

INTERNATIONAL FRANCISCAN CONFERENCE – TOR

Celebration of the 800th Anniversary of the SECOND LETTER TO THE FAITHFUL (1221) Saint Francis of Assisi

Rome, October 11, 2021

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Peace and all Good!

The year 2021 has been a year of celebration for us as we joyfully recalled the sending of a second letter to all the faithful from St. Francis. In a time many, many years ago before social media and instantaneous communication, Francis used this letter to communicate his passion for following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, a radical following of Jesus by living the Gospel. He asked that whoever received the letter to make copies of it and to pass it on to others; this being done by hand was no small task! The people received it and the number of brothers and sisters of the Third Order increased as they accepted with joy the spiritual values of the call and challenge of the Gospel and the concrete responses to Jesus' way of life that Francis wrote about.

This year we have celebrated the Second Letter to the Faithful with monthly memories and reflections written by members of the IFC-TOR Council. These were passed on to all members of the conference, perhaps even beyond, to seekers with a Franciscan heart. This issue of PROPOSITUM offers examples of the lived reality of what Francis outlined in his letter to all the faithful. Surely, there are countless examples that remain unpublished, but emblazoned in the hearts of the brothers and sisters. What are your ideas and prayers, reflecting the richness of the Second Letter? How do you translate the twelfth-century Francis to our time, the twenty-first century?

We pray that this year has been a time of renewal and deepened understanding of St. Francis' admonitions and counsels to all who are led by the Spirit in the following of the Gospel in example of St. Francis. May Francis' prayer be fulfilled in our day, ⁴⁸ "And *the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon all those men and women who have done and persevered in these things and ... make a home and dwelling place in them.*"

Sr. Deborah LOCKWOOD, President IFC-TOR
Sr. M. Magdalena SCHMITZ, Vice-President
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**800th Jubilee Celebration of the
SECOND LETTER TO THE FAITHFUL (1221)
St. Francis of Assisi**

THE ITINERARY OF UNCEASING CONVERSION

*Fr. James F. Puglisi, sa
Director of the Centro Pro Unione
Franciscan Friars of the Atonement
Original language: English*

We know that at the request of St. Francis, his friend Cardinal Hugolino dei Conti di Segni composed a document at the same time as the *Second Letter to the Faithful*. Probably Francis requested this because he knew that the Church had made clear prescriptions concerning these new groups of men and women that were springing up at this time. Those who were following Francis' lead as penitents needed to have a spiritual guide. This he laid out in the *First Letter to the Faithful* in 1215. Contemporaneously the IV Lateran Council established norms for the growing number of Penitents and these were incorporated by the future Pope Gregory IX, Card. Hugolino in the *Memoriale propositi* of 1221, as an official rule, codifying what Francis had written in the *Second Letter to the Faithful*.

In the *First Letter to the Faithful* Francis promised his Penitents a path to salvation by reading the words of life and salvation and putting them into practice. This was the **itinerary of unceasing conversion** that breathes the very foundation of the Good News: to repent, do penance and believe in Jesus as savior. The example that Francis set was the way many women and men wished to commit to seeing the Lord more clearly (by reading the words of life), to love him without measure (and love of neighbor) and to follow Christ more closely. This is the core of penitential life: walking in love to embrace with the highest Good and highest Love.

This itinerary is then laid out in the *Second Letter* corresponding to the itinerary of unceasing conversion.

What does this itinerary look like?

- First it is one of service , being a servant to all of creation in imitation of Jesus who humbled himself to be a servant in obedience to the will of the Father.
- Second, one needs “to choose poverty in the world beyond all else”.
- Third, we are to be at one with Jesus in the reception of his holy Body and Blood. This leads to a way of life by loving God and neighbor as one's self and hence becoming adorers of the highest Good.

To be worthy then of this life, we need to confess our sins so we may worthily partake of his Body and Blood and thereby produce “worthy fruits of penance”. These fruits are seen in how we love our neighbors, how we pass judgement with mercy so as “to receive mercy from the Lord”.

The discipline of penance is seen by specific acts: alms giving, charity and humility which “wash away the stains of our sins”. Fasting and abstaining, first from vices and then from excess of food and drink are all part of this itinerary of conversion. In addition we must hate our bodies,

because they are the seat of vices which come from the heart and so we must deny ourselves and “place our bodies under the yoke of servitude and holy obedience”.

Francis exhorts his penitent brothers and sisters to visit frequently churches and revere the clergy, not for themselves but for the ministry they exercise in the Eucharist.

The conversion of heart that Francis proposes is prepared for and lived in humility and simplicity of pure heart. By becoming a lesser brother/sister we never desire to be above others, but “we must be servants of and subject to every human creature for God’s sake”.

The itinerary of unceasing conversion leads to the actualization of new relationships that have been established in the human family based on a life of penance which allow us to become “salt of the earth and light for the world”. Then Francis says that

*We are spouses
when the faithful soul is united by the Holy Spirit to our Lord Jesus Christ.
We are brothers,
moreover, when we do the will of His Father Who is in heaven;
mothers
when we carry Him in our heart and body
through love and a pure and sincere conscience;
and give Him birth through a holy activity,
which must shine before others by example.*

Second Letter to the Faithful of St. Francis, verses 51-53



Innocent III approving the Franciscan Rule



Celebration of the 800th Anniversary of the Second Letter to the Faithful (1221)

*Written by Sr Rose Wong, Superior General of SSFS
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Original language: English*

30 July 2021

In the SECOND LETTER, St Francis wishes to exhort us Christians and religious to observe the words and teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ. In my congregation, the Sisters say the daily Breviary prayers together and do their personal Scripture Reflection. The Words of God in the Bible reveal the wonderful works of our Almighty God, and his love for his creatures. He called Abraham and his family to be His Chosen People, and be the agents to reveal to the world the true and the living God. When our Lord Jesus Christ came to live among us, he completed the full revelation of God his Father in heaven, and teaches us “*to adore the Father in Spirit and Truth*”. In my recent general circular to our communities, I reminded the Sisters of our focus on our commitment to love God, because he loved us first, and to be touched by his love, so that we can continue the mission of Christ to make God known to all humanity.

As consecrated disciples of our Lord Jesus, we try to be faithful witnesses to his teachings on Gospel Values and renounce worldly values, and to encounter the loving presence of God in every creation of God. Each religious community should enlighten families of how the Gospel Values can form a domestic church in each family. In our Daily Prayers, the Scripture reflections, the daily Masses, and regular confessions, are helpful to our growth in our religious life. Also the monthly Recollection Days, and the annual retreats. Last year, I arranged for each of our communities to make a retreat of four days, using the videos and talks of Fr Richard Rohr, OFM. The theme: “*Living with contemplative Heart and Mind*”. This year, some Sisters attended online a repeat of the CCFMC, from 5th to 12th July. All these spiritual exercises really

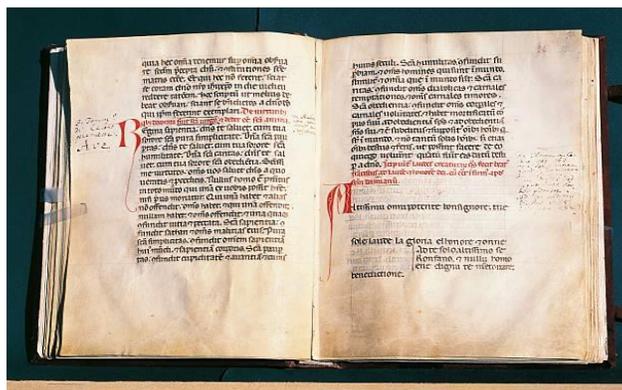
help us to know and love our “*glorious and holy Father in heaven*”, and to have the example of Jesus before us, and “*follow joyfully his footprints*”.

With this joy in our hearts, we can walk freely in the presence of God, and serve God’s creatures and creation with sincere “*fraternity and social friendship*”, Pope Francis’ new encyclical. First of all, we must grow in every fruit of the Holy Spirit and especially to show love, respect and mercy among the Sisters in our communities, and relate with everyone with mission purpose and hope. Only by the fruitful outcome can we inspire the people we work with, and journey with, “*to encounter our marvelous God through our words and example*”(Fr.R. Rohr). St Francis stresses very strongly that we follow Our Lord’s commands “*to love our neighbours as ourselves*”, to have mercy in our dealings with others, “*to have charity and humility and give alms*”, and “*to love our enemies*”.

