



PROPOSITUM

November 2023

CHRIST, ST. FRANCIS AND THE MEANING OF SUFFERING IN OUR MODERN WORLD

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular,

The year of remembering the Franciscan Centenary of Greccio and the Rule will close with the celebration of the Christmas Season next month. The theme has been “**You are Joy**” and hopefully the year was one of joy for you and one in which you strove to bring joy to others on life’s journey.

As we begin the Franciscan Centenary in 2024 in memory of The Stigmata of St. Francis, we reflect upon ***Christ, St. Francis and the Meaning of Suffering in our Modern World***, which is the topic of this edition of the **Propositum**. The theme proposed by the Franciscan Centenary Committee for the year is “**You are Love**” with the Theological Dimension given as “*The Franciscan Cross as an expression and model of the free and gratuitous love of the triune God;*” the Anthropological Dimension, “*Getting to know, accept and integrate our personal and institutional limits;*” the Ecclesiological Dimension, “*Identification and personalization of the mystery of life, death and resurrection of Jesus;*” and the Sociological Dimension, “*Solidarity with the crucified and the excluded of our world.*”

Sister Ilia Delio OSF, Father Paolo Nicolosi, SA and Dr. Carlos Eduardo Cardozo share in this **Propositum** how they envision suffering today in the light of St. Francis and Christ. As you read and reflect on these articles in the coming weeks, you are invited to reflect on your own experience of suffering personally or as the world experiences suffering and to submit your reflections for consideration for the next edition of the **Propositum**.

Remembering that the suffering of Christ and St. Francis culminated with a message of hope in new life and resurrection, let us approach this year in remembrance of the Stigmata celebrating the Love of God for us and all the world.

Peace and all Good for now and all times!

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SUFFERING AND LOVE: THE FRANCISCAN PATH TO GOD

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Original: English



The Primacy of Love

Francis of Assisi had one ardent desire, to follow the footsteps of the crucified Christ. At the beginning of his conversion, the cross of Christ spoke to him inwardly and he “felt a mysterious change in himself” (2 Cel 6, 249). He was so deeply touched by the compassionate love of God that he often wept loudly over the passion of Christ, “as if it were constantly before his eyes” (2 Cel 6, 250). By the end of life, Francis had internalized the cross of Jesus Christ to the extent that compassionate love forged in him the human likeness of the Crucified shown by the Stigmata. Love guided his entire life, and by the end of his life, he had become like the one he loved. His likeness to Christ crucified was so profound that, upon his death, his disciples saw Francis as another Christ, “for it really seemed. . . as if Christ and Saint Francis were one person” (2 Cel 165, 389). Clare of Assisi grasped the import of the centrality of Christ crucified in the life of Francis and spoke of the cross as a mirror of our true identity. “Study your face in this mirror each day,” she wrote to Agnes of Prague, “that you may be adorned with virtues within and without” (4 Lag 15). Building on the charism of Francis, Clare realized that the body of Christ is born in our bodies when our minds and hearts are fully united with God’s unconditional love.

Francis and Clare were single-hearted and centered their minds on the selfless and compassionate love of God. For them, the overflowing love of God is our deepest reality. Love and not sin is the primary reason for the incarnation which renders matter not fallen and sinful but rich in potential for Godly life. God enters into weak and fragile being and suffers through the limits of matter to empower life. Hence to know God is to experience concrete reality in all

its messiness, sorrow, wonder and beauty. Thomas of Celano captured the sacred depth of matter in the life of Francis when he wrote:

Even for worms he had a warm love, since he had read this text about the Savior: *I am a worm and not a man.*” That is why he used to pick them up from the road and put them in he found an abundance of flowers, he used to preach to them and invite them to praise the Lord, just as if they were endowed with reason (1 Cel 29, 80).

Francis was captured by the mystery of the incarnation. Three years before his death, he celebrated the birth of Jesus at Greccio in a way that symbolized the Godliness of creation and the singularity of God’s love. “God did not come as an idea, a message, or a thought,” Margaret Pirkel wrote, “God came as a baby, a particular baby in a particular place, at a particular time, and God embraces that.”¹ Francis saw the life of Jesus, from birth to death, as single movement of incarnational love: “Indeed, so thoroughly did the humility of the Incarnation and the charity of the Passion occupy his memory that he scarcely wanted to think of anything else” (1 Cel 30, 84).

