

# About St. Francis Today R056-ba

*A Modern Connection* by Jeff Liautaud

*With critical thanks for review by Fr. Joe Chinnici, OFM, an Oxford educated historian, and highly respected Franciscan Theologian. Fr. Joe said "Circulate this, as many will find it helpful." Thanks also to a Franciscan spiritual assistant's review.*

After many hours of prayer and contemplation, St. Francis was a swift arrow to God. By swift I mean there was little or no space between decision and action. After discernment, he almost ran, and often times did run, to execute an inspiration. Many of his inspirations continued on throughout his whole life, like care for lepers. And hitting the mark of God from the inspiration may be found in the witness of his whole life.

St. Francis stepped out on a limb. St. Francis was ready to be a fool for God. St. Francis' faith, radical faith, is something that inspires me greatly, as I dare say, it would inspire any. Our direction, like St. Francis is to be a swift arrow to God.

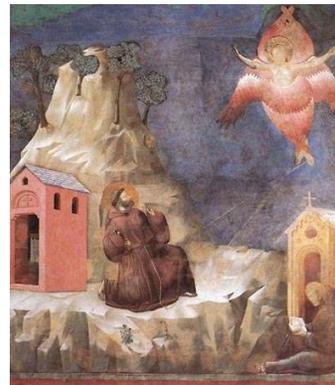
St. Francis' direction is Biblical. He lived the Gospel. Nay, rather he had the audacity to live the Gospel. I remember being afraid to hear the Gospel for fear of what it might mean; and tell me what, or something, I had to do. St. Francis, ran to live the Gospel.

St. Francis began with Lady Poverty. His embrace of Lady Poverty was swift, as swift and complete as any mystical inspiration. You would need to read over and over in any book about St. Francis the extremes to which he went, to espouse Lady Poverty. Lady Poverty kept him detached from things of the world. Suffice it to say as he was accomplishing this espousal, nothing could keep him from imitating Christ. The world had no hold on him.

That is why he, like Christ, was so puzzling to people like myself, so often buried in the false allures of the world. After I read five books on St. Francis, I was, and am, humbled by the armloads of information in which I need to change myself for the better. This change will take some time.

There is a difference between the self I am, my shameful self, and the self I ought to be. Doing something about that difference was for St. Francis to be penitential. Like St. Francis, when I am aware, I wish to offer up a changed self to the glory of God. And St. Francis was to my knowledge never proud, even though he was so Christ-like. That is why I am more aware and so humbled from learning about St. Francis.

Pax et Bonum, peace and all good, is what St. Francis brings to earth. A seraph angel bespoke to him in a vision, wrapping some of its six wings around a human form.



What St. Francis saw in a fresco attributed to Giotto in the upper church of St. Francis Basilica Assisi, Italy circa 1300.

In Christian angelology the seraphim are the highest-ranking celestial beings in the hierarchy of angels, six-winged creatures praising God as in "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isaiah 6:3).

It is not completely clear, but what St. Francis pondered may have been himself and/or Christ. A Franciscan,

Oxford

Historian and respected Theologian, explained:

"Later, at Easter, on La Verna and the experience of the stigmata, and when gazing at Christ on the cross of San Damiano, Francis sees the picture of "love willing to suffer," and it is the love expressed on the cross that attracts him. God does not want Francis to suffer, nor does the Father want His Son to suffer. As the fullest expression of a God who is Love, God sends his Son to reveal the depth of God's love for us; the suffering that ensues is the consequence of loving, of God's desire, to use the author's beautiful insight, to be with us and the drive towards relatedness... God first loved us, our response is to love back by bearing the burdens that come our way in loving."

The seraphic Christ was embraced in St. Francis by deed of the stigmata, which St. Francis, in typical fashion, was quite reluctant to share with others.

St. Francis was of keen intellect, but his greatest attribute was his faith to imitate Christ. Christ suffered. So, St. Francis suffered. He simply was more of a doer than a philosopher. For when St. Francis was questioned about a philosopher with sound thinking, St. Francis was inclined to ask the philosopher to act more on what he thought, than just think.

St. Francis followed Christ, like a little child... in great joy, giving away in delight whatever he had. His joy in gifting was as astounding as the action itself. The child in St. Francis was quite attractive.

In contrast, after I began to follow where the Gospel led me, I wondered when I would arrive, for I suffered much. Like St. Francis, the Cross was mine, but it was an affliction. St. Francis relished receiving the Cross.