In this time of covid-19 virus pandemic, many people are suffering from loss of livelihood due to the poor economy. It is very encouraging to see our government and citizens of good will to help relieve the plight of our stricken brothers and sisters with free food baskets, medicine, and even cash donations. The Sisters of my congregation do our part as follows:-

- Say special prayer I have formulated for the Lenten Season in conjunction with Stations of the Cross, and another prayer to be used daily to implore God’s help,
- Provide spiritual direction and counseling to people in distress.
- Reduce school fees in our nurseries and kindergartens.
- Give groceries, sometimes pay medical fees and provide transport for the poor and the needy.

As we “*observe the commands and counsels of our Lord Jesus Christ*”, we pray to be one with our fellow creatures, and with our Father in heaven



Canticle of Brother Sun

THE PROPOSAL OF LIFE ACCORDING TO THE SECOND LETTER TO THE FAITHFUL (1221)

*Sr. Anna Ingolia
Suore Francescane dei Poveri,
Original language: Italian*

The St. Francis' way of life proposed to every man/woman of good will is an completely evangelical way based precisely on the Gospel.

But Francis also is aware that this proposal of life is sometimes difficult and hard: it is grounded on relationship and acceptance. His project is a Christian one, so he gives first place to God, after God he privileges the brother/sister and among them especially the poorest and most marginalized. God by becoming flesh became like man, like each one of us.

Francis in embracing the leper discovers in him the face of God and from then on he builds fraternal relationships with everyone, with all things and with the entire creation. In the Second Letter to all the Faithful, Francis insists on the ongoing transformation of the person, on the change of heart and on conversion. The only thing to worry about is to have the spirit of the Lord and his holy operation. Things that cannot be eliminated are these: showing love by works/good actions, giving alms and produce worthy fruits of penance, judging with mercy, loving even one's enemies and persecutors. (cf. 2Lf, 25-31). Francis was a brother to all, especially to the poorest and simplest, and like him the brothers are brothers to all and all must serve, and if they cannot love everyone at least to try not to do evil but to do good (2 Lf, 25-27) especially to the poor and humble.

I

am working in a Caritas Center and like Francis I try to welcome, as much as I can, to give service to the brothers and sisters who stop by. By welcoming, listening, I am trying to understand how to become channels of God's love is the "holy operation" which I try to live every day. Listening to everyone, even those who do not want to be listened to, but only because in need for material goods such as the payment of a bill, or rent, or medicine, or a ticket to go on a trip, or many other things... Having the Gospel as the base, the actions of welcoming and listening can be the key that opens glimmers of hope and, together with it, brings change.

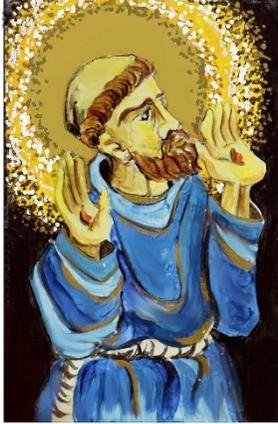
This year of pandemic has brought out critical and serious situations such as the risk of impoverishment of many people and many families. Pope Francis says that we live in a change of era and not an era of change. Grasping this great change requires attention but also the ability to know how to interpret, to discern, to continue to keep the Gospel alive in our lives. The possibility of meeting people and being able to weave relationships based on gratuitousness and respect for the dignity of each person is precisely what generates processes of change.

It is a bit this for me the holy operation of which St. Francis speaks: "And we are mothers when we carry Him in our heart and body through love and a pure and sincere conscience; and give Him birth through a holy activity, which must shine before others by example" 2Lf,53.



