

TROUBADOUR

The Newsletter of St. Francis House, New London, Connecticut



Summer 2001

Vol. 3, No. 2

+++++

MATZOH, BREAKING BREAD, AND LIBERATION

by Ted Mellor

At a rally for hotel workers yesterday in front of the virulently anti-union Loews Hotel in Santa Monica, a Rabbi broke a piece of Matzoh in two and explained that the Matzoh's significance is precisely in its brokenness. Unless it is broken, it cannot be shared; and it is God's commandment that God's gifts be shared among all, not hogged by management and stockholders and withheld from minimum-wage service employees.

I was reminded of the breaking of the bread at the Eucharist, reduced during the middle ages to a single breaking of the "priest's host" and explained as a kind of allegory of the breaking of Christ's body on the cross. But the broken body of Christ, it is often forgotten, "brings joy to the whole world." The whole Paschal Mystery celebrates not just the death and resurrection of a remarkable individual visiting as if from another planet, but, at a deeper level, our own death to the world of this present age and our liberation into a new way of living together in the world – a way characterized by the freedom to love, to be at peace one with another, and to share joyfully the gifts of God rather than engage in a bitter competition for each morsel of food. The Eucharist, I think, is one of God's ways of showing us in action how we are to live in the world, and in the ancient liturgies the bread was broken very deliberately in order that it might be shared – equally and by all, as St. John Chrysostom stresses – and the breaking went on for some time.

I like liturgies in which the breaking of the bread is more than just a quick gesture, liturgies in which the bread is broken and then broken and broken again into ever smaller pieces, and the wine is poured into extra chalices, so that the breaking and pouring become a sign of the sharing. And everybody gets her or his share – the rich do not get "more Communion" than the poor.

A passing motorist hurled what he supposed was an insult at our procession yesterday. I was reminded of Stewart Headlam's remark (paraphrasing the Didache) that "the Holy Communion pledges all who partake of it to be sharers of their wealth, whether spiritual or material, to be holy communists." How I hope this year's Paschal celebration will bring us closer to the day when that "insult" will be justified!

+++++

This reflection was posted on Ted Mellor's website, www.anglocatholicsocialism.org, on April 4, 2001, at the beginning of Lent. Ted now lives in Los Angeles and continues to write articles like this one that show the deep connection between the liturgy and the Kingdom of God and the justice that the Kingdom demands and inaugurates. Anne and Emmett first met Ted in Boston, at St. John's, Bowdoin Street, in the early 1980's.

FAITH BASED INITIATIVES

Overheard on the Internet

Canon Ed Rodman, a St. Francis House Board member, gave a talk to the Massachusetts Bible Society that elicited an enthusiastic response from Mr. Richard Neathamer of Kentucky. With the permission of both correspondents we reprint their remarks here as worthy of serious reflection.

June 18, 2001

Dear Canon Rodman,

I just finished listening to a tape of your recent Massachusetts Bible Society luncheon discussion of Faith Based Initiatives and appreciated it very much. It was very thought-provoking and presented a position I had not heard or thought of before, which is the idea that the ultimate goal of the Bush Faith Based Initiative is individual personal responsibility for social welfare. You said that this was not a secret conspiracy but an open public policy.

I had only thought of this issue in terms of Separation of Church and State, period. You stated that the organizers of this policy actually believe that the churches and religious organizations will ultimately fail, thus placing the total responsibility of social welfare on the individual, private citizen; that the religious organizational involvement is only a temporary "phase two" of the process before the ultimate responsibility of social welfare gets placed on the individual citizen.

If that is basically correct, I have four questions I would love to ask you about this overall subject, questions I would have tried to ask if I had been at the luncheon.

1. I have personally vigorously opposed the Bush Faith Based Initiative basically because I have framed the overall situation as a serious intrusion and weakening of the Separation of Church and State. If your understanding is correct then do we not have to actually

fear this merging of Church and State? Is the Church and State issue the main issue to be concerned about, as I had always thought it was?

2. If this policy is successful, does that mean the government especially at the federal level will get totally out of the social welfare area, ultimately publicly leaving it all to individual citizens as a matter of national public policy?
3. Why is this shift from government to individual responsibility so important to those who are pushing Bush Faith Based Initiative and who are these people specifically?
4. After listening to your discussion, would you personally be willing to try to get on *Nightline* or write an article for *Time*, or *Newsweek* or a Letter to the Editor of all the national newspapers to get your ideas and ultimate concerns out to the general public? I think it would be great to hear you talk with Ted Koppel publicly on *Nightline*.

As I mentioned before, I found your discussion very interesting and was just wondering about these particular questions so I thought I would write in hopes that you might be able to have a little time to e-mail or write me back.

I live in a very small town in Kentucky, basically totally surrounded by radical, fanatical Christian Fundamentalists who would love more than anything to totally tear down the Wall of Separation of Church and State and, for example, let the fundamentalist Southern Baptists rule the country based on the literal theocratic interpretation of the Bible.

