



ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS

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My dear Sisters and Brothers,
may the Lord give you his peace!

This year we have started the celebration of the Franciscan Centenaries (2023-2026), which has to inspire us to get back to the origins, to give thanks to God for the gifts we receive through Saint Francis and through our vocation. The way of life to which God has invited us enriches us and inserts us into a big family which is our spiritual home. Celebration is always somehow a remembering and thanksgiving for the time we could live and for those many things we have received during this time. These years have to be a time for us to give thanks to God for these gifts, to learn more about our Seraphic Father St. Francis, and thus grow both individually and also in our fraternities together with our brothers and sisters. This will make us feel home.

At the feast of Pentecost, we should focus on the work of the Holy Spirit in Saint Francis, and how the Holy Spirit intends to guide us through the example of our Seraphic Father who always lived and did everything *under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit*. I kindly invite you all to contemplate this in order to discover the works of the Holy Spirit in you, especially during this significant period of time. This is how we can deepen our vocation, strengthen our dedication to our mission, and live the spirituality of Saint Francis in a more personal way; let me say, ‘let him into our lives in a deeper sense’.

I would like to share with you some scattered thoughts, seeking and finding the traces of the Holy Spirit in our life. These scattered thoughts are about penance, fraternity, mission, servant leadership, celebration.

The very first thing that came into my mind is **penance**. We had been called ‘brothers and sisters of penance’, and Saint Francis has happily embraced this expression, which represents closely not only the religious friars and sisters, but us, seculars, too.

What a treasure it is that our Rule begins with the encouraging words of Saint Francis! He calls blessed “*all those who love the Lord with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind, with their whole strength (Mk12:30) and love their neighbors as themselves, (Mt 22:39 2) who hate their bodies with their vices and sins, who receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and who produce worthy fruits of penance.*”¹ He calls all of them blessed, “*because the **Spirit of the Lord will rest upon them (Is 11:2) and make its home and dwelling place (Jn 14:23) among them, and they are children of the heavenly Father whose (Mt 5:45) works they***

¹ St. Francis: Letter to the Faithful I.

do, and they are spouses, brothers and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ (Mt 12:50).”² What a great treasure it is to give home to the Holy Spirit, what a dignity it is to be “the temple of the Holy Spirit”³!

Our way of life is “*performing fitting fruits of penance because YOU KNOW THAT we shall soon die. Give and it will be given to you. Forgive and you will be forgiven. If you do not forgive people their sins, the Lord will not forgive you yours. Confess all your sins. Blessed are those who die in penance, for they shall be in the kingdom of heaven.*”⁴

We often think about penance, as a negative thing that means giving up something, it means restriction, becoming poorer, weaker. But how could something that bears fruits be negative? The Holy Spirit is always positive. Let us think about penance as a gift of the Holy Spirit, present in our life, in which we bring fruits, in order to enrich both ourselves and our neighbors! This is how the Holy Spirit will rest upon us. I pray that all of us may discover this fruitful meaning of penance again.

The second word which is so close to the works of the Holy Spirit is **fraternity**. Those brothers and sisters, who are in the same fraternity, starting with the local fraternities to the international fraternity, are gifts from God, as Saint Francis makes us remember in the Testament: *and the Lord gave me some brothers*⁵. Saint Francis, filled with the Holy Spirit, lived his life with the real freedom of the children of God. This freedom isn't something that we can take for granted, and it isn't something that we can achieve. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit, that allows us to enjoy the freedom which makes us find our proper place in the world, in creation. Having one common father of all of us, who created “*all creatures, animate and inanimate, which bear the imprint of the Most High*”⁶, means that we all are brothers and sisters. Understanding and believing this is a gift of the Holy Spirit. This has led Saint Francis to look at all his brothers as gifts from God. We must do the same. Our brothers and sisters are the gifts from God and our fraternities are being brought together, guided and animated by the Holy Spirit. We can live our fraternal life only if we respect this and find the works of the Holy Spirit in all that we do in the fraternity and for the fraternity. I pray that those brothers and sisters who, at this moment, may not be considered as gifts from God, be filled with the Holy Spirit to experience the goodness of the heavenly father, who created all of us, and by whom we all are brothers and sisters. And I pray that those fraternities which do not presently feel the freshness and inspiration in fraternal life, may be guided by the Holy Spirit and get back to the refreshing fountain of life.