**800th Jubilee Celebration of the
SECOND LETTER TO THE FAITHFUL (1221)
St. Francis of Assisi**

Sister Mariella Erdmann, O.S.F.
Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity
United States of America
Original language: English



In his Second Letter to the Faithful, Francis speaks to us of seeking God's will above all else through prayer and worthy fruits of penance. Francis praised all creation as good and believed that we are made in the image and likeness of God. I would like to clarify what appears to be a negative perspective regarding our bodies with regards to penance and ascetic practices in the letter. By penance and ascetic practices, Francis and his earlier followers were seeking to discipline the flesh which they recognized as a source of sin due to wrong desires of the heart which lead to jealousy, anger, pride, sloth, lust, and so on. They did not believe their bodies to be evil but rather that they needed to control and purify their unrestrained desires in order to become more Christ-like, more holy, and by their holiness of life work for the salvation others. The awareness

of human sinfulness is a part of holiness and the predictable effect of God's closeness and love for each of us. True sorrow for sin carries with it a certainty of God's forgiving love.

In the Franciscan tradition we understand penance as a call to daily conversion, which is its biblical meaning. It is a daily dying to inordinate desires and turning to God. It is a metanoia – a change of heart centered in Christ crucified for love of us. Penance then is an act of LOVE - love for God and for one's neighbor. Penance can be any sacrifice offered up to God. We may introduce such sacrifices as fasting, prayer, almsgiving, visiting the sick or imprisoned, refraining from slander, reaching out to those who are different than us or difficult at times, working with the immigrants, and so on.

Each of us, also, faces the daily life situations that are unforeseen such as illness, misunderstandings, jealousy, financial difficulties, human loss of loved ones, loneliness, and the challenges of Covid-19, to name a few. By identifying with and uniting our sufferings, frustrations, and disappointments to the cross of Christ, the Lord can use them to accomplish his will in us for our salvation and for the salvation of others. Just as Christ came to do the will of the Father so we seek not our wills but the will of God. Francis saw penance, and ascetic practices in the light of the Christ's passion and death. They make no sense otherwise.

We grow in our relationship to the Lord by encountering Christ personally. This profound encounter with Christ can affect a deep change in each of us. Such a change can make us beacons of hope in a world so torn by divisions, anger, the evils of trafficking, addictions, the homeless, the plight of the refugees and the list can go on and on. Our world today is much like the world Francis lived in. So, let us live the Third Order Rule as true penitents out of love for God and others. It is sacrificial love that will bring hearts back to God who is all good, all holy, all true, and all deserving of our praise and adoration!

Let us Celebrate!

Sr. Deborah Lockwood's presentation

President IFC-TOR

Original language: English

The Conference of the Franciscan Family of Brazil had their National Assembly from October 2-3, 2021. This is the text of the greeting to them as they celebrated the 800 years of the Second Letter of St. Francis to the Faithful.

As President of the International Franciscan Conference of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of Saint Francis, so-called TOR, I convey greetings on behalf of the 61,000 Brothers and Sisters, members of 227 congregations living in 52 countries. I bring you wishes of "Peace and Good" as you assemble in a Celebration Chapter of the Franciscan Family of Brazil. As members of TOR, we strive to be of mutual support in living out the vision of Saint Francis as Third Order Regular Franciscans.

This year we are celebrating a great gift that ¹ has been given to us and to the world. 800 years ago, St. Francis experienced a call from God which he did not understand fully in the beginning. He heard and understood in bits and pieces, like most of us. In the beginning, he heard, "Francis, repair my house, which as you see is falling into ruin." He took those words very literally and began to rebuild churches in and around Assisi. As he lay stones and mortar in place, he slowly realized that the house of God was much more than a physical building; he understood that the church is the people of God. How was God calling him to rebuild the people of God? He asked Sylvester and Clare to pray with him in this discernment. Both came to the same conclusion: "God has not chosen you, Francis, only for yourself, but rather for the salvation of others. God wants you to go throughout the world and preach to his people." When Francis heard this, he got up immediately, and went to Cannara with Masseo and Angelo and preached so fervently that all the people



wanted to do exactly as he said and leave their homes to follow him.*Saint Francis did not allow them, saying, "Don't be in a hurry, and don't leave: I'll arrange what you must do for the salvation of your souls." And then he got the idea of starting the Third Order...* [Fioretti](#) (16)