I know you must be extremely busy. I just wanted you to know that your ideas have actually reached a fundamentalist rural area of Kentucky and that I personally appreciate them very much for whatever that's worth.

Respectfully,

Richard Neathamer

Ed Rodman's Response

June 20, 2001

Dear Mr. Neathamer,

First let me thank you for your kind e-mail. I would be curious to know how you got a copy of the tape. Let me indicate at the outset that I attempted to convey a public policy process whose stated end result would be the privatization of social welfare as we have known it. By privatization I mean that organizations primarily for profit, but some that might be nonprofit (this could include churches), would be given the contracts from government agencies primarily state and local for a wide range of human services. As you must be aware, there are already pilot projects in place that offer such services in the areas of education, criminal justice, security in public housing facilities, and other selected venues including police, health services and social services. In some ways this has always been true and is, in fact, the norm for most international aid and development. It is from this reality that the concept of "development pimps" was coined in the 1980's for international development entrepreneurs. Whether this is or is not a desirable outcome has never been debated, nor as your e-mail would indicate, fully understood. I must point out, however, that this was the fundamental platform of the so-called "Gingrich revolution," or as it was more commonly known, the "Contract with America." While he may have been personally discredited, many of his ideas were bought into by both parties, and the camel's nose under the tent was the so-called Welfare Reform Act of 1996. It is from that statute that Charitable Choice, faith-based initiatives, and private sector vendors were given access to government funds. In the full document issued by Bush, Jr., "rallying the armies of compassion," the same fundamental message is spelled out in detail. Needless to say, the language is such that the interpretation that I have given to it is not explicit but is in fact implicit, if it is

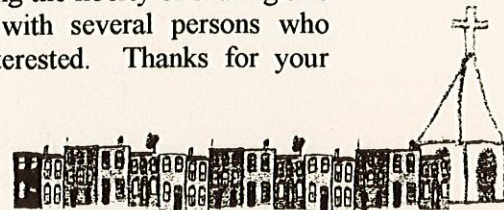
read carefully. The clincher is the movement of major foundation funds to first measure the effectiveness of the faith-based programs and, secondly to encourage the formation of private sector service delivery systems for "non-profits." I hope this clarifies what you may have heard on the tape and summarizes my position on these matters. You may be interested in a book entitled *Who Will Provide? The Changing Role of Religion in American Social Welfare*, edited by Mary Jo Bane, Brent Coffin and Ronal Thiemann, published by Westview Press, A Member of the Perseus Books Group. This gives a more moderate interpretation and has the virtue of scholarly input. Now to your questions.

1. The FBI's, as I like to call them, should be opposed on the separation of church and state as a matter of principle. And, of course, because churches can qualify through their adjunct non-profit corporations, as part of the private sector, that further blurs the line. This is where organizations such as the Salvation Army, Catholic and Jewish Charities and others with religious connections currently receive money from both the government and the United Way. (I would not be surprised if the United Way does not play a key role in whatever transition occurs in 2004-2006.)
2. I hope I answered #2 in the preface. However, if you talk to anybody who remembers the pre-Roosevelt years where the situation I have described above was the status quo, obviously those individuals who could not find help from private and non-profit or church agencies were on their own. The sad fact of the matter is, many of the homeless are already in that situation because of cutbacks in mental health and low-cost housing initiatives.
3. This social policy is consistent with neo-conservative ideology, first articulated in the '80's by the Reaganites,

sharpened by Libertarian talk show hosts, and co-opted by Bill Clinton in the '96 Welfare Reform Act. It is, at its root, racist, classist and elitist. It does not value the worth of every human being and seeks to make profit on their misery and the fear of their seeking justice.

I hope these thoughts are helpful to you, and I do not believe that the mainstream media is interested in this critique and its implications for their complicity in the process. Obviously I'm happy to speak out whenever asked. I am taking the liberty of sharing this correspondence with several persons who may also be interested. Thanks for your interest.

Peace,
Ed Rodman



Clare Cottage: An Experience of Franciscan Solitude

The first of several "Hermitage Retreats" will be offered on October 3-5, 2001, at a private home in Rockport, MA.

Retreatants will be limited to two, and two members of The Third Order will be on site, offering community support in the way of meals, quiet companionship and the Offices, as well as meeting whatever needs arise.

Accommodations will include private bedroom, shared bath, common room with library and worship space, refectory, and garden patio. A dog and cat are also in residence.

For information, and a copy of Francis' Rule for Hermitages, please call or write Mary Beal, TSSF, 35 Atlantic Avenue, Rockport, MA. 01966; 978-546-3769.

MEETINGS FOR CLARIFICATION OF THOUGHT RESUME IN SEPTEMBER

Meetings will begin again on Friday, September 7, and continue every other Friday night until December 28, when we will have our traditional Christmas party.

The schedule of programs is not yet final, although we are planning a conversation about Thomas Merton and another on prison ministry early in the fall. Local friends will receive a special mailing and the full program will appear in the Fall 2001 issue of TROUBADOUR.

