

The Secular Franciscan Rule
1978 – 2018
40th Anniversary of the Pauline Rule

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians (4:1-13)

“Brothers and sisters, I, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility, and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace; one body, and one spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”

The word of the Lord...Thanks be to God!

1978 was a good year. On June 24, 1978, The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order was confirmed by Pope Paul VI, and on that day our name became the Order of Franciscans Secular, or Secular Franciscans. On August 26, 1978, Pope John Paul I was elected and reigned only 33 days! On October 16, 1978, Saint Pope John Paul II was elected.

The reason I can recall the happenings of 1978 vividly is because on July 15, 1978 I married my beloved husband! It was only after many years that we realized that July 15th is the feast day of St. Bonaventure! Does God have a plan or what?!

The Rule, this month, will turn 40 years old! CIOFS, the International Council of the OFS declared a Jubilee Year of the Rule from June 6, of this year to June 6, of next year. A full 365 days of celebration.

I will not be giving you the entire history of the OFS Rule, please read pages 1-3 of the recent Spring 2018 issue of the TAU-USA. That is the written history. But, I would like to share with you a few points.

It took over 10 years to finalize the version of the Rule we have today. By the second draft, it was clear that the Franciscan fathers, who had been revising the Leonine Rule themselves, needed input by the Third Order Seculars in writing our own Rule; a first in the writing of any Order’s Rule in the Church! The final version, right at the last moment added “especially with youth groups” in Article 24. It was the final change.

Today I would like to talk about the Rule’s content, meaning, and challenge.

The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order has 2,890 words. The Webster Dictionary states that a word is a noun which is “a sound or combination of sounds that has a meaning and is spoken or written.” Words are important; semantics are important. For example, what if a fraternity member would say, “I think we should do it this way.”? What if instead, they phrased it differently by saying, “Have we considered doing it this way?” It is virtually the same meaning, but by asking this question the person has changed the whole dynamic from sharing their own viewpoint, to instead, asking the entire fraternity what their thoughts are on an idea.

We probably know many of the words of the Rule by heart, or at least I would hope we do, but do we really? Let's look at the specific words used when we read our Rule.

Not surprising are the words Jesus Christ, and Lord which are used 24 times. He was Francis' beloved and inspiration. 14 times we see the word Church, which was the vessel through which Francis lived and received the Eucharist. Love/loved/beloved is seen 13 times. These words are the fruits of Francis' knowledge and imitation of Jesus. 10 times we see the word fraternity which was Francis' family in which he lived his life, served the poor, and taught future generations. Gospel is seen 9 times because it is the inspired word of God which Francis vowed to live as written. And as we would expect because it is our Rule, we see the words Secular Franciscan Order six times and we see the word Secular Franciscan seven times. This is the Order Francis began for the laity.

Words that we would also expect to see are strive, my personal favorite, used 5 times, also used 5 times combines are duties (2), obligations (1), and responsibility (2). 4 times we see the words witness, family and mission.

The following words we would expect to see more of out of 2,890 words mainly because of our Franciscan charism. Eucharist and Eucharistic life are seen only 3 times; as well as prayer, service, and peace! Those who we are called to serve, the poor and lowly, are words only used 3 times! Conversion, what we are to experience daily, is used only 2 times. What really surprised me were the words contemplation and reconciliation, which were words only used 1 time each!

If you study all the words, our Rule leads us to what is important in our vocation, our call, and what we should be striving towards. It was interesting to me that the word "I" is only seen quoted in the Prologue by St. Francis, it is nowhere else to be found in the body of the Rule! Nor is the word "WE" used. Instead, the word "ALL" is used 9 times! So maybe the words *not* used are as important as the words *chosen* to be used.

If we put the top 5 words of our OFS Rule in a sentence, this is what it may look like:

"Because Jesus Christ, our Lord, loved us so much He gave us the gospel to inspire us to action, the Church to enable us to action, and our fraternity brothers and sisters to assist us in those actions which we participate in for the betterment of the world."

A member of my own fraternity, who has since gone to the Lord, shared with us one meeting while we were explaining the differences between the Leonine Rule and the Pauline Rule. She was professed and lived under the Leonine Rule for many years. She told us that, to her, the Leonine Rule was a check list of do's and don'ts for personal piety, but that the Pauline Rule was expanded to include our actions in the Church and in the world. She said she liked the Pauline Rule better!

I have often compared the two Rules and shared that the Leonine Rule was a Rule of life to get me into Heaven, but the Pauline Rule is a Rule of life to get me into Heaven *AND* to take everyone else with me!

Our Rule is forty years old this month, and it is still the inspiration and driving force behind our "call" to the vocation of a Secular Franciscan. It is a Rule made up of words, not just *nouns*, but living, breathing and moving *verbs*. We can read the *nouns* of the Rule, but we are called to live the *verbs* of the Rule.

Fr. Lester Bach, OFM Capuchin, writes in *The Franciscan Journey*:

“Living the spirit spelled out in the Rule and Constitutions is the criterion that proves the legitimacy of our calling. Our vocation expects us to give flesh, in daily life, to the words of our Franciscan profession. Love of people, conversion, reconciliation, forgiveness, contemplation, love for all of creation, prayerfulness, etc. become normal for us.”

Our “call” is to live the Rule in our personal lives, in our fraternities and in our Queen of Peace Region, especially during this her 25th Anniversary year (November 27, 1992). Our call to be Secular Franciscans is not a personal call, but one to be taken to the pews of our Churches, the halls of our job sites, the rooms of our homes, the streets where humanity exists, and into the whole world where Christ has placed His divine seed in all of creation!

Remember the words of Saint Paul as he “urge[s] you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received” and remember that “grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”

I am most blessed to be called a Secular Franciscan.

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