Franciscan theologians developed an understanding of love as our deepest reality, from the inception of all life to its ultimate fulfillment. Bonaventure worked through the integral relationship between the Trinity and Christ and realized that when the doctrine of being is held open to the mystery of Christ, the true nature of created reality is revealed as love. Love is not what God does; love is what God is. Love is God’s identity. God loves the world with the very same love that God is. The human vocation is to love God in return.

Duns Scotus understood the centrality of love in the life of Francis and developed a metaphysics of love. Our existence is *not* rooted in an abstract universal concept of divine Being, as Thomas Aquinas claimed; rather, each existence is uniquely loved into being. This is Scotus’s notion of *haecceitas* or individuation. Everything that exists has a particular “thisness.” Divine love is expressed in *this* particular way; *this* person or leaf or tree speaks God in an eternally unique way and cannot be reduced to an object or replaced by another human, leaf or tree. There is no abstract or universal common good; rather, there is the concrete particular good of each person who manifests God in a unique way by being what he or she is. Every single being is the singularity of divine love, a fractal of divine light. A Franciscan metaphysics of love is at the heart of an integral ecological worldview.

¹ Margaret Pirkel, “Christ, The Inspiration and Center of Life with God and Creation,” in *Resource Manual for the Study Franciscan Christology*, eds. Kathleen Moffatt, OSF and Christa Maria Thompson, OSF (Washington, DC: Franciscan Federation, TOR, 1998), 264.

Love and Suffering

If love is our deepest reality, then why do we suffer? Francis understood the role of suffering as the creative effort toward deeper love. God is the wellspring of love at the heart of created life; however, humans must be inwardly free in order to respond in love to love. In this respect, poverty or living *sine proprio* is fundamental. We tend to grasp and hold on to things which prevent us from experiencing God's love in new ways. Sin is the resistance to love, the rejection of being part of God's wild love. Francis had a keen awareness of sin and strove to live as a poor person, accepting suffering as an opportunity for growth. Suffering is a sign that life is incomplete, that forces of resistance will try to prevent life from its potential fullness. To be open to suffering is to be open to the flux and flow of life, to live in the freedom of the Spirit, and to see with new eyes in ways that can open us up more deeply to God. How we accept suffering as part of God's creative adventure in love (rather a judgment or punishment) affects our choices and actions.

In an essay on creation and kenosis, environmental philosopher Holmes Rolston said that suffering and death make all life possible. There is a struggle throughout nature for survival and yet there is a capacity to evolve despite suffering and death. Life seeks more life, as Rolston writes:

This whole evolutionary upslope is a calling in which renewed life comes by blasting the old. Life is gathered up in the midst of its throes, a blessed tragedy, lived in grace through a besetting storm. . . .The cruciform creation is, in the end, deiform, godly, just because of this element of struggle, not in spite of it. There is a great divine 'yes' hidden behind and within every 'no' of crushing nature. . . .Long before humans arrived, the way of nature was already a *via dolorosa*. In that sense, the aura of the cross is cast backward across the whole global story, and it forever outlines the future.²

What Rolston points out is that suffering is not absurd to nature; rather it is key to the whole transformative process of nature. Suffering makes nature wild and unpredictable; yet out of this wildness of life comes amazing beauty and new creation. The whole evolutionary upslope is a *via dolorosa*, a path of suffering that creates an invitation to more love in a world striving to become more whole in God. He writes: "In the flesh and blood creatures, each is a blood sacrifice perishing that others might live. . . .In their lives, beautiful, tragic and perpetually incomplete, they speak for God; they prophesy as they participate in the divine pathos. . . .They

² Holmes Rolston, III, "Kenosis and Nature," in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 59 – 60.

share the labor of the divinity” (Rolston, 57). Suffering and sacrifice belong to a world grounded in love.

Does God Suffer?

