

## Homily—21 October Opening Chapter Mass—Fr Christopher, T.O.R.

These past several days I've been waking up several times during the night, unable to get back to sleep. Can't stop the issues swirling around in my mind:

- Racial discrimination.
- Fear and uncertainty every breath we take.
- Divisiveness in society, in our institutions, and in our Church.
- Bigotry.
- Lack of civility in public discourse.
- Injustices against human dignity.
- Preventive health and safety measures misinterpreted as restrictions on personal freedom.
- Disinformation..

How well are you sleeping at night? These issues weigh heavy on us as we gather for Chapter, isolated from fraternity yet doing our best to stay connected, even virtually. What's our response to all that's happening around us? What's a body to do? Is there a remedy somewhere?

St Francis sought to be alone, to pray and contemplate God's deep and abiding love of us. Let us see these disruptions as opportunity—an opportunity to be alone with Jesus, and go deeper, deeper:

- into the quagmire.
- into faith.
- into trust.
- Into the Paschal Mystery.

How much time do we devote to the good around us, the good that we are called to espouse? How far are we willing to go in

extending ourselves as our Rule bids us? In truly being people with a Franciscan heart?

Of the rich spiritual content of the Prologue to the Rule, the phrase referring to those who *“bear fruit worthy of penance”* clearly characterizes the *“happy and blessed.”* Being penitent is key. In these unsettling times, as brothers and sisters of penance, let us maintain a fervent and joyful attitude as did Francis.

The call to conversion is a change of mentality. It predisposes us to believe in the gift of the Kingdom of God proclaimed and inaugurated by Jesus. Being penitent introduces us to the extraordinary and intimate relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus expects us to be alert to the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and to act in ways that bear witness to our vocation. This hidden treasure has not lost its value in the current conditions of the world and of the Church. To the contrary, it is even more valuable as a Gospel alternative to the lacerations that oppress and distress today’s men and women.

The central mystery here is Jesus, and the redemption that He brings. It regulates our thinking on the environment and everything within it. It sheds light on the degradation of the universe often done in the name of progress. Ecology has a moral concern affecting us and future generations.

The unexpected—is the in-breaking of the very reign of God, God’s own secret in the process of being revealed. It’s not often recognized because this revelation often occurs through the most unexpected of times.

Like the prudent steward in today's Gospel, let us display a vigilant and unwavering faith in the face of uncertainty. Jesus' words find particular resonance for us to be prepared against the unexpected.

So let us be on guard: with masks on in the grocery store or on the walk around the block, God's reign is lurking among and within the unexpected. Be prepared to encounter God's reign and welcome Jesus in.