



JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION



OUR HOLY RULE: A DOCUMENT OF LOVE AND PEACE

By Carolyn D. Townes, OFS,
National JPIC Animator

“Secular Franciscans, together with all people of good will, are called to build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively. Mindful that anyone “who follows Christ, the perfect man, becomes more of a man himself,” let them exercise their responsibilities competently in the Christian spirit of service.” (Article 14)

As I reflect on my 18 years as a professed Secular Franciscan, one of the most beloved aspects of this way of life, constant and faithful, is the Holy Rule I professed. It is the one thing that truly binds us all as we journey through this way of life.

There are many different paths to this Order; there are many different formation processes, many different ministries and apostolates within the Order. Yet the one thing that truly binds us all is our Holy Rule of Life. Like the liturgies of Mother Church, it is the constant we can be sure that hundreds of thousands of people are praying and worshipping each and every day – Word, Eucharist and Liturgy of the Hours.

As we profess to this Rule, we must continue to live out the precepts laid out in the Rule. As our brother and Minister General Tibor Kauser, OFS, states in his Jubilee Letter: *“The Rule is an empty text if we do not turn it into life. We have to use it.”* Some days we will slip up, but as Article 7 clearly tells us, it is about daily conversion. We have not arrived, but are still on the journey.

“Mindful that they are bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly, they should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon. Messengers of perfect joy in every circumstance, they should strive to bring joy and hope to others.” (Art. 19)

What I especially love and appreciate about Article 19 is that it states emphatically in the opening that we “are bearers of peace...” not that we strive to become, or we will be someday – but that we already are. And as such, we must bring that bold statement to life, into action – every moment of our lives. Not someday. Not when we are ready, but right this very moment. What a great grace that God has bestowed upon us – a grace we must all live up to and into.

And how do we live out this gift of grace? By doing it in love. Not the love of feeling as we wait until we feel something. But the love of doing, making the decision every single moment to will the good of the other; to wish the other “peace and all good,” and to truly mean it. When Saint Francis set about wishing his fellow countrymen *“Pace e bene,”* he truly meant it. This is evident in his addressing all creatures as brother and sister. Francis saw all creatures as family; born of the same loving and benevolent God; a God who is all love, slow to anger and abounding in mercy. This is our call – a call to mercy.

Our Holy Rule not only lays out a path to holiness, but also gives us a blueprint for mercy. It calls us to trust. Trust is a sacred action, and most times a very difficult action. It can be difficult to trust, especially if our trust has been compromised or betrayed. We then retreat into mistrust and suspicion. This leads to judgment and criticism. There is no room for trust in a heart that judges and criticizes. We are called to *trust in the presence of the divine seed in everyone.* And yes, sometimes it takes an especially strong pair of glasses to see that divine seed in some folks. But if we are truly living and loving our Rule of Life, the Rule we professed and said, “Yes, this is what I want,” then by God’s grace and mercy, it becomes perfect joy!