

Scotland's Third Order Franciscan Spiritual Journal



December 7th 2007 - Newsletter 2

Dear Friends of St Francis in the Third Order,

As most of you will be aware, Francis of Assisi initiated what has become known as the Christmas Crib, at the beautiful little village of Greccio. If you go there today, you will see the small but imposing hermitage built into the side of a sheer rock face. The 'Praesepio' was for Francis a re-enactment of the Nativity of Jesus using actual people, animals,



and, of course, a baby. From what we can gather, the result probably looked like a 'tableau'. So as the words of the Gospel were read, the imagination of all those present was exercised, so that the Word, Christ entered the heart all the more deeply.

In a way, this is not unlike the exercises of St Ignatius, which directs the one praying to be 'taken into' the heart of the Gospel narrative and become part of the 'scene'. In Eastern Orthodoxy, spirituality is described as a process of being 'formed' by Christ. Therefore, the Gospel is a fundamental means by which we are made 'instruments' of the presence of Christ.

I have a suggestion which may not be a new one to you. Francis prayed with the Gospels so that he might be an 'instrument' of Christ - living the

Christ-like life. The Church has every day a reading from a Gospel set for the daily Eucharist. Whether you can get to a Eucharist that frequently or not, perhaps you might use the Gospel of the day on a daily basis. Here's a suggested pattern:

1. Be still.
2. Address the God who loves you in whatever way you like to adore or praise Him.
3. Read the passage carefully.
4. Read it again, noticing your responses and reactions, without being analytical. Be there with Christ. Let Him be with you! Let your imagination and your heart be free there.
5. Take a word or an image and wait in the silence with it for 15 minutes to 20 minutes.
6. Then notice what has happened in your silence, again without analysis or self-criticism.
7. Then finish with a prayer of thanks that you know...
8. Perhaps write down briefly in a little notebook some of what happened in your prayer time. Be careful to keep this brief...





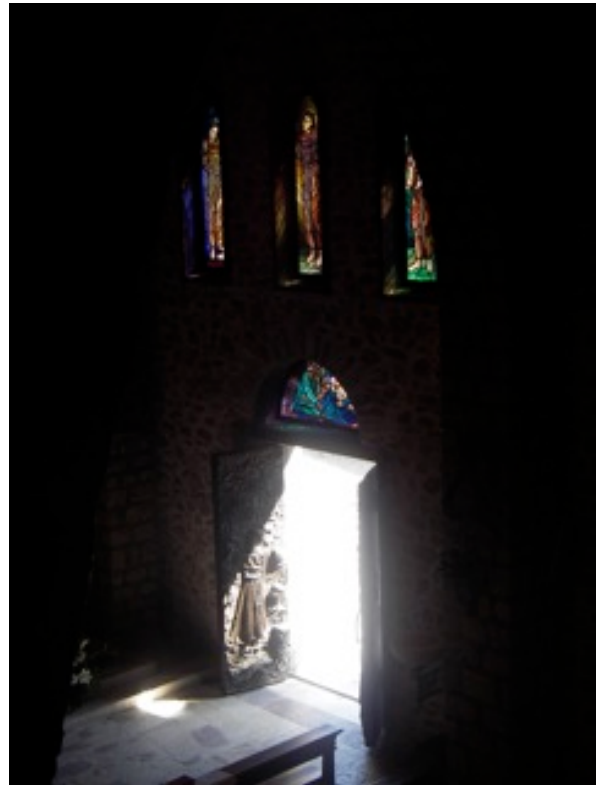
You can get the Gospel of the Day quite easily in a number of ways:

1. By asking your local priest to give you the readings for the week from the Scottish Episcopal Church Lectionary.
2. By clicking on the 'Liturgy' icon on the Scottish

Episcopal Church website.

3. By ordering a hard copy of the Lectionary from the General Synod Offices.
4. The readings, including the Gospel readings, are the same on weekdays for the Roman Catholic Church as in the Anglican Communion. You might prefer to buy a copy of the Daily Readings for Mass, which are available in different forms.

If you would like to add your comments or reactions to these suggestions, do come back to me. Perhaps we might build up a bank of experience on this approach to daily prayer.



And may St Francis inspire you to gaze on the Christ-child with his arms spread out in love for you and in anticipation of his dying that you may be born to eternal life.

Happy Christmas! Bishop Martin.
Argyll and The Isles.
alexandermartin.shaw@virgin.net