I thought the Cross would end. Not until one Easter, did I realize that the Cross would be with me, as many times as there were weaves in my shirt. From that point forward whenever I made a place for pain in my heart, when the Cross arrived, I had joy in doing the will of the Father. This may have been a way in which I began to become a bit more like St. Francis. St. Francis regaled his followers to seek the Cross, to have faith in all those around us, even those who cause us to suffer, speaking the truth always and staying with them. That drew them to the righteousness of God within him.

St. Francis wanted his followers to be penitential, to embrace the Cross, because that is the only way to be like Christ. Metanoia means a complete turning away from something and a turning to something. By our Cross, like Christ, we redeem the world around us. This is an irrefutable law. This is what Christ meant when He said to be My disciple you must pick up your Cross and follow Me (Matthew 10:38; Luke 9:23; Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34).

Christ perfected atonement for all men. He stayed related even with the greatest sinner by dying on the cross. He had a dual experience of sorrow and joy. His atonement was complete but he invites us to join him in suffering for others when put upon, in order to stay related with them. Relatedness is an innate need of all mankind. This means that if you go against relatedness with any person, you will have diminished motivation and diminished well-being.

There is no other way to stay related even to those who cause me to suffer the most. For me, the dual experience of suffering when put upon, and making external acts of kindness staying committed to being with the one wrongfully causing the suffering, brings me the joy of Christ. Embracing the local meaning of suffering, permits me, to stay - related to all.

G.K. Chesterton said St. Francis knew we all were debtors to God. I can understand this. A debt is a minus on a bookkeeper's ledger.

Let me explain my view. It works like this. God is just. Let's arbitrarily call sin a minus or "-." When we pick up our Cross and submit to the will of the Lord, we burn the dross from ourselves. We turn our "-“ to a plus, or “+.” Only God metes out justice perfectly. We will know we have suffered enough, when we suffer no more. Then something even more miraculous occurs.

When our own atonement is complete, when our + = our -, then only the + occurs. Eventually St. Francis enraptured in love saw himself on the Seraphic cross completely loved and accepted by Seraphic Christ.

I am to pray to suffer in the image of Christ (in my own vision) that I might become more like Him. Jesus is in my cross. Himself. His love. His joy. For all the world to see. It is the only way. There is no other way. My Cross helps me burn the dross from my soul. That I may yet know Him. I do this, like St. Francis by only doing the will of the Father fleeing attachment. And in freeing himself, St. Francis could freely love everyone and everything in God's creation.

St. Francis, so abundantly left his individual debt of sins behind that from the time he so stripped himself of possessions, he brought God's mercy to the world thru his suffering abundantly for others, seen in abundant miracles of their personal conversion.

The Holy Spirit performed miracles thru St. Francis because St. Francis was so like Christ.

The Catholic Church teaches that this juxtaposition of any person with Christ is meaningfully connected to the power of the Holy Spirit thru suffering. This is what John Paul II wrote about as Salvific Suffering (Google "Vatican: Salvifici Doloris.") St. Paul said:

Colossians 1:24 And now I am happy about my sufferings for you, for by means of my physical sufferings I am helping to complete what still remains of Christ's sufferings on behalf of his body, the church.

Salvific Suffering partakes fully in God's will. Salvific suffering is open to all. It requires faith to embrace it. Our direction, like St. Francis' is to close the gap from decision to action. Joy is its fruit.

St. Francis knew closeness to Christ could only be achieved in the moment, and did this moment by moment. For example, St. Francis admonished his followers that he could yet have a wife and children, though he never did. His meaning may have been that moment by moment we must choose. We must let God's grace carry us in the moment, for we can never fully achieve being Christ.

St. Francis changed sociological systems of which he was a part. When one person in a system changes, the system changes. G.K. Chesterton pointed out that St. Francis' army of followers could move fast; one might say with lightning speed, with no possessions except their robe, a rope cord, and sandals. That was their financial plan...utter simplicity...to beg for alms as needed. This was really traveling light. And the interior

spiritual beauty for the army was to surrender to God, totally trusting in divine providence.

St. Francis was not trying to start a new religion. From the beginning, St. Francis was literally, and simply, trying to build up the Church, one stone upon the other. No wonder that one of St. Francis' first acts was to get authority from the Pope to practice his proposed religious order, going from life to Gospel, and Gospel to life.