We are aware of our personal sufferings, as well as the sufferings of the world, but does God suffer? In the early Church it was a heresy to admit that God suffers because God is divine being and divine perfection cannot be subject to anything imperfect. However, in the twentieth century, marked by tragic wars and violence, theologians began to rethink the suffering of God. Lutheran theologian Jürgen Moltmann wrote that, in the mystery of the cross, we find God deeply immersed in suffering of the world. The cross signifies a God who is radically in love with the world and this love bears the ultimate sacrifice of God’s Son for the world. Love is the

Godness of God, which is why the cross is the most revealing statement about God.³ The *power* of divine Love is shown in the *powerlessness* of the cross. In the words of Cardinal Walter Kasper: “God need not strip himself of his omnipotence in order to reveal his love. . . . Only an almighty love can give itself wholly to the other and be a helpless love.”⁴ While God cannot



suffer *ex carentia* since God cannot lose what pertains to God’s integrity, God suffers *ex abundantia*: out of the divine plenitude God suffers out of love for us. God shares our pain and bears our burdens out of the divine fullness of love. God empowers the world through the suffering of love. Hence, “there is no suffering that is not God’s suffering; no death which has not been God’s death in the history on Golgotha.”⁵ This freedom in love is shown in the way Jesus freely and actively chose death in the face of evil, as an act of resistance not a passive victimization. Nor did God require a sacrificial death. Jesus died because of the way he lived, because of the pattern of fidelity and commitment of his life and his liberating message. The death of God in Jesus is the revelation of divine love, incomprehensible in presence and power, yet the hope and source of the world’s becoming.

³ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (New York: Fortress Press, 1993), 205.

⁴ Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (New York: Continuum, 1999), 194-95.

⁵ Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 246.

The crucified Christ stands as a symbol of the world's openness to its completion in God. God suffers in and with creation so that we do not suffer alone. Suffering is a door through which God can enter and love us in our human weakness, misery and loneliness. As we suffer loss, so too God experiences loss with us; yet, God is unconditional love and remains ever faithful in love. This compassionate loving presence of God is our power for new life, a power that becomes actualized in love through our conscious personal response, the wholehearted gift of our lives. As Francis proclaimed: "The love of him who loved us is greatly to be loved" (*Leg. maj.* 9, 1). The love of God touched Francis deeply within and he responded freely without; so too, we must do the same.

Our contemporary culture negates suffering and treats it as a surd, an aberration of life. Today some creators of artificial intelligence want to eradicate suffering by creating humanoids. While alleviating suffering due to disease or illness can be beneficial, artificial intelligence also has the capacity to eliminate the potential of suffering to creatively move us toward deeper love. The breakdowns of our fragile lives are invitations to break through our controlled loves and creatively learn to love in new and deeper ways. Suffering can open our eyes to see what is otherwise invisible and to love what the world sees as unlovable. If life is reduced to algorithms and suffering is controlled by devices, then we eliminate the spontaneity of life and the infinite capacity to love in unexpected ways. A world dominated by artificial intelligence "where all contingency is eliminated is also a planet dominated by unchecked evil."⁶ The fecundity of nature requires wildness and unpredictability; it is contingency that makes the world what it is—a place of astonishment, wonder and awe.⁷ Nature is entangled with the wild kenotic love of God.

⁶ Alfred Kracher, "The Diversity of Environments: Nature and Technology as Competing Myths," in *Creation's Diversity: Voices of Theology and Science*, ed. Willem B. Drees et al (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 84.

⁷ Kracher, "The Diversity of Environments," 84.

Love and Freedom

Freedom to love in the midst of suffering is a matter of faith. Do we believe in the incarnation as the power of God's love within and without? Francis believed wholeheartedly in the mystery of Christ. His *Canticle of the Creatures* begins with acknowledging the Most High and ends with recognizing the intimate nearness of God, or, as Bonaventure wrote, God is to be thought of *altissime et piissime*, most high and intimately united with all creaturely life. Experiencing this intimate nearness, Francis surrendered to God and trusted the unconditional embrace of God, even in the midst of his many physical sufferings and rejection by his brothers. To suffer with joy requires radical surrender. By turning our attention entirely to God, we become one with the Son in unity with the Father, and one with the Father in his surrender of the Son, and thus we are caught up in the flow of God's love, the breath of the Spirit, with a love that is always new, always creative, always breathing into the future. Hence despite our ailments, our losses, our uncertainties and anxieties, we live on the cusp of new life because we live from the power of God's love.