We meet at 5:30 p.m. for prayer and Bible study, followed by a simple supper at 6 p.m. The program lasts from 7-8:30 p.m., and it really is a "conversation" among friends, not a lecture by an expert. Everyone seems to learn something from the experience. Please join us.



Fr. Ken Leech and Otis

TRAVELS WITH OTIS Anne P. Scheibner

My experience of "walking the bounds" i.e. the neighborhood around St. Francis House, has been greatly enhanced by the arrival of Otis. "What kind of dog is that?" asked a slightly disheveled man standing in front of the Covenant Shelter. It was early in the morning and Otis and I had just walked Sarah to school. "Well, the Humane Society said he's mostly beagle but maybe some basset, too," I said. "No," my interlocutor replied, "that dog has coon dog in him. I know, I used to raise them."

Later I saw this Neighbor sitting on a bench on State Street and staring blankly ahead as I was driving past. The next week Otis and I walked down State Street to get the papers at Parade News where the owner always gives Otis a dog biscuit. There was our Neighbor in a clean shirt drinking coffee at an outside table at the shop next door. I asked him to watch Otis while I went inside to get coffee. He asked where we'd met and I reminded him of the street location and our conversation about coon dogs. He clearly appreciated my not mentioning the shelter. But then he told me about the humiliation he had suffered going to the furniture repair store near the shelter in the hope of finding work. "Get out," the person at the shop barked at him without any conversation. He told me about the furniture and antique restoration business he had had with his father who was a skilled craftsman from Germany. "The guy in that shop didn't do such good work," he added. "But he still shouldn't have talked to me like that." We finished our coffee while Otis, too, basked in the sun.

Several weeks later I was strolling one evening with friends when our Neighbor emerged from the shadows of an alley again looking disheveled and glassy-eyed. I greeted him by name and next morning found him again. We shared my danish pastry and he told me about his children now grown, the house his mother had lived in and his desire to visit her in her assisted



living residence across the river. He didn't think he would stay in New London. He didn't like the shelter and everything else was too expensive.

Two days later I dropped a note off at the shelter inviting him to help rehab a hundred year old door that Paul, another friend, and I were working on. Later that afternoon Otis was supervising our work on the porch. Our Neighbor passed by on the other side of the street. He did not acknowledge our salutes but went on hurriedly. Should I go after him? One of the hardest lessons here at St. Francis House has been understanding what it means to be a neighbor. "Guess he can't do it," Paul said softly, as we watched him limp off.

Later that week I took Otis to the bottom of the L-shaped lot on which St. Francis House is situated. It has weeds and an occasional chicken or pork chop bone. Otis is fond of the bones and the weeds are one of his favorite places to poop. That day we found a young man with a knapsack earnestly scraping in the soil. "Great worms," he told me confidentially. "I've been getting worms here for twenty years." I nodded, surprised, while Otis looked around for a place to do his business. I asked him where he lived and he laughed and said he was camping over near a pond on the outskirts of town. "I'm homeless now," he said. "I fish in the pond. These worms are like snakes!" He held up a long and juicy specimen for approval.

Otis helps me see nature on the block every day. Standing at the other end of the leash while he sniffs excitedly each blade and hummock, I notice the buds on the trees, the fresh smell of morning, the spider webs, the stranglehold vines twisting up the tree trunks. I notice the potato chip bags and old tires. Along with Morning Prayer, going out with Otis is my most regular reminder of the dailiness of life and the constancy of life's demands. And greeting, talking about and caring for this dog gives a natural equality to the beginning of relationships among the two-footed creatures who stop to admire his shining presentness.

Chrissy's House Blessing
For the Hermitage
June 15, 2001

There is only one presence in this house. This one presence is the presence of GOD. No evil can enter here. There is no evil in GOD. GOD the good dwells here. Whoever enters here will be conscious of the one divine presence of good.

There is only one presence here. The presence of health. No sickness can enter, no impurity or fear can enter here. All weakness and sickness are cast out. Whoever enters here will be conscious of the presence of health.

This house is filled with peace and harmony. We dwell in the presence of peace. No restless or discordant thought can enter here. No irritation or fear can enter here. The presence of GOD is peace. Whoever enters here will be conscious of the presence of peace.

There is one presence here, the presence of wisdom. All ignorance, doubt, foolishness and superstition are cast out. GOD is here and GOD is wisdom. Whoever enters here will be conscious of wisdom.

There is only one presence here, the presence of joy. Joy radiates here filling this house. No sorrow can enter here. All depression is cast out. The joy of the Lord is here.

Only love dwells here. This house is filled with the presence of love. GOD is love and love is here. All anger, hatred and revenge are cast out. Love fills these walls. Whoever enters here will be conscious of the pure holy presence of love.

"Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out." Duet 28: 6

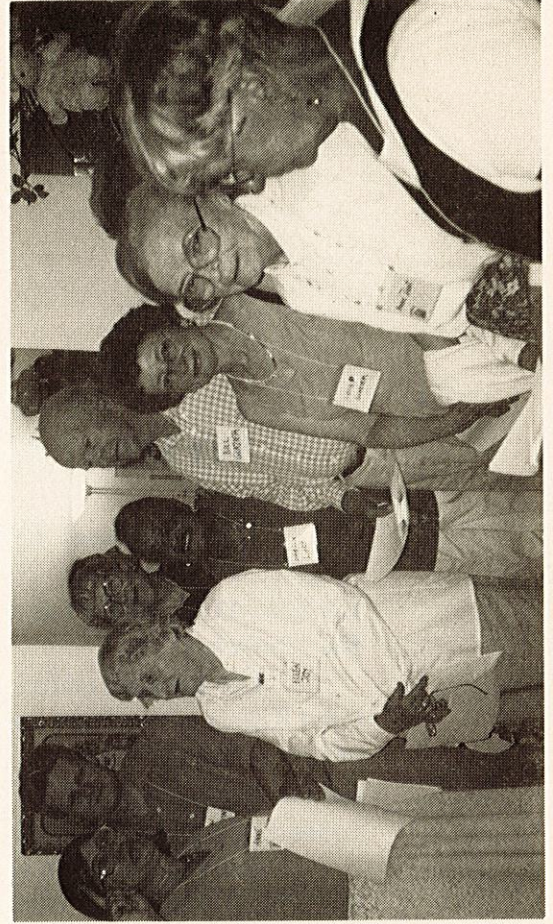
I am thankful to Thee Father/Mother GOD that this house is filled with health, peace, harmony, wisdom, joy and love. I am thankful for thy presence Lord. Bless those that live here and those that come in and those that go out.

In Christ's most precious name
AMEN.

This blessing was written
by Christine Guarnieri-Benham
who lives in the Hermitage.



Friends from Calvary Church, Stonington, and St. James, New London join the community at prayer (above) before the blessing of the Calvary Church Hermitage (below). The Hermitage was renovated by members of Calvary and furnished from the home of Frederick and Dorothea Gould in whose memory it was dedicated.





EPISCOPAL URBAN CAUCUS TO MEET IN LOS ANGELES, February 6-9, 2002

The Episcopal Urban Caucus will hold its 22nd national Assembly in Los Angeles February 6-9, 2002. The theme of the assembly is: **EVERY FAMILY, LANGUAGE, PEOPLE AND NATION – The Diverse and Multicultural Mission of the Church.**

The keynote address for the Assembly will be given by the Rev. **James Lawson**, Civil Rights activist and leader in Los Angeles of interfaith religious and labor movement efforts to secure economic justice for poor and minority workers. Lawson will establish the theological context for confronting the principalities and powers in the multicultural context of a global economy.

Daily Bible study at the Assembly will be led by **Ched Myers**, author of *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Gospel* and *Who Will Roll Away the Stone: Discipleship Queries for First World Christians*.

A panel of lay and clergy leaders from the Diocese of Los Angeles will lead reflection on **The LA Experience of Multicultural Ministry**.

The **Episcopal Peace Fellowship** and the **Episcopal Network for Economic Justice** will be part of the Urban Caucus, as usual, and share in the life of the Assembly. New this year will be a **YOUTH PLENARY** led by young members of the Urban Caucus to help shape the agenda of the movement for the future.

Also new this year, the **Urban Bishops Coalition** will meet with the Caucus, and everyone is invited to join in the installation of the new **Bishop of Los Angeles**, Jon Bruno, at an outdoor service on Saturday.

The **Assembly Eucharist** will be celebrated at the Cathedral Center of the Diocese, with the Rev. **Altagracia Perez** preaching. Site visits will include a tour of Wilshire Downtown to experience ecumenical organizing efforts, and an opportunity to join a picket line at a non-union hotel led by Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union leaders.

The traditional Assembly Banquet will take the form of a **FIESTA!** and will be the occasion for honoring **Bishop Barbara C. Harris** on her retirement as Suffragan Bishop of Massachusetts. Bishop Harris, the first female Anglican bishop, is a founding member of the Episcopal Urban Caucus.

Accommodation will be at the **Radisson Wilshire**, a union hotel, at the excellent rate of \$84 per night, single or double occupancy. Registration materials will be mailed to members and friends of the Caucus and groups and individuals involved in urban ministry in September 2001.

The Episcopal Urban Caucus
P. O. Box 2247, New London, CT 06320-2247
Telephone: 860 437-8890 Email: stfrancishouse@mindspring.com

OPEN HANDS, EMPTY HANDS A Reflection on Franciscan Vocation

by Emmett Jarrett, TSSF



I was moved to reflect again on my vocation as an Anglican Franciscan Tertiary by an article on the same subject by Sr. Pamela Clare, CSF. This is a highly condensed version of what turned out to be a rather long essay.