The third thing I would like to mention is our **missionary service**. How many times have we read, that Saint Francis did something “inspired by the Holy Spirit”! His missionary spirit to spread the Gospel was very deep and strong. *During the course of the eighteen years which by then had passed, his flesh rarely or never had any rest, as he traveled through many distant regions, so that the willing spirit, the devout spirit, and the fervent spirit which dwelt within him might scatter the seed of the word of God everywhere.*⁷ We too, have to strive to ask the Holy Spirit to inspire all of us, so that we may have the same willing spirit, devout spirit and fervent spirit, that Saint Francis had. Our presence in the world, our work among the people, our apostolic mission need these virtues, which come from inside. They depend on them. What

² St. Francis: Letter to the Faithful I.

³ 1Cor. 6:19

⁴ Fragment found in a Manuscript in the Worcester Cathedral

⁵ St. Francis: Testament 14.

⁶ OFS Rule 18

⁷ 1Cel2 IV

matters in our service is not the quantity of what we do, but the way we do it. To let others see who we are, to let others see the Holy Spirit, to spread the Gospel is much more important than the meters, pounds, numbers or even the hours. The seed of the word of God can be scattered only with this willing, devout and fervent spirit. I pray that each brother and sister, and each fraternity, which does not have this spirit yet, or has not found his way, be filled with the Holy Spirit and find his proper missionary service. Also, for those who are serving but are facing some uncertainty or tiredness, may they rediscover their mission and be filled by the Holy Spirit.

The fourth thing to be mentioned is the **servant leadership**. During the period of the last General Chapters the International Fraternity has learned, shared and projected a lot about the idea of servant leadership. But we all, who are in any of the services at any level, must always remember, how Saint Francis experienced it. He, as the leader of the Order, wanted to be a servant and not a leader, because for him the Holy Spirit was the real General Minister. *"With God," he would say, "there is no preference of persons, and the Holy Spirit, the general minister of the Order, rests equally upon the poor and simple."*⁸ Therefore, we have to listen to the voice of the poor and simple, especially of those among us, because often their voice is the voice of the Holy Spirit, their cry is the cry of the Holy Spirit, their request is the request of the Holy Spirit. I pray that each one of us, who has a service of leadership may be attentive and obedient to the calls of the Holy Spirit, who is – as Saint Francis said – the real general minister of the Order.

The last thing I would like to call your attention to is to find your way back to the real spirit of **celebration**. Celebration is always joyful, and with a grateful spirit. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of joy, the spirit of sharing and welcoming, the spirit of thanksgiving, the spirit of unity. When we celebrate these centenaries, we should remember the great deeds and gifts from God, give thanks for them, and do all this with a joyful heart opened to God and to each other. I also invite you to re-ignite that fire which was set in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, when we first felt called to be Secular Franciscans. May these years be for us the time to go back to our roots, give thanks to God in a joyful spirit! May these years be for us the time to strengthen the fraternal spirit at all the levels of our Order! Learning about our past and living intensely in the present will give us the hope to a great future. I pray for all the fraternities, especially for the local fraternities all over the world, that they may celebrate these centenaries in a joyful spirit, having *"the Spirit of the Lord and Its holy activity"*⁹.

Finally, I invite all of you to pray for the gifts of the Holy Spirit, together with Saint Bonaventure, and I am sure that God will grant us the spirit of renewal, the spirit of strength, the spirit of unity and the spirit of joy.

We beg the all-merciful Father through thee, his only-begotten Son made man for our sake, crucified and glorified for us, to send upon us from his treasure-house the Spirit of sevenfold grace, who rested upon thee in all his fullness:

the spirit of wisdom, enabling us to relish the fruit of the tree of life, which is indeed thyself;

the gift of understanding: to enlighten our perceptions;

the gift of prudence, enabling us to follow in thy footsteps;

the gift of strength: to withstand our adversary's onslaught;

the gift of knowledge: to distinguish good from evil by the light of thy holy teaching;

the gift of piety: to clothe ourselves with charity and mercy;

⁸ 2Cel CXLV

⁹ RB 10:8

*the gift of fear: to withdraw from all ill-doing and live quietly in awe of thy eternal majesty.
These are the things for which we petition. Grant them for the honor of thy holy name, to which,
with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be all honor and glory, thanksgiving, renown, and lordship
for ever and ever.
Amen.¹⁰*

Your brother and your minister



Tibor Kauser
CIOFS General minister



¹⁰ Saint Bonaventure: The tree of life, Nr. 49