G. K. Chesterton, in his inspiring book St. Francis of Assisi, concluded that the Catholic Church was more than St. Francis. The mystery of Christ is definitely in the domain of the catholic (with a small "c" which means universal) Church. Just as St. Francis would never, could never, say he was Christ, so too does the common sense role of the Catholic Church teach the dignity of every man to answer the call of Jesus, to hear God's call uniquely in our heart. That is what the great mind of G.K. Chesterton may have meant when he said that the Catholic Church is more than St. Francis. The Catholic Church continually surprises us with her treasures, the Communion of Saints.

The Catholic Church understands autonomy. Let me give two examples. The Catholic Church teaches that all of us have a unique job to do. That job is given to us by Christ. It is a job to change the world in a way only we can do. This satisfies the innate need of autonomy.

Dr. Dennis Galligani of Dana Point, California, while professionally working with Franciscans, said "When you meet one Franciscan, you meet one Franciscan," attesting to their example of autonomy. Each has a personality different from another but each are fraternal as Franciscans. The Franciscan Theologian explains:

In fact we become unique only in relationship to others.

The second way that the Catholic Church teaches autonomy is thru community as found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 1880: each man is established as an "heir" and receives certain "talents" that enrich his identity and whose fruits he must develop. He

rightly owes loyalty to the communities of which he is part and respect to those in authority who have charge of the common good.

1881 Each community is defined by its purpose and consequently obeys specific rules; but "the human person . . . is and ought to be the principle, the subject and the end of all social institutions.

The primary value that satisfies the innate need of autonomy, that is finding our uniqueness, is operating in an area of meaningful expansion for your self, that is your interiorly preferred work. By prayer and contemplation, like St. Francis, we empty our self, that we might do the work God has in mind for us. In a penitential manner by making a declaration offering our interiorly preferred work as a gift back to God, we invoke the Spirit to give us more of that kind of work. Then operating in our own area of meaningful expansion for our self, we decide a matter and light will shine upon our ways.

The Franciscan definition of love is doing that which is truly in the best interests of others. That satisfies the innate need of relatedness. When you do that which is truly in the best interests of others...you are...related.

St. Francis was a doer. We satisfy the innate need of competence through the primary value of attaining goals, or other ends not necessarily preconceived as goals, but which becomes a goal once experienced. St. Francis heard a Gospel reading, spoke to the priest and said that is "just what I want to do...to live the Gospel." The end, not preconceived as a goal but which became a goal once experienced, was going from life to Gospel and Gospel to life, but prayer and contemplation was the path. A Franciscan spiritual assistant explains:

Francis spent almost 300 days of each year in prayer and contemplation. Francis...was to be one with Christ by living a Gospel life.

He did this in community with Franciscans.

Cited by over half a million Academic Research articles, the innate needs of human kind may be the greatest discovery in natural law ever. Innate needs

when satisfied lead to "enhanced self-motivation and mental health and when thwarted lead to diminished motivation and well-being."

When you satisfy innate needs and include an interdependence based on the Spirit, you have a more perfect form of God centered community. Doing so, you will tend toward happiness or joy for yourself, and increased sense of community in every group of which you are a part.

So, when G. K. Chesterton said the Catholic Church is more than St. Francis, G.K. Chesterton may have also meant the great common sense indicated by the Church in its basic understanding of the individual, of subsidiarity and the proper role of the Church to defend Christ in the individual.

St. Francis teaches us, not just the birds, to go from Gospel to life and life to Gospel, by observing natural law, being one with all God's created universe, no different than his call to Lady Poverty...what an example for everyone!

#### About the author

Jeff Liautaud graduated from Quincy, a Franciscan University. Understanding the sense of community that he experienced at Quincy became a lifelong avocation for him. In 1970 he founded a charity, [Loquate](#). Today Loquate is a ripple organization that builds community "in unity for all."

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#### *Summary Description – a Modern Connection*

*St. Francis was a swift arrow to God. He took up his cross in Lady Poverty and befriended all mankind, exclusive of none. That classic has not changed. Yet God reveals to us a Natural Law that St. Francis so admired. That Natural Law connection is a new dimension explained scientifically as [innate needs](#), and primary values that satisfy innate needs. The modern connection unfolds and upholds the classic swift arrow to God. This is a personal reflection by the author. But that is the point about St. Francis. Each has their own personal reflection and never ending encouragement studying the life of St. Francis.*

[Smart® Resources](#) for building authentic community.