Sr. Pamela Clare spoke of her experience in 1978 as a professional anthropologist, an "Indian Expert," confronted on the streets of San Francisco with "Native American families devastated by alienation, poverty, drug and alcohol abuse." She had nothing to give them. She came to them with empty hands, which paradoxically proved to be the only way to really approach people. "Empty hands" are not only embarrassingly empty, she found, but also open, "ready to take hold of another hand, . . . naked, revealing our true selves," and available to God.

The more I thought about her article the more it seemed to me that my own Franciscan vocation, and our experience at St. Francis House in New London, was an example of what she was talking about. Now, not all vocations are Christian, and not all Christian vocations are Franciscan, but a Franciscan vocation is a particular kind of calling, a particular sort of call to discipleship. It is radical, because Francis, the model for this vocation, is radical, but radical in his (and our) openness to Jesus, whose disciples we are.

Discipleship. I take my definition of discipleship from Matthew 16:24, one of the texts Francis found when he opened the Bible after Mass on St. Matthias' Day, 1208. *Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."* This saying of Jesus indicates the three elements of discipleship: self-denial, the way of the cross, and following. The order is important, for self-denial begins with conversion from the self to Jesus; the

disciple's lifelong path is the way of the cross; and the goal is the journey, a following in community with Jesus and other disciples. Community is essential to discipleship and to Franciscan vocation. As Ed Rodman said last February at the Episcopal Urban Caucus assembly in New London: *A vocation is genuine when the deepest desire of your heart meets the deepest need of your community.*

Franciscan vocation can be seen under these three aspects, or headings, derived from Jesus in Scripture. This involves three images, three religious vows, and is related to the three traditional stages of spiritual growth.

Nakedness involves conversion, denial of self, the purgative way, and the vow of obedience.

Passion involves darkness, the cross, a commitment to nonviolence, the illuminative way, and the vow of chastity.

Silence suggests union with the One we follow, in community, the unitive way, and the vow of poverty.

Nakedness. Nakedness is a profound Christian image. In the Bible Job, deprived of property, family, even health, says *"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return"* (Job 1:21). The young man who followed Jesus on the night he was arrested *left the linen cloth* in which he was clothed *and ran away naked* (Mark 14:52). To be naked is to be unprotected, without even clothing to hide behind. When a man or woman encounters Jesus, he or she is naked. To become a disciple you must be stripped naked.

Francis was naked at the beginning of his ministry and twenty years later at the end of his life. When his father haled him into the Bishop's Court to get back the money Francis had appropriated to rebuild the church of San Damiano, he got more than he had sought. Francis returned the money, took off his clothes, and said "From now on I can freely say *Our Father who art in heaven*, not *father Peter Bernardone*, to whom, behold, I give up not only the

money, but all my clothes too. I will therefore go naked to the Lord."

At the end of his life, Francis was taken back to the Porziuncula to die. He asked his brothers to place his naked body on the ground. "When you see that I am brought to my last moments, place me naked on the ground, and let me lie there after I am dead for the length of time it takes one to walk a mile unhurriedly." The nakedness that had marked the beginning of his life of discipleship graced his end.

The journey of discipleship, or vocation, begins with the naked encounter with Jesus, which is conversion. Just as Francis had to strip himself of pride, position, wealth, even the admiration of his worldly friends, so we must come to Jesus naked, "without a leg to stand on," clothes, or reputation to hide behind. When we stand naked before God we begin to see ourselves as God sees us. This process is called "purgative" because it is painful, as giving up our egotism and self-sufficiency, or burning dross from the pure ore. Sin is purged away and pride is humbled. The clothing that once seemed to Francis beautiful now appear ugly, and rags appear as noble garments.

Francis's conversion, like most people's, was part of a long process, but one incident stands out among the others. A rich young man, accustomed to beauty and health and the best that money could buy, Francis had an instinctive revulsion to lepers. This is not hard to understand because of the odor, the ugliness, and the fear people had of contagion. One day in 1206, as Francis was riding his horse on a country road, he encountered a leper. Dismounting he gave the leper a coin, then kissed his wounds. At the end of his life he described this event in these words:

This is how God inspired me, Brother Francis, to embark upon a life of penance. When I was in sin, the sight of lepers nauseated me beyond measure, but then God himself led me into their company, and I had pity on them. When I had once become acquainted with them, what had previously nauseated me became a source of

spiritual and physical consolation to me. After that I did not wait long before leaving the world.

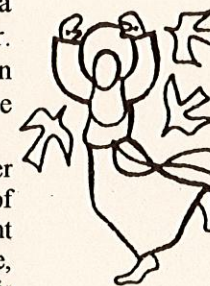
Not only does the false finery now seem like rags to the disciple, the rags he once despised have become beautiful. Conversion is not wallowing in guilt but a complete change of direction for the whole of one's life.

