr Liz