This deeper truth of suffering can lead us beyond a sense of suffering as self-alienating and self-isolating to a compassionate suffering in and with others; that is, surrendering to the power of God's love within can turn us *outward* toward the suffering of others. The key to creative suffering is a deep awareness of God's hidden presence, the glory of God which shines in our hearts. Only when I know that I belong to another can I share with others in *their* suffering. Rather than avoiding my suffering or becoming absorbed in its grip, I can become a source of love for others in their sufferings and thus a co-creator with God in the unfolding future of the world.

The Path of the Crucified

At the end of his "Soul's Journey into God" Bonaventure wrote, "there is no other path than through the burning love of the Crucified" (*Itin.* 7.6). Contemporary culture wants to find another path to ultimate life without suffering; the Franciscan path to God courses through the dark and winding road of suffering love precisely because God *is* kenosis or self-emptying love. Francis of Assisi suffered physically, emotionally and psychologically throughout his life; yet he remained committed to the love of God and used the lessons of suffering to learn how to see the cracks in everything through which the divine light shines through. We are to grow into a higher freedom of compassionate love, to be part of an unfinished world seeking its fulfillment in God. Loving by way of sacrifice and letting go of our precious need to control our lives

challenges us to lean into our sufferings and see in them opportunities for growth in love. To resist sacrifice or ignore pain is to suppress the vitality of life and its impulse to evolve, to move to a higher plane of interdependence and interconnected life. When we are beaten down and defeated, our tendency is to give up and declare life a failure. But if we search within, we will find the power of God's love challenging us to get up and see the world in a new way.



CHRIST, FRANCIS AND THE MEANING OF SUFFERING IN OUR MODERN WORLD – SOME PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

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Original: Italian



The various forms of suffering that I observe and experience, directly and indirectly, in micro or macro contexts of our modern world (as indeed it was in the past and will most likely be in the future) reveal the fragility of the human condition, which coexists with a precious spiritual condition, especially as believers. “*We have this treasure in clay jars,*” St. Paul writes to the Corinthians (2 Cor 4:7), and then, further down, he adds, “*For Christ’s sake, when I am weak, then I am strong*” (2 Cor 12:10). These observations lead me to pray, reflect and seek to experience fragility/suffering as a pillar of human and spiritual life, which can bring precious awareness and healing from and through hopes and wounds. Just as in the natural process of the growth of a pearl, which is precious and is the result of a lesion in the shell.

We have to accept that it is impossible to avoid all fragility and suffering in our lives: how we deal with them is what makes the difference. Apart from possible miracles, Jesus Christ does not help us to avoid fragility, suffering and death, but shows us how to experience them as a precious space in which to encounter him, to develop solidarity with others and to grow ourselves, feeling free to choose our responses, which may be different from those one would consider “normal” in similar circumstances. Several saints, following in Jesus’ footsteps, have shown us the way of love in spite of, and even through suffering, growing in precious unity with God and others, precisely in situations where the “normal” responses would have been annihilation, division and destruction. Considering also that most of them experienced sickness, rejection, suspicion and persecution, we realize that they were neither delivered nor healed, at least not in material terms (and since they were saints we cannot doubt their faith). Potentially we can all find other ways to experience suffering, transform it, even “use” it to attain deeper understanding and love in the various dimensions of human and spiritual existence, and we find this transformative way of facing fragility and suffering also in the experience of the founder of all Franciscan families, St. Francis, ‘another Christ’. In particular, two episodes of his life are

essential in this personal reflection, as a human being, a Christian and a Franciscan brother: the embrace with the lepers, at the very beginning of his spiritual journey, and the Stigmata, towards its end.

The first episode is fundamental in the conversion of Francis' life, for he was terrified of lepers: not only because of their disease, but because they represented the opposite of his dreams of glory. In Francis' day, as in other times and for similar contagious diseases, sick



people such as lepers were rejected by society and ostracized for obvious reasons of public health. There was also the belief that a leper was being punished by God for a sin committed (being treated as a scapegoat, much unlike the honor reserved for knights, which Francis wanted to become). The leper represented all kinds of fragility and suffering: physical, social, and spiritual, and Francis shunned them. Psychologically speaking, we might even think that he was avoiding facing his own fragility; in fact, he was trying to understand what to do with his life after some failures and unfulfilled dreams. In the end, as we know, he embraced the leper and what he represented: fragility, suffering, exclusion.