Nakedness, conversion, purgation, the encounter with Jesus leads to a life of obedience. We usually speak of the three vows of religious life as poverty, chastity, and obedience. But obedience comes first, not only in the order of experience, but as a spiritual reality. We cannot be chaste (or celibate, and there is a difference!) unless we are first obedient. The same is true of poverty or simplicity of life. We embrace a simple life in obedience to Jesus and the Gospel. All of this is impossible except to those who *hear* the call of God. The word "obedience" comes from the Latin *oboedire*, "to listen to," from *audire*, "to hear." Obedience is not so much a matter of following someone else's command as of hearing what someone says. For the Christian, it's about hearing what Jesus says.

It is not accurate to speak of a "conclusion" to the process of conversion, but there is a transition from the initial experiences into the practice of discipleship. This is entrance upon the life of service in a community and the stage of passion and the way of the cross, the second element of a Franciscan vocation.

Passion. The second stage of discipleship is to "take up the cross." The Christian and Franciscan disciple embraces the life of faith, walking in darkness. That's what the life of faith is: walking in darkness, embracing the darkness. And it is a passionate embrace. We follow Jesus and seek to become obedient to the Gospel because we are passionate. It was said of Francis that he did not simply love God, he was *in love with God*. Franciscan vocation is passionate.

Passion is a double-edged concept for the Christian. First and foremost it is *the*



Passion, the suffering of Jesus on the cross, that constitutes the Christian community and draws the individual Christian into discipleship. The very word "passion," *passio*, means suffering. A deeper understanding of sexual love is aware that passion is not torrid sex scenes on the video screen. Passion is about sacrifice and surrender more than satisfaction of desire.

But the "passion" of lust reminds us that the ancients thought of passion as a powerful, chaotic force, like a hurricane, that blows the rational creature off balance and off course. Passions are not rational. Passions in this sense are drives that must be brought under control, subject to the mind and the will. The disciple, in this way of thinking, will be a disciplined person, who has brought the passions into the service of the Lord of life, who suffered to set us free.

The Greek Fathers spoke of the contemplative life as one of *apatheia*, literally "without passion." But George Maloney, SJ, writing of Symeon the New Theologian, defined *apatheia* as "a passionless passion to do whatever at the moment corresponds to God's good pleasure as manifested by Jesus Christ through his Spirit in accord with Gospel values." Passions may cloud the mind, but the person of faith walks in darkness, trusting passionately in the One who has called her.

The image of darkness, like that of passion, is essential to an understanding of faith. Faith is not the same thing as belief. I believe the articles of the Christian faith set forth in the Creed, but I trust Jesus, whom I encounter in the darkness of discipleship. Paul's great example of faith was Abraham, who believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness (Gen. 15:6; II Cor. 5:7). Abraham in his old age went into a distant land, away from home and family, on God's promise to give the land to offspring he didn't have and had no expectation of having. The Christian disciple is likewise promised much, and trusts the Lord who promises.

Walking in the darkness of discipleship on a Franciscan vocation involves, I believe, a commitment to

nonviolence. The work of the disciple is like the work of Jesus, who might have appealed to God for ten legions of angels but chose the cross in obedience to his Father (Matthew 26:53). Franciscans reject violence as Jesus and Francis did. When his first companions had joined him, Francis was offered property by Bishop Guido of Assisi to support their life together. He refused the offer.

My Lord, if we had any possessions we should also be forced to have arms to protect them, since possessions are a cause of disputes and strife, and in many ways we should be hindered from loving God and our neighbor. Therefore in this life we wish to have no temporal possessions.

The Rule of the Third Order, established by Francis as early as 1209, is now lost, but it probably contained a provision like the Rule of 1221. The Tertiaries "are not to take up lethal weapons, or bear them about, against anybody."

Gandhi taught that nonviolence is "the law of life," and while Francis was very much a man of his times, he may have thought in a similar way. Gandhi said:

Mutual forbearance is not non-violence. Immediately you get the conviction that non-violence is the law of life, you have to practice it towards those who act violently towards you; and the law must apply to nations as to individuals.

Jesus (as Gandhi knew) said much the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount.

The main evidence for an orientation towards nonviolence in the life of Francis is revealed in his mission to Egypt and his attempt to convert the Sultan. His methods of evangelization and his peace-making strategies in a time of Christian-Muslim conflict breathe the air of nonviolence. While the pope's legate was more blood-thirsty than the Christian military leaders, Francis and his brothers ministered to the sick and wounded, both Muslim and Christian. When he finally was able to speak to the Sultan, he preferred to risk his own life rather than the lives of others.



There is much that is legendary in the story of Francis and the Sultan. It is certain, however, that the highly sophisticated Sultan al-Kamil listened attentively to Francis in the presence of learned doctors of his own religion. He posed questions and trials to Francis, who answered and passed them satisfactorily. The two parted friends, though neither persuaded the other of the truth of his faith. When Francis returned to the Christian lines, it is said that the Sultan asked the brothers to pray that before he died he would be shown the true faith. Meanwhile, the siege of Damietta forced the capitulation of the Muslim city at a cost of more lives than were lost in the bombing of Hiroshima. Disappointed, Francis returned to Assisi to deal with dissension in his Order in 1220.

