

FRANCISCAN LIVING

A DIFFERENT KIND OF BEAUTY

By Francine Gikow, OFS

Are you wounded? Were you wounded by someone or some experience that impacts you to this day? Do you carry those experiences like baggage that weigh you down and impede your joy in life? Did you ask for healing, but God seemingly ignores your plea? Do you know that your wounds can be beautiful? How is that even possible?

I believe everyone is has experienced some sort of "wounded-ness" in their past. No one is immune. However, some people seem to attract more than their share of catastrophe and suffering. You may know someone like this, but in spite of the wounds, he or she demonstrates trust, peace and the love of God. That's beauty!

So let's take a closer look at wounds, holiness and beauty. St. Francis had wounds —both emotional and physical. His emotional wounds might have been caused by his experience of war in Perugia and developed into what is now known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.¹ It was in prison that St. Francis examined his life and his relationship with God. Francis also had (I am sure) emotional wounds from his fractured relationship with his father, which may never have been resolved.

Francis' physical wounds are also well documented. His failing health and eyesight impaired his ministry. It must have been such a source of frustration and suffering! But it was his bodily bearing of the wounds of Christ in secret and silence that mirrored Christ's love. Francis became an "alter Christus."

Celano reflected on the paradox of how Francis' bodily wounds could be beautiful:

"... they rendered beautiful that sick and tormented body.... Because they also showed forth the wounds of Christ, they spoke to those who saw them about the way in which our wounds are transformed by the presence of the Incarnate Word who came into our world to share our grief."²

Sr. Mary Teresa Downing, OSC, describes the sanctification of our wounds, stating: "Those wounds are imprinted by the hand of God...especially when we abandon ourselves to the work of redemption so that it can flow outward from our own lives."³ What does "the work of redemption" mean here? How do we do it?

The "work of redemption" is the joining of our suffering with Jesus for the sanctification of the world. In other words: Offer it up! Offer it up to God for others. "Offering it up" gets us past our own self pity and gives us a focus on others. It makes our wounds precious by giving them spiritual value. Like Francis, others may see our lives transformed with the presence of God and find a way to glimpse God through us.

It is not easy to "offer up" our sufferings to God. Wallowing in self pity sure feels good at times. We are so tempted to keep feeding our wounds and thereby enlarging them by giving them inordinate attention. Instead of feeding our self pity, isn't it better to turn our attention to what we *can do* with our wounds by making them our own "work of redemption." Sounds simple, but it's difficult to do!

Instead, think about how our love of God and others can be a beautiful gift! Sharing in the work of redemption is a thing of beauty because we share in His love for us and in the beauty of the Son of God. Jesus carried his wounds of betrayal, crucifixion, and death as a sign of His Love for us. As St. Clare says, "gaze, consider, contemplate [sic] desiring to imitate your Spouse!"⁴

Do not be afraid of your wounds. Do not consider them "baggage" or something to endure. Rather, see their beauty as Christ sees them:

"If you suffer with Him, you will reign with Him. Weeping with Him, you will rejoice with Him; dying on the cross of tribulation with Him, you will possess heavenly mansions with Him among the splendor of the saints..."⁵

¹ Weichec, Nancy. "St. Francis and US Veterans." *St. Anthony Messenger*, 24 Oct. 2018.

² Celano, *Life of St. Francis*, Ch IX as described in Downing, O.S.C., Sr. Frances Teresa. *Saint Clare of Assisi*. Tau Publishing, 2015. p. 154-5.

³ Downing, p. 154.

⁴ 2LAg:20

⁵ 2LAg: 21