

FROM THE SERVANT GENERAL

ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

October 4, 2008

My dear brethren,

Today is the feast day of my patron saint, St Francis of Assisi. I am particularly fond of this saint, and look to him in living my life in Christ.

St Francis gave up all material goods in order to follow Christ, he devoted his entire life to serve Christ, he looked to building up the Church, he served the poor, he loved nature. He was an ardent evangelizer, even trying to convert the Muslim sultan. He was opposed by some of his own confreres and even ousted from heading the Franciscans. He considered his suffering for Christ to be perfect joy.

We would do well to look to this great saint, in living our lives for Christ.

First, we must be detached from the world and all its allures. Conformity with the world brings all the undesirable *isms* into our lives—materialism, secularism, liberalism, humanism, hedonism. Rather, God calls us to be set apart, that is, to be holy.

Second, we must embrace suffering and pain as part of our life in Christ. Suffering and pain purify us. They make us even more totally dependent on the grace and providence of God. They teach us endurance and perseverance. They strengthen our resolve. They allow us to share in the very suffering of Jesus. If so, then whenever we suffer pain for the sake of righteousness, we must always rejoice.

Third, we must give our all in serving Christ. Our lives belong to God. We are slaves of Christ. Our mission is to bring his good news of salvation to the whole world. In particular, as CFC-FFL, we focus on our charism of family and life. But family and life are at the core of evangelization today. As Pope John Paul II said, the future of humanity passes by way of the family. And the fight to uphold the culture of life is all about God's desire to have us live an abundant life on earth. With families living renewed lives in Christ, that is also the way to combating the scourges of poverty, social injustice, environmental degradation and terrorism.

The above three are, after all, what discipleship is all about. Jesus says, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." (Lk 9:23).

Denying ourselves? Shunning the pleasures the world has to offer? Embracing our cross? Rejoicing in persecution and suffering? Foolish, the world says. Indeed, "we are fools on Christ's account." (1 Cor 4:10a). But in the topsy-turvy world of Christ where the first is last and the last is first, where the greatest is the least and the least is the greatest, this is

the only way to go. Jesus tells us the bottom line: “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.” (Lk 9:24).

Let us take on the mind of Christ and the heart of St Francis. Let us live our all for God. Let us not look to the world but always to the wondrous reality of our renewed lives. And so we move on, “as sorrowful yet always rejoicing; as poor yet enriching many; as having nothing and yet possessing all things.” (2 Cor 6:10).

The Lord has already blessed us with exultant joy. Now with St Francis of Assisi, let us look forward to perfect joy.

God bless you always.

In the exuberant joy of Mary,

Frank Padilla