For Francis, as for Gandhi, nonviolence was not a strategy for accomplishing an end that is external to the disciple's vocation. His sole aim was "to do the will of God." We may not know that will in detail or even at all. But if we make nonviolence our goal as well as our method we will not act violently in any event. This was Jesus' way as well as Francis's, and it must be the disciple's way as well. The test is our willingness to suffer.

Finally, the Franciscan vocation involves a life of chastity. Friars and sisters are vowed to celibacy but Tertiaries, like all Christians, practice chastity as a baptismal commitment. Our super-sexualized culture limits chastity to sexual relationships but the Christian tradition knows it to be much broader. Chastity involves self-respect and respect for the other. It is the refusal to treat another, sexually or otherwise, as a possession. It is a decision to accord the same respect to another's human dignity as one wishes for one's own.

The Rule of the Third Order of the Society of St. Francis (Anglican Tertiaries) locates chastity as a practice inherent in the Order's second aim, "to spread the spirit of love and harmony."

Tertiaries fight against . . . injustice in the name of Christ, in whom there can be neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor



free, male nor female, for in him all are one. Their chief object is to reflect that openness to all which was characteristic of Jesus. This can only be achieved in a spirit of chastity which sees others as belonging to God and not as a means of self-fulfillment.

The essence of chastity is openness to others and a refusal of possessiveness. If we do not wish to be possessions ourselves, we cannot treat others so. As with poverty and the decision not to own property, chastity (and nonviolence) is a matter of non-possession.

Silence. The association of silence with community may seem strange, but the community of disciples called Franciscans knows that the God for whom the soul *in silence waits* (Psalm 62:1,6) is divine community, the blessed Trinity. The communitarian nature of Franciscan vocation springs from the trinitarian nature of God. The individual, and the community, that experiences the nakedness of conversion and obedience, and walks the way of the cross in chaste and nonviolent service, is the one that "follows" Jesus. It is the "social Trinity" who is God of the community of disciples.

When Francis first began to live in community with his brothers he was in great doubt as to whether he should devote himself entirely to prayer, or should also preach sometimes. He consulted the community as he prayed about this, and asked Clare and Sylvester to pray that God would reveal the best course. Both of them received the same answer from the Lord: "that God has not called [Francis] to this state only on his own account, but that he may reap a harvest of souls and that many may be saved through him." As the Trinitarian God revealed himself to Jesus' first disciples when he returned to the Father and sent the Spirit among them, so God spoke to Francis through his community. The unity of the community, if it is genuine, reflects their oneness with God. Community life and the unitive state of oneness with God are not strange companions but a divinely intended hospitality.



So Christian community is not an "extra added attraction" to individual salvation. We are saved together, from isolation and alienation, as we are incorporated into Christ and his community. The atheist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre said "Hell is other people" in his play *No Exit*, but I think hell is having nobody to love. We are saved together or we are not saved at all. The reason this is so has to do with the divine nature. We are incorporated into that divine community nature in baptism. We live in that divine nature in our Christian and Franciscan community. The invitation and command of Jesus to "Follow me" is a call to follow him into community. Why? Because God's nature is social, God's divine Being is Being-in-common as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Our experience at St. Francis House in New London, CT, grows immediately out of praying with the Rublev icon of the Trinity which is on our chapel altar. In 1998 and 1999 we prayed before this icon that God would make clear his call to us for the next step in our family life and ministry. The icon itself became a symbol, both of the God who calls us to union, and the life in which he calls us to find that union with one another and with Jesus. The Rublev icon represents the "Old Testament Trinity" of Genesis 18, the three angels who visited Abraham and Sarah by the oak of Mamre. The three figures are seated around a table altar on which is laid a bowl containing a lamb. Above the angels are symbols of Christian life: a tree, which represents the tree of life in the Garden of Eden and the tree of the cross; a house, which represents Abraham's house, the Temple in Jerusalem, and the Church as the house of God; and a mountain, the place of revelation, Mount Sinai, the mount of Transfiguration, Calvary, and Mount Olivet where Jesus ascended to the Father.

The genius of the icon, which is sometimes called *Philoxenia*, "love of the stranger," which means *hospitality*, is that the circle of persons of the Godhead draws the viewer into itself. God is not the isolated old white man of so much degenerated



Western symbolism, but a community of persons in relationship, what the poet W. B. Yeats called "the dancer [and] the dance." This hospitality of God reaches out to us in the Incarnation of the Word. It invites us into itself in the sanctification that begins at baptism. It thrives in the community we know as church. It culminates in the ecstasy of union with God. If the hospitality of God is what reaches out and includes us, what is our mission but to exhibit the same hospitality to others that God has shown us? A Franciscan community is a community of hospitality.

Indeed, it is a community which exists most fully in the silence of God. Third Order Franciscans, who may marry and have children, know the joy of sitting in silence in the company of one's beloved. This silence is not empty or awkward, waiting to be filled with talk. It is a profound silence that reflects the silence that is God, a music heard by angels with the mind's ear. This is the silence of contemplative prayer, which is prayer *for* union with God, and the prayer *of* union.

