

# Franciscan Living

## PRAYER: The Heart of Who We Are

by Francine Gikow, OFS

Do you know the secret of perseverance in our vocation? Ever wonder how people remain committed as Secular Franciscans for 30, 40, 50 years? The answers seem simple but are, in fact, difficult to live because they require untiring efforts and a penitential option for the spiritual path. Even professed members can lose their vocation through the busyness of family, work, and other commitments if they fail to make prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do. (OFS Rule, 8)

This intimate prayer life demands time, desire and perseverance. As for any lover, time together is foundational for any relationship. We cannot have a relationship without conversation, listening and responding. Intimacy in prayer is a necessity. Rote prayers and rushing through our prayers to finish, is not a fitting gift to our all loving God for as Jesus said: "...in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them"...(Mt. 6:7-8)

If we have the desire to live like Francis, intense, passionate prayer time is needed to listen to God's voice, and to be open to see Him in each other and the world. God makes Himself present to us individually because our relationship with Him is unique; we are made for a particular purpose, exclusively our own.

Balancing our life of prayer and action is important as we strive to live more closely to Christ. Our commitments to daily prayer, Mass or other spiritual exercises should begin to take priority over "sleeping in," retrieving emails or checking social media. It is penitential since we relinquish time and material things to become closer to God. What a glorious sacrifice!

A desire for our relationship with God means that it must become a priority in our life as we make a conscious choice for spending time with the Father, Son, and Spirit. Even if we don't feel desire; ...the Spirit helps us in our weakness ...for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. (Rom. 8:26)

Perseverance is vital in our commitment to a relationship of prayer. We have made this commitment at the time of our profession; however, it requires the ongoing nourishment of our own spiritual life with reading, retreats, and study. In addition, we have to pray for ourselves for the grace to persevere in this vocation God has given us.

It is also imperative that a Secular Franciscan have a vibrant, intimate relationship with God through prayer, scripture and the sacraments. Jesus instructed us: And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites...Go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. (Mt. 6:5-6) Through silence, we allow intimacy to occur.

Scripture is indispensable to intimacy because we profess to go from gospel to life and life to the gospel. We learn to interiorize and personalize the teachings of Jesus in scripture. Fr. Eric Doyle, OFM, describes meditating on Holy Scripture as an exchange between Christ and those who love Him; we need to read scriptures lovingly, listen to them lovingly, as we would listen to or read a letter from someone we loved. Remember, St Jerome said, ignorance of scripture is ignorance of Christ.

The sacraments are also available as a source of grace which enables us to persevere. It may entail making changes in your schedule to include daily Mass, and the frequent use of the sacrament of Reconciliation. Without the sacraments, we are setting ourselves up for failure by starving our souls of the graces needed to persevere in our life of prayer.

Through an intimate relationship with God, we can become a home for the Holy Spirit and a conduit for Christ to enter into this secular world through us:

***Abide in me, and I in you...  
He who abides in me and I in him,  
he it is that bears much fruit.***