¹ Photo of St. Francis from the book FRANCISCO de ASSIS: Um itinerário de conversão e vivência do amor, Autora Dirce Margarida Limberger, FPCC

This is what we celebrate this year, Francis' good idea that came from a deeper understanding of what God was calling him to be for the sake of the world, with a way to include all people in that holy endeavor. Francis was called to change himself in love and peace and to be an inspiration of change for all whom he met. His followers would do the same, walking in the footprints of Jesus with him, on fire with the Holy Spirit to spread the good news of Jesus in order to build up the reign of God here and now. A message that the world always yearns for and needs.

Francis set out to imitate Christ and literally carry out his work. He looked around and responded to what he pondered in the Gospels. He saw poor people, rejected for who they were that was different and discriminated against by mainline society, the outcasts, the vulnerable, and he responded with a lifestyle of identification with them.

We as carriers of the Franciscan charism in our time, can ask ourselves questions as we celebrate this anniversary: How do I identify with the people at the margins? How am I in solidarity with them as they seek the dignity and reverence that is inherent in every person? These challenges reverberate in the struggles of our world today as it did for Francis. Let us celebrate the ways we talk the talk and walk the walk, giving hope to our struggling world.

“Francis went around the cities and villages, proclaiming the kingdom of God and preaching peace.” 1C 36 He was a herald of peace and reconciliation, a peacebuilder on all levels. His followers are called to do the same by attitudes and lifestyles of active non-violence, with the greeting, “Peace and good!” not only on their lips, but more deeply in their hearts.

Striving to embody the Franciscan charism of peace in our day, we ask ourselves as we celebrate this anniversary: How am I a peacemaker, alert to ways of being a reconciling presence? What is my greeting of peace to all? These are echoes of Francis the peacemaker that our world needs to hear. Let us celebrate the ways we talk the talk and walk the walk, giving hope to our divided world.

Francis believed that creation was the mirror of God's love and beauty, God's care and creativity. He clearly saw the family of God, his brothers and sisters, not only the people of his life, but all of creation that surrounded him. To him, creation was the first book God wrote, a profound way to learn our connectedness with all that is.

Recognizing our relationships within creation, as we celebrate this anniversary we reflect and ponder: How do I reverence all creation, walking in sacredness, understanding my part in the web of creation? How do my actions help sustain a limited and fragile world? This ever-deepening mindfulness beckons us in evolutionary and revolutionary ways here and now. Let us celebrate the ways we talk the talk and walk the walk, giving hope to our fragile world.

In *Laudato Sí* (10) Pope Francis spoke of St. Francis saying, he *“is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically... He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.”* Saint Francis pray for us!

This vision, this good idea of Francis began 800 years ago and continues to be globally relevant in our day for men and women of all ages living in commitment to the dream of Saint Francis through the great variety of Franciscan groups, ancient and new. Fifty years ago, the Franciscan Youth of Brazil began and today we celebrate the youth and the vitality of youth

they gift us with. There are many examples of youth giving of their love and energy in ministry to others inspired by the words and deeds of St. Francis. I think of a recent young man, Carlo Acutis, an Italian teenager, who said. "To always be close to Jesus, that's my life plan." Carlo loved soccer and video games. He was a computer genius who taught himself programming, coding and animation and used his computer skills to spread God's love.

When he was 15, he was diagnosed with untreatable leukemia, and died soon after on October 12, 2006. At his request he was buried in Assisi because of his desire to be in the city of Saint Francis, whom he loved and who gave him much inspiration. Carlo Acutis was beatified on October 12, 2020, after a 7-year-old Brazilian boy miraculously recovered from a life-threatening pancreatic disorder through his mother's prayers and intercession to Carlo. Blessed Carlo, pray for us!

As we come together today in celebration of 800 years of the Third Order and 50 years of the Franciscan Youth of Brazil, we are grateful to God for the charism of Saint Francis to the world, grateful to know him and follow in his footprints, challenged always to bear testimony by our lives to the overwhelming grace and love of God which alone gives hope to our world.

