

“Never has the Franciscan charism been so needed than today in order to offer the total Christ to a disintegrating world which fears a brotherhood of solidarity among all human beings without exclusion. It is the total Christ, all of Christ, every aspect of Christ, which we Franciscans must, like Francis, bear within us and offer to the world. The areas of service to which we are called are, therefore, unlimited and demanding (Roger Cardinal Etchegary, “Great Franciscan Jubilee,” 9 April 2000).”

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The burning question is: what do we as Franciscans have to offer a “disintegrating world”

Here’s what my heart tells me: a wholehearted, dynamic, living active acceptance of the mandate received by Francis to “. . . REBUILD . . .” To follow in Francis’ footsteps is to accept the same call and the same challenge to rebuild what is, seemingly, falling apart before our eyes at warp speed.

I once learned a long time ago, that an infallible sign of the Spirit’s presence is UNITY (with respectfulness, of course, to God-given diversity [SFO RULE, Chapter 1, #1]):

*“In various ways and forms but IN LIFE-GIVING UNION WITH EACH OTHER, they intend to make present the charism of their common Seraphic Father in the life and mission of the Church.”*

*“In this way holy simplicity filled them innocence of life taught them and purity of heart so possessed them that they were completely ignorant of duplicity of heart. For just as there was in them ONE FAITH, so there was ONE SPIRIT, one will, one charity, continual unity of spirit. Harmony in living, cultivation of virtues, agreement of minds, and loyalty in actions (Celano, FA:ED, Vol. 1, p. 223).”*

Elsewhere, Celano wrote of Francis:

*“Yet this love of true unity is not divided by being shared (Celano, FA:ED, Vol. 1, p. 289).”*

That thought brings to mind the candle flames shared from the ONE CANDLE at the Easter Vigil — many, yet from the ONE SOURCE uniting all present into one Easter people! One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism. And we, as Franciscans, ONE CALL of all three families TO REBUILD!

**WHAT IF:** as members of all three Orders, we offered to the world a living sign of our “brotherhood of solidarity” with each other and with all our universal brothers and sisters: those signs being: living our spirit of Franciscan simplicity, warm and loving fraternity, unity of spirit, harmony in living, agreement of minds and loyalty in actions, and reverence for every human being, as well as care for all of God’s creation, etc. ?

**WHAT IF:** we “kept our eyes fixed on Jesus” and offered to the starving world the One who said, “I am the bread of eternal life . . .”? Not just by our spiritual care for them, but by caring for all their human needs? Is this one form of the “solidarity” we as a united Franciscan family can offer?

**WHAT IF:** Jesus filled us the same way as Francis and it was this relationship that would make visible by our lives to our fragmented and fearful world what “brotherhood” means. In Celano we read: “Jesus always “in his heart, mouth, ears, eyes, hands, his whole body . . . (Celano FA:ED, Vol. I, p. 283).” In the marketplaces of life, how do we witness this unity to others?

**WHAT IF:** instead of dealing with the visible horrors of “disintegration” and distress in our world, we would have the courage to stand up to and confront the causes and not join the chorus of voices bemoaning the

symptoms? Is this the “unlimited and demanding” — the oh, so DEMANDING service of which Cardinal Etchegary spoke? Francis, from the days he heard the call of Jesus “Go rebuild . . .”, **allowed himself to be rebuilt** into an instrument Jesus could use to heal the church and heal the society around him by fraternal life. That conversion, as we know, was more demanding than he could imagine.

**WHAT IF:** we allowed ourselves to become twenty first century “Francis’s” (**punctuation???**) that the Holy Spirit could employ by using cyber technology in all its forms that it might unite us in fraternal witness and mission to counter the back-stepping of so many who are retreating into atomic individualism? In other words, by building a “brotherhood of solidarity” by real, genuine honest, face to face conversations with each other on all levels could we counter in “me” and self-centeredness of our culture.

In Francis, Clare, and their followers in the past 800 years, **we have the example** of their lives; by our Profession we have the same vocation to which we have committed ourselves, and, we have, I sincerely believe, the desire, or we wouldn’t be here!

**WHAT IF:** we took seriously the words spoken to Francis, “Go rebuild . . .” by the building blocks of our fidelity to the Franciscan charism, our Communion with the Church and the Franciscan family — those values which make us FRANCISCAN? Those which our Brother Thomas gave us: *:For just as there was in them ONE FAITH, so there was ONE SPIRIT, one will, one charity, continual unity of spirit. Harmony in living, cultivation of virtues, agreement of minds, and loyalty in actions (Celano, FA:ED, Vol. 1, p. 223).*”

**WHAT IF,** after we leave St. Louis, Missouri this week, we could blanket the world with all the gifts of the Franciscan spirit we all love so deeply and which, to be honest, brought all of us here today? And,

**WHAT IF** we could take all these answers home to share with the fraternal spiritual assistants in our care?

**WHAT IF . . . . .**