Francis indirectly confirms this when he writes in his Testament that, up to that point, he was “in sin”, that is, he was focused and bent only on himself. In contrast, when he opened himself to others in distress, what was bitter became sweetness to him.

The Stigmata occurred on Mount Verna in 1224 (practically 8 centuries ago!), almost 20 years after the encounter with the leper and just two before the death of St. Francis, who was very ill and suffering on account of various situations. In particular, his fast-growing religious family needed regulations (whereas he was happy with the first small group based on the Gospel and the Pope's informal approval). Furthermore, most of the friars sought or aspired to a different lifestyle: more structures, some comforts, studies, and even accolades. Francis was tempted to impose himself as the founder, as the Testament suggests, but eventually he gave up leadership of the newly formed Franciscan Order, withdrew from fraternal life and focused more on the spiritual foundations of his choice to follow Jesus, which had attracted so many followers who had a different notion and understanding of the Franciscan life. This makes me think that it could have been like Jesus' situation with his people, who often did not understand his parables and life examples, betrayed him, and even shunned the prospect of

the failure of the cross. Yet Jesus continued to love them and not impose himself, but let his sacrifice on the Cross and the Holy Spirit lead them to be converted and to believe.

Clearly, as the Franciscan Sources remind us in No. 1919, Francis wanted to experience Jesus' immense suffering on the Cross as well as the love he felt in that situation (in complete union with and partaking of all forms of suffering in the world, then as now, we could say). The intensity of the love that Francis experienced was like a flame, in fact the image is that of a Seraphim 'imprinting' on his body the marks of passion, which left Francis in a state of joy and ecstasy, like that of the great mystics. He will eventually tell his brothers that in order to go to the Father, following in the footsteps of the Son, they (we!) should purify themselves, be enlightened and aflame with the fire of the Holy Spirit. And, I would go on to add that in this encounter of ardent love and identification with Christ, Francis was able to sacrifice himself and part of his inspiration, loving his brothers, even if they did not follow him in the way he had originally thought they would, bearing witness to the model of Jesus, who is crucified, betrayed and abandoned by his own. Concretely, Francis once again embraced the fragility of the cross, and what happened was not that his physical or relational suffering disappeared, but that they were immersed in love, for he identified fully with the one he had decided to follow, Christ.

As Christians, particularly as Franciscans, we offer our lives completely to God: joys and sorrows, good times and bad, life and death. I have experienced that humanly "negative" circumstances, lived in faith, can be great vehicles of grace, which purify me and unite me with the crucified Lord. I believe that everything talks to me about God, so in pain or fragility, in sorrows and difficulties, I have experienced that if (after trying possible ways to overcome my problems!) I surrender myself to Him, I experience such situations as powerful tools to grow, to see other perspectives, to be free to choose alternative ways of responding, to experience the closeness of Christ, to become more sensitive to the suffering of others. Furthermore, in relation to others, as a TOR brother I remember that I am called to heal the wounded, to bandage those who are hurt, and to recover those who have done wrong: I live this with a deep sense of accomplishment and gratitude, as a 'wounded healer', who can express closeness to those who suffer, because I have experienced in the past or am currently experiencing sufferings that can heal, unify, sanctify.



WOUNDS, PAIN AND SUFFERING: FROM FRANCIS TO TODAY'S WORLD

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Original: Portuguese



Francis, the universal saint, is known both within and outside of Christianity; from the years of his life in the early 13th century to the present day, he is one of the most perfect incarnations of the Christian ideal. The reason for that is simple. In his person and in his life the *Poverello* of Assisi reflects the person and life of Jesus whom he followed radically. He introduced a form of Christian life that fully responded to the deepest needs and aspirations of the society of his time.

The secret of the success of Francis' mystical originality as an incarnation of the Gospel lies in his having found the centre around which various elements are structured. It is this centre that the Gospel of St John stresses unequivocally: "And eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." (Jn 17:3) The secret attraction of the novelty of Francis' mysticism is its realization of a particularly faithful form of the Christian experience of God, adapted to the needs of his time..

Francis' praxis animated and continues to animate those who place their lives under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the radical following of Jesus Christ. Francis' tenderness manifests itself above all in human relationships. He breaks the rigidity of the feudal hierarchy and calls everyone brothers and sisters. He called himself the little brother (*fratello*) (cf. JJ 17). He manifested a special tenderness towards the poor and to the poorest among the poor, the lepers. Biographies are unanimous in stating that his first conversion was for the poor and the crucified, and from there for the poor Christ, the Crucified.

Francis is profoundly devoted to the cross of Christ and to his passion. Celano, the great biographer of Francis, tell us: "the humility of the incarnation and the charity of the passion had imprinted itself so deeply in his memory that he could hardly think of anything else" (1 Cel 84). The passion of the Lord is one of the christological dimensions most intensely experienced by Francis' mysticism, both in terms of suffering and in the way he sought to identify with Christ through suffering. In this yearning for identification, Francis allows himself to be sacrificed by the mystery of the Lord's passion.

After his conversion, he began a journey of penance, fasting and prayer, demonstrating an ardent desire to be united with Christ Jesus, the "Unloved Love". Francis' penances were for the most part radical to the point of causing his body profound discomfort, as Celano tells us: "If he had had any temptation of the flesh, such as happens, he immersed himself during the winter in a pit full of ice and remained there until all rebellion of the flesh had passed away". (42,8)

Francis always denied himself the comfort of a bed, sleeping on the bare earth and using a stone or a piece of wood as a pillow. On several occasions, the *Poverello* deprived himself of food for a long period of time, going so far as to eat only half a loaf of bread over a period of forty days. These few gestures demonstrate Francis' excessive love for his Beloved. For many, these acts of extreme penance are considered folly, but for him they are small gestures of love, moved by the desire to complete the "suffering that was lacking in the passion of Christ".

Moving from Francis to the wounds of today's world

The moments of desolation that hurt the world today are countless, as Pope Francis decries. The Covid-19 pandemic experienced in 2020 exacerbated the consequences of social inequalities, adding to the problems already existing. Today, Francis' experience on the Mount of La Verna is relevant and inspiring. Faced with a wounded world, we learn to contemplate so much pain and suffering. Wounded humanity cries out for justice. There are so many open wounds that lack a merciful and transforming gaze.

Poverty, violence and exclusion have definitively crept into the social field. It suffices to walk around any metropolis in the world to find on every corner, in all public places, wretched men, women and children begging for a bit of food, if they do not go so far as aggression to get their fix of crack. Violence of society against them, their violence against society.

The question of migrants and refugees has gained prominence on the international scene in recent years due to the significant scale of their movement, the lack of respect for human dignity and the increasing violence in containing them, despite their extremely vulnerable condition. Throughout history, factors such as conflict and persecution have caused

forced migration but in contemporary times the multiplicity of factors involved in the formation of forced displacement makes the reality of refugees complex.

In today's world, another form of grief is femicide, the violent death of a woman because of her gender status - that is its fullest definition. Discussing the death of women is a very complex theoretical-practical task, as there are so many peculiarities in the face of the deadliness of gender-based violence that the terrain of analysis becomes unstable, however necessary it may be to navigate it.

It is an open wound to be and to live in a world at war. "The earth is still shaking and the Ukrainian people weep," said Pope Francis in his latest message to the Archbishop of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. "In the face of all the war scenarios of our time, I ask each person to be a peacemaker and to pray that thoughts and projects of harmony and reconciliation may spread throughout the world. Today we live in a world war, let us stop, please!"



In the face of a world that is advancing rapidly in terms of technology, we are still seeing a world that is wounded and lost on Earth. Climate change causes global warming, ecological crises, devastating fires worldwide, warming oceans. "Exposed to the climate crisis, the poor feel even more severely the impact of droughts, floods, hurricanes and increasingly intense and frequent heat waves," said Francis.