The paradoxical silence of the unitive state and the community's life is the consequence of Jesus' command to all his disciples: "Follow me." The three elements of the dominical saying are in the right order, although we too often reverse them. We begin with self-denial and conversion. We walk the way of the cross in passion and darkness. "Following" is the purpose and the goal of Franciscan vocation. The community with and in which we follow Jesus now is the community with and in which we shall be united with God forever.

It is here that we encounter Franciscan poverty, not the first religious discipline but the final one. We begin with obedience and end with the poverty Jesus chose to share with us. This poverty of Francis is not abject want, which many of us fear and most of us seek to relieve when we encounter it in others. It is the simplicity of life that knows we possess nothing. We trust that we shall have our daily bread because the Father knows our need before we ask. The essence of Franciscan poverty,

I believe, is non-possessiveness. We see that the poverty of most people in the world is the result, in the first place, of the possessiveness and selfishness of the few who are rich. To relieve this poverty, to permit the abundance of the earth to supply the needs of all, we who have possessions must abandon them, give up our violence in defense of them, and share with others. We will not go hungry if everyone else is fed. The vision of abundance is related to nonviolence because the social changes that are required to provide for all cannot be accomplished by violence, which is the source of the inequities in the first place.

Let's be honest. Francis believed that literal poverty was his vocation. He sought to imitate the poor Child of the poor Virgin by sharing a total dependence upon God and others for every mouthful of food. We are called today, I believe, to a simplicity of life that provides for everyone. Young people in America today are not impressed with the revolutionary rhetoric that inspired an earlier generation. But they are moved to imitate a *lifestyle* they find admirable. My generation thought of lifestyle as a matter of fashion in clothing and politics and spoke of it with contempt. The young call the way we live our lifestyle and take that seriously even as they are bored by our rhetoric. Here is another place where Francis's famous dictum, *Preach the Gospel always; use words if necessary*, applies.

Silence, community, union, poverty, all these apparently contradictory elements combine to reflect the Gospel imperative to follow Jesus. The silence of our following is a powerful witness to the passionate life of the Lord walking the way of the cross.

Conclusion. It all begins with standing naked before the Lord, who summons us to obedience. Franciscan vocation is about nakedness, passion, and silence. Our hands are empty when we open them. The riches of God's grace are poured lavishly into the open, empty hands of the poor. Because this is Jesus' way, this is the way of Francis.



Empty hands are open hands. Paul writes in the letter to the Philippians that Jesus,



who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:6-8)

And of Francis we sing in the antiphon appointed for the Transitus on the evening before his feast day:

Francis, poor and lowly, enters heaven rich.



PROJECT/WISH LIST

Donations and sponsors are needed for the following projects:

- + Renovation of St. Francis House front hallway:
 - Demolition/rebuilding, \$800
 - Display cabinet, \$350
- + Painting outside of bay window to chapel:
 - Neighbor needing work, \$300
 - Materials, \$80.
- + Restoration of ground floor rear apartment:
 - Materials, \$1,000
 - Labor donated (THANK YOU!)
- + Building inspection of 32 Broad Street (house next door) for possible St. Francis House expansion: \$500.

And thanks to:

- + Marian Doro for glasses, linens, and end tables.
- + Calvary Church for \$1200 to meet needs.
- + Fr. Scott Hankins and the Church of the Resurrection, Norwich, for the lectern now in use in the chapel.

IN THIS ISSUE

Ted Mellor, "Matzoh, Breaking Bread, and Liberation," page 1.

Ed Rodman and Richard Neathamer on "Faith-Based Initiatives," page 2.

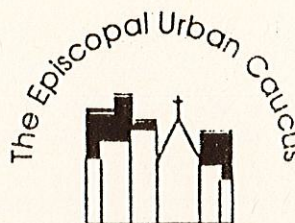
Anne P. Scheibner, "Travels with Otis," page 5.

Emmett Jarrett, TSSF, "Open Hands, Empty Hands," page 6.

"Chrissy's House Blessing for the Hermitage," and news of the Episcopal Urban Caucus Los Angeles Assembly, insert.

Meetings for Clarification of Thought resume in September, page 4.

St. Francis House Wish List and thank-yous, page 11.



SAVE THE DATE

L. A. ASSEMBLY FEB. 6-9, 2002

TAKE NOTE! IMPORTANT!

We cannot guarantee the \$84 hotel rate beyond November 5, 2001! After that date, we have to cancel rooms or be severely penalized.

Call **TODAY** – Radisson Wilshire Plaza Hotel, 213 381-7411, and ask for **California Federal Credit Union/EUC** rates.

NONPROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U. S. Postage Paid
Permit #122
New London, CT 06320

Saint Francis House
P. O. Box 2185
New London, CT 06320-2185
Telephone (860) 437-8890
E-mail stfranchishouse@mindspring.com