

Scotland's Third Order Franciscan Spiritual Journal



May 19th 2008 - Newsletter 7

Being a Tertiary and the Discipline of 'Confession and Absolution'

Dear Friends of St Francis in the Third Order,

Simplicity. Well now! Here's a subject about which I have been dreading writing to you. I look around me and wonder....! I am sitting on a beautifully comfortable chair with my laptop in front of me which is linked to my little printer and to the internet at the same time. There in the corner is a television with a Freeview box and a series of DVDs, which my darling wife Elspeth wishes I would tidy up. Attached to my belt is a PDA - a little pocket computer which can send and receive emails as well as make me feel busy and very important. On my left, is a Bose CD player which is currently throwing out the glories of Vaughan Williams 5th Symphony. In my pocket, is a Mont Blanc fountain pen which my son gave me for Christmas two years ago. I own a Leica Camera. And I have the audacity to write about simplicity....?

Well yes, I do actually.

The reason I do so is because I am writing for and to myself as well as to you. Apart from anything else, maybe you can help ME! No. I do not live a simple life and yes, I do have a great deal of things. Yes, I do spend too much money on books and CDs and can find all sorts of reasons to justify it. Yes, I do feel un-

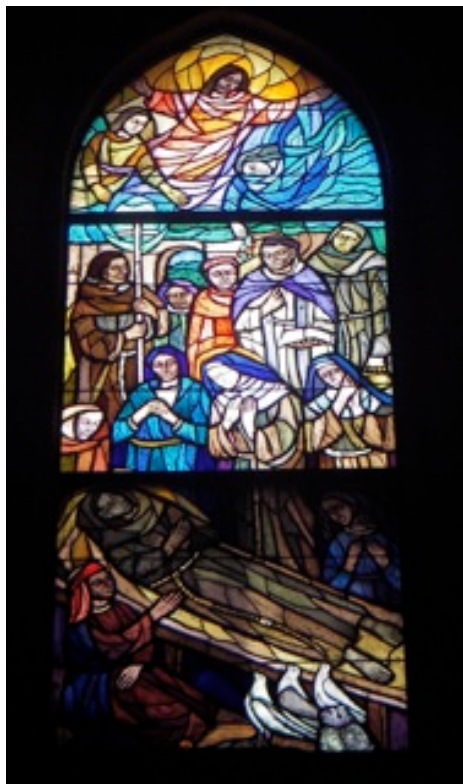
comfortable that I have all these while there is an incomprehensible agony taking place in Burma, to name but one. Does that stop me? Well....only sort of....! It may be that I am generous with my 'stuff', in lending it to people. Except you can't borrow my iPod!!! The things I give away are largely the things I don't want or need any more. So where is the generosity in that?

When I first became a tertiary back in the early 1970s, I was expected to keep careful personal accounts of what I earned and what I spent. These were then shared with my spiritual director. Perhaps this is a fastidiousness that verges on neurotic scrupulosity. Perhaps.... I have mentioned in one of my previous letters that accountability is important.

Each tertiary, as you know, is expected to read and pray with 'The Principles of Daily Living' which has the unsettling but important subtitle of 'Community Obedience'. On day 12 of each month, as part of 'The Third Aim', there is this guidance:

"Personal spending is limited to what is necessary for our health and well-being and that of our dependants. We aim to stay free from all attachment to wealth, keeping our-

selves constantly aware of the poverty in the world and its claim on us. We are concerned more for the generosity that gives all, rather than for the value of poverty in itself. In this way we reflect in spirit the acceptance of Jesus' challenge to sell all, give to the poor, and follow him."



Dr Sheila Cassidy., you may recall was a doctor in Chile and was tortured by the 'junta' for associating herself with liberation groups. This experience was, as you might imagine, a life-changing experience and brought about a series of outstanding books, one of which is called 'Audacity to Believe'. Sheila's flat in Plymouth, where she was director of a hospice, was an education and challenge. She made sure that none of her cups and saucers were matching so that she could buy any second-hand (or twelfth hand!) replacement in a charity shop. [Writing about charity shops, we have an expert on them in our Bishop of Edinburgh, Brian Smith]. Sheila Cassidy was generous in giving away her time, money and food on her table for all sorts and conditions..

At the end of this week, I am leading a pilgrimage again to Assisi [which is hardly a cheap let alone an ecologically 'sound' enterprise!]. I am hoping that I can rededicate myself to some tiny level of simplicity that doesn't arise from guilt but arises from the spirit of Francis in his delight in giving his all. You may find this pathetic really, but I would like to try and live for the rest of this year without buying anything for myself which I don't need. Well, for me it's a place to start. If you see me at some point, just smile and ask me if I have kept to this! You will probably get a smile back! Now do you have any little helps and guides on this vocation in our Third Order Journey? (Of course, I am going to add a 'but'.....) BUT.... I would like the occasional trip to the movies.....

Perhaps when Tertiaries meet we can help each other a little more in trust, how to handle practically these issues. Of course, people have different needs and different calls on their resources. Being a tertiary and taking its vocation really seriously, is hard. What is essential however, is that we keep fo-

cused on the delight in our vocation. Delight is a necessity! I remember going to my spiritual director years ago and telling her that I had managed to do without alcohol throughout Lent. All she did was put her finger to her lips: 'Shshsh!' she exclaimed quietly. So the question is: How are we to be simple without being boringly self-satisfied.

I remind myself of Brother Leo's question to Francis: 'Haven't we followed you as the disciples followed Christ? Haven't we given enough?' Francis reply was swift and, according to Bonaventure, said with a beaming smile: 'Leo, my friend, it is and will never be enough! Give your love NOW and while doing so sing your song!'

Please let me know what you think?

In the love, life and simplicity of that follower of the Christ of delight - Francis.

+Martin
Bishop of Argyll and The Isles

If you have anything to share on this issue, please email me or write to me and I will draw the responses together for the next Newsletter.



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