



OFS-USA

NATIONAL FRATERNITY OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER-USA

NATIONAL MINISTER'S MESSAGE

by Jan Parker, OFS

THE RULE: REBAR FOR CONCRETE CHRISTIAN LIVES

Thirty-five years ago, a wise Capuchin friar handed me a copy of *The Ideals of St. Francis of Assisi*,¹ and suggested I read it. It was a pivotal moment. I can still picture the outdoor wooden stairway where I sat down, opened this book and read for hours. I remember the cool breeze as night fell, and how thankful I was for the porch light. I did not want to put this book down. Each chapter made my heart sing a joyful “yes!”

That book was my first study of Franciscan spirituality. Here I began to learn what distinguishes St. Francis, and what constitutes his individuality, his personality, his soul, his spirit, his genius – his ideals. This book explores these ideals one by one: “Francis and the Gospel,” “Francis and Christ,” “Francis and the Eucharist,” “Francis and the Church,” “Francis and His Love of Poverty,” continuing with chapters on Franciscan Livelihood, Humility, Obedience, Simplicity, Chastity, Penance, Joy, Brotherliness, Charity, Peace, Apostolate, Science (yes, science!), Piety, and Nature. It was during this time that I was beginning to learn, too, about the Franciscan Order. How delighted I was to discover that there was a Rule that incorporated these ideals! I embraced this Rule as a way to develop and live the ideals of St. Francis. I made my profession, and from that day

forward, the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order has been the rebar of my life. Rebar?

It was Cal Prewitt who introduced me to the importance of rebar. Cal was a great friend, a fellow parishioner, and an engineer who helped oversee the construction of our new church. One day, as we toured the newly-poured foundation, Cal explained that rebar (short for reinforcing bar) is a steel bar or mesh of steel wires used to increase the tensile strength of concrete. He went on to say that rebar greatly increases the amount of stress that concrete can withstand before breaking, then added, “You know, the values we hold onto in life are like rebar – like steel giving strength to concrete.” The image stuck.



Here is a reinforced concrete column, seen before and after the concrete has been cast in place around the rebar cage.

Rebar is a good image for how I see the Rule working in my life. The ideals embedded in our OFS Rule are very much like steel bars, encased deep in the center of my being. They give fundamental support to my life. They reinforce me, keep me from breaking away, and help me stay strong and true to my vocation, especially in times of stress. These Franciscan reinforcement bars guide and direct my actions.

This analogy of rebar returned to mind a few months ago when Pope Francis gave a homily

¹ The Ideals of St. Francis of Assisi by Hilarin Felder OFM Cap., translated by Berchmans Bittle OFM Cap., published by Benziger Brothers, Printers to the Holy Apostolic See, copyrighted 1925.

about how our Christian lives need to be **concrete**. He reflected on the different opposites stressed in Matthew 7:21-27, notably between “saying and doing”:

“To say is a way of believing, but very superficial, half-way: I say I’m a Christian, but I don’t act like a Christian. To say it simply, it’s a bit like making oneself up as a Christian: only to say it is to make oneself up, to say without doing.” **On the contrary, “Jesus’ proposal is concrete, always concrete.** When someone approaches you and asks for advice, it’s always for concrete things. **The works of mercy are concrete.”**

Another opposition: rock and sand. Sand is “a consequence of saying”; it leads to a life “without foundations.” The Lord is the rock, “He is the force. However, very often one who trusts in the Lord doesn’t seem to have success; he is hidden . . . **but he is solid.** He doesn’t have hope in words, in vanity, in pride, in the ephemeral powers of life,” but in the Lord, stressed the Pontiff. **“The concrete aspect of the Christian life makes us advance and build on that rock which is God, which is**

Jesus, on the divinity’s solidity — *not on appearances or vanity, pride, recommendations... no, on the truth.*”

Third opposition: the vain and the humble. The Holy Father quoted the Magnificat: **“The Lord raises the humble, who are in the concreteness of the everyday, and brings down the arrogant, those who build their life on vanity, pride . . . they don’t last.”**

Secular Franciscans should certainly exemplify this **concrete living** our Holy Father speaks of – living solid Christian lives on the foundation that is Christ. The rebar of our Rule is there to reinforce our efforts. As our sister St. Clare says, **“Hold fast.”**

As we close this Jubilee Year in celebration of the 40th Anniversary of our Rule, let’s make it a celebration not just of our Rule, but *of our lives* as Secular Franciscans. We must be resolute. There’s no point in celebrating the Rule unless we celebrate *how we are living it*. Let’s celebrate today and every day by living **concrete Christian lives**, grateful for the Rule and the rebar that it is.

SHARING THE VISION

Report from the National Executive Council (NEC)

40th Anniversary of the Rule – Our Jubilee Year Continues!

Our national goal is that every local fraternity dedicate at least one formation session to the OFS Rule between now and June 24, 2019. Ready-made presentations on the Rule can be found on our OFS-USA website (secularfranciscansusa.org) under “Resources.” We would appreciate seeing photos of your celebration of the Rule, or any photos of your fraternity or regional happenings. Please send photos to ofsusasecretary@gmail.com

Formation “Visioning Initiatives” Workshop

The National Formation Commission, in collaboration with the NEC, has invited a number of qualified professed members and Spiritual Assistants to a Formation “Visioning Initiatives” Workshop on April 4-7, 2019. At this workshop we will further develop the ideas that came from the August 2018 Visioning Workshop and set up task force groups, each focusing on a particular aspect of formation. The proposed Task Force topics are: