

Brothers and Sisters, may the Lord give you peace! I come to you from St Bernardine Monastery on this particular journey of my recovery from congestive heart failure. Strength and endurance are returning slowly, but enough energy to craft a few words for today's liturgy. Care and compassion for the sake of the other pop up as Gospel values. The friars and our lay staff are revealing the face of Christ. I would like to speak to this.

The centenary of the Stigmata of St Francis still resonates in our minds and hearts. In our previous presentations and reflections Francis ascends La Verna to pray and fast as he was accustomed, to meditate on the image that had impressed itself upon his spirit at San Damiano, the crucified. But now, two years before his passing, Francis comes already wounded. The fraternal enterprise of "Fraternitas" that he inaugurated is being threatened with a variety of problems and disappointments: influential friars were trying to modify the 1221 rule, and so in the turmoil the early rule is revised; foreign missions have already collapsed; ill health prevents him to visit and preach peace, especially with his friend, the Sultan, although this encounter would remain a lasting significance; the numbers of the friars are increasing, the new ones do not know Francis, nor does he know them; the church is asking Francis to bring "order" into the "fraternity," in which organizational skills were not his, and so the administration of the friars was turned over to others; Francis preferred to be a brother, a living example of his way of life in imitation of Christ crucified; the founder of the Franciscan movement now becomes the observer.

This time on La Verna, Francis is already wounded. We understand "woundedness" in our society, in our families and communities, even in our fraternities. Our we ready to identify with the crucified, our Lord and our brothers and sisters? So deeply did Francis identify with the crucified, that the wounds of Jesus shown forth and pierced his own flesh. That which he had before his eyes his whole life long, and had experienced deep within, now manifested itself externally. Even in his brokenness, Francis is sensitive to the anguish of the brothers, especially Leo, who receives the parchment with the letter Tau, that each of us in our own way is marked with the stigmata.

Our monastery library contains the books of the friars expanding many decades. I found one, from 1953, authored by a German philosopher, Romano Guardini, who heavily influenced the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council. Pope Benedict XVI was his disciple. Most quoted by Pope Francis in “Laudato Si.’

Here begins the quote:

The specific charism of St Francis consists in remembering Jesus. This claim sounds strange since all the saints are those who unveil the mystery of Christ. The saints express Christ; they translate Him who is the Lord and Center of all meaning into a special human possibility relative to the social order, the time, the need, the task of the hour. This all the saints do. But Francis does more: he does not translate; he actualizes; and he makes present. Whoever encounters Francis must think of Christ. His nature is such, his word, his thought, his entire life are of such nature that they are immediate concrete expressions of the Gospel; literal imitation, pure and simple actuation of the life of Jesus without any compromise or change—so that the face of Christ Himself becomes visible in him, the bearing of Christ is seen in his own.

Our responsibility is to be the compassionate Christ, to bring joy to joyless hearts.