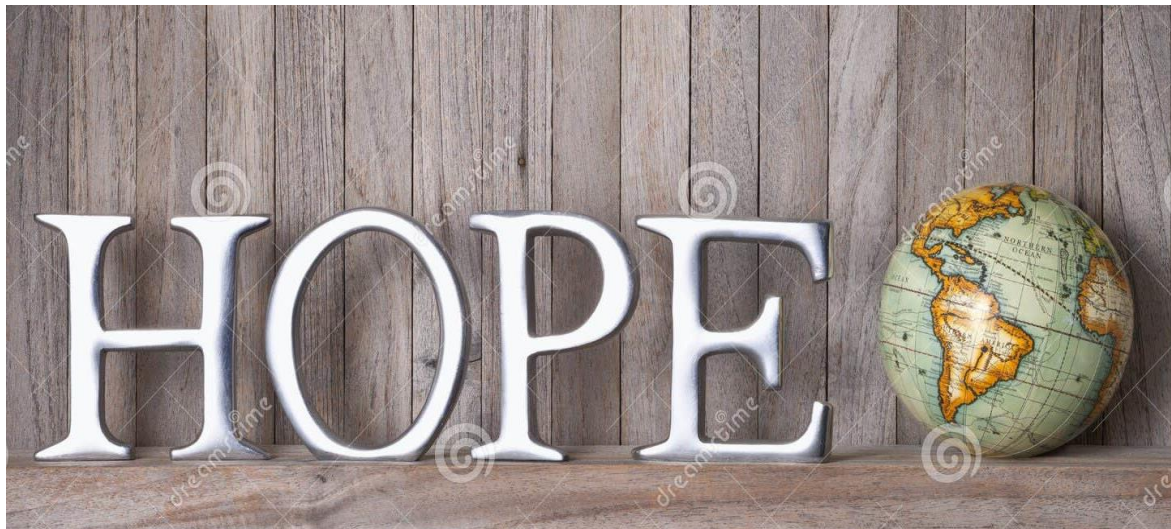
Hope is born and takes root in many human wounds, in much suffering, and in that moment of pain, of affliction, of suffering, we are invited to meditate with St Francis on the passion of Jesus Christ in the wounds and sorrows of the world of today. His total abandonment to the will of the Father and his total surrender to the cross have shown us all that death no longer has any power, because the Son of God has brought us, once and for all, the redemption of the entire human race. With St Francis, the universal brother, we are invited to say, as he himself repeated and wept in the woods of Assisi: "My God and my All."

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Reflection Questions

“Christ, St. Francis and the Meaning of Suffering in our Modern World”

1. In the article by Sister Ilia Delio, she states “If love is our deepest reality, then why do we suffer?” She also states “Francis accepted suffering as an opportunity for growth.” In your own life, when have you endured great suffering that later proved to be opportunities for growth within you?
2. “Freedom to love in the midst of suffering is a matter of faith.” Through many years of ministering to those who suffer greatly due to the circumstances that life offers to them, can you recall times when the suffering of others and the way they handled that suffering gave witness to you of the mystery of God’s love in God’s people?
3. Brother Paolo likened the awareness that comes from suffering as the natural process of the growth of a pearl inside a “wounded” shell. What in your life has acted as an “irritant” to your living yet has “developed” into a pearl for you? What aided you through the process?
4. Dr Carlos Eduardo Cardozo speaks in his article about the wounds of our society today including many injustices: wars between nations, divisions within nations and the Church, prejudice, increasing poverty, abuse of the environment, intolerance of immigrants and refugees, and the list continues. Despite all of these injustices, Pope Francis in his World Youth Day address to young adults told them and us to be people of hope. As followers of St. Francis in this Third Order way of life, how can we be a beacon of hope in the midst of a suffering world?

For the next Propositum, we invite your reflections on this topic, either by answering one or more of the questions listed above or your own reflection from these articles.





Propositum a periodical of Franciscan history and spirituality of the Third Order Regular and is published by the International Franciscan Conference of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis · IFC-TOR.

Propositum takes its name and inspiration from “*Franciscanum Vitae Propositum*”, the Apostolic Brief of 8 December 1982, by which His Holiness Pope John Paul II approved and promulgated the revised Rule and Life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis. The periodical / issues are published in English, French, German, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese.

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