

SPECIFIC SPIRITUAL VIRTUES FROM FRANCIS' LIFE

Primary Source for these notes: "Francis of Assisi: A New Biography" by Augustine Thompson, OP

[These are the thoughts of Fr. Michael Scully, OFM Cap, and not necessarily anyone else's conclusions.]

[Intention of these notes:

- You can study F's virtues coming from Fcan thought, but you can also study specific virtues coming directly from his life
 - that's what I intend to do and what makes this reflection significant (different from a "normal" talk on Fcan virtues)—look at F'S life as defined by arguably the best biography of F, and then make some spiritual conclusions from specific moments that can apply to the daily life of a Third Order member]

1 BE GENEROUS

- *Be a generous person*
- *Be kind in what you do*
- *The number 1 directive of a Christian and therefore Fcan: **be strong in your beliefs, but be kind in carrying them out***

2 WORK WITH GOD

- *The Christian and therefore Fcan will work with his/her life with God's help, perhaps human help, keep trying to determine what is best for himself/herself. See also Virtue #13*

3 FOSTER A NEGATIVE FEELING ABOUT WAR

- *The Fcan will have a negative feeling about "war", "battle", "conquering", "killing"*
 - *thought spreads to troops, drones, war machines, etc.*
 - *in general, a Fcan should be against war, going to war*
- *Therefore to be in our country, world's most aggressive, most powerful because of weaponry, and to believe in peace is a challenge*
- *Solution: without "broadcasting" it: be against what our country is doing with regard to military aggression and when push comes to shove, take a personal stand, if necessary*
 - *eg, become a "conscientious objector", or work as medical person or the like*
- *Always with utmost respect and without judging toward those who are serving or will serve in the military*
 - *Footnote: the Fcan will be against the death penalty (no killing at all)*
 - *See also Virtue # 23*

4 PERFORM TRADITIONAL WORKS OF PENANCE

- *As a Christian and therefore Fcan, there will be traditional works of penance*
 - *almsgiving: giving of what we have, 10%?*
 - *prayer: more on that later*
- *bodily mortification (fasting): more a denial of things rather than any “taking it out on the body”*
- *As a Fcan, there can be physical punishment of selves, but always with guidance of spiritual person/director*
 - *otherwise it can be nothing more than pride:*
See Luke 18:9-14

5 WORK FOR A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH FAMILY

- *A Fcan will sever ties with family in some sense*
 - *For F, this was one of the defining moments of conversion in his life*
 - *He had a good relationship with his family*
- *Felt the love of father and mother, and wanted to work it so he would