



Dear Brothers & Sisters

Secular Franciscan Fraternity

During COVID-19 we are gathering through Zoom or through partnering with a specific fraternity member.

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For privacy, all personal addresses, phone numbers, email, prayer intentions, and (for non-council members) last names are removed from this web version.

The Meaning of Resurrection

Jesus taught us something about Resurrection not long before his own Resurrection, when he called his friend Lazarus back from death. In John's telling of the story, Jesus comes before the tomb, the tomb symbolizing the deadness, the coldness, the hard-heartedness in all of us. He stands as the powerful warrior, the conqueror, the victor before that deadness. Jesus tells them to take away the stone, then he asks of them a further sign of faith. Do you believe that I can do it? Can you be with me as I do it? Step out. Make a little bit of a fool of yourself, move away from the stone. "Untie him," Jesus told them, "and let him go free." (John 11:44). Notice what John may well be saying to the community. Though Jesus brings us to life, he needs us, the Body of Christ. He needs the community to unbind Lazarus. We now share in the power of resurrection. The eternal Christ says to the eternal Church: Unbind the suffering world and let it go free! That is the meaning of Church. It is our call, our burden, our task in human history. The risen Christ invites us on his path of liberation.

Fr. Richard Rohr, OFM

The Great Themes of Scripture

This is our call, our burden, our task in human history not only as Church, but even more so as secular Franciscans. ☒

Our Monthly Gathering

The April fraternity Zoom meeting will be held on Monday, April 12th. The pairs should schedule a time convenient for both. For April, read Chapter 3 of *Fratelli Tutti* and answer the question(s) in the study guide. ☒

Anniversaries

Congratulations to our Spiritual Assistant, Brother Jerry as he celebrates his Tenth Anniversary of profession on April 30th.

God's Blessings be Yours in Abundance!

And So We Pray...

PAPAL INTENTIONS FOR APRIL

Universal intention – *Fundamental rights*

We pray for those who risk their lives while fighting for fundamental rights under dictatorships, authoritarian regimes and even in democracies in crisis.

HANDS AND FEET OF CHRIST

Do you want my hands, Lord, to spend the day helping the sick and the poor who need them?

Lord, today I give you my hands.

Do you want my feet, Lord, to spend the day visiting those who need a friend?

Lord, today I give you my feet.

Do you want my voice, Lord, to spend the day speaking to all who need your words of love?

Lord, today, I give you my voice.

Do you want my heart, Lord, to spend the day loving everyone without exception?

Lord, today I give you my heart.

Blessed Teresa of Kolkata

MORALISM

Moralism is the common substitute and counterfeit for mysticism in almost all religions. Moralism (as opposed to healthy morality) is our reliance on largely arbitrary purity codes, magic rituals, and “requirements” for our supposed enlightenment, “salvation”, or any other display of superiority. Every group and individual relies on moralism in its early stages. We look for something behavioral to *externally do or not do* rather than undergo a radical transformation of *our very mind and heart*. I guess that would be *la grande mort*, or too big a death. Mature religion is about change, not little changes. But little changes and adjustments here and there are so much easier.

Paul states the contrast perfectly when he says to the early Jewish Christians: “It does not matter whether one is circumcised or not, what matters is that you become a whole new creation (Galatians 6:16). And remember that circumcision was as important for Jews as baptism is for Christians. Divine union is not the same as personal perfection; they are quite different paths. It was St. Irenaeus of Lyon, called the first Christian theologian, who said, “The Son of God was made man so that man might become sons of God.” That, brothers and sisters, despite his sexist use of words, is the whole point—not circumcision or baptism. Think of the Christian denominations that have divided over the who, when, where, how, what words, how much water, and by whom of baptism. To my knowledge, Abraham, Moses, St. Joseph, and the Blessed Virgin Mary were never baptized. They were just transformed.

By *moralism*, I mean any technique or ritual of private perfection. Moral achievement invariably becomes a carrot on a stick—a largely arbitrary but only half-true goal that is always a bit beyond you. It makes any experience of union largely impossible, and that is its problem (as Romans and Galatians make resoundingly clear). You can now be independently “good” without the love and mercy of God, or anybody else for that matter. The big moral issues change from century to century

and culture to culture. Once it was “eating with pagans” (Galatian 2:12). By the early Middle Ages, it was usury (taking interest on loans, which we have no problem with now). Catholics still profess “missing Mass on Sunday” more than any other sin (when that is not even in the same category of many of the evils we are easily condoning), and today the moral issue is abortion and gay marriage. What will it be in the next century?

The moralistic agenda is revealed by the fact that one is never quite pure enough, holy enough, moral enough, or enough of an insider to the proper group. This process of “sin management” has kept us clergy in enduring business—and it must bore God to death, considering the weak historic ratings and results from all of our moralizing. (I have been pick-pocketed twice in my life, both in pious Catholic countries: on the bus to St. Peter’s in Rome and in front of a Marian shrine in the Philippines. I never felt safer than on the streets of India and Japan).

In a moralistically oriented religious group, there are always clear outsiders to be kept clearly outside. Hiding inside this false moral purity are things like slavery; sexism; the greed of Christian emperors, clergy, and citizens; pedophilia; national conquest; oppression of Native cultures. Greed and war are easily overlooked. That is no exaggeration if you read church history. We have not largely been dealing with any deep Jesus spirituality up to now but what some impatiently call “churchianity.” We Catholics had to canonize saints because they were the rare exception instead of the norm. The New Testament, in contrast, regularly calls all Christians “the saints.”

The good news of an incarnational religion, a Spirit-based morality, is that you are not motivated by outside reward or punishment but actually by looking out from inside the Mystery itself. So carrots are neither needed nor helpful. “It is God, who for his own loving purpose, puts both the will and the action into you” (Philippians 2:13). It is not our rule-following behavior but our actual identity that needs to be radically changed. This is a major change of position and vantage point. You do things because they are true, not because you have to or you are afraid of punishment. Henceforth you are not so much *driven from without* (the False Self method) as you are *drawn from within* (the True Self method). The generating motor is inside you now instead of a whip or a threat outside.

Before transformation, you pray to God. After transformation you pray *through God*, as the Christian liturgies always say: “*Through Christ our Lord. Amen!*” Before radical conversion, (*convertere*, to turn around or to turn with) you look out from God with eyes other than your own. As the Dominican, Meister Eckhart put it in one of his *Sermons*, “The eye through which I see God is the same eye through which God sees me; my eye and God’s eye are one eye, one seeing, one knowing, one love. All humans are doing is allowing God to “complete the circuit” within us—until we both see from the same perspective.

Every viewpoint is a view from a point, and our vantage point is utterly changed by God. Only then is the gap overcome, and quite effectively. I might add. When we can see in this way we know we are now living from our True Self. When your very “I” changes, the rest of your life will fall into place—a mighty fine place too. A fourth-century Syrian mystic called Pseudo-Macarius said that after we have been found by God, we are “nothing but gazing.” By the second and third weeks of my Lenten hermitages, I take long walks, I stop thinking and even feeling, and I just look, and see, everything—in exact color, shape, texture, and all inside of utter gratitude and harmony. It is wide-eye seeing without commentary. It is pure awareness and not ‘thinking’ as such. Then I can write and have something to say from the pulpit.

Fr. Richard Rohr, OFM
The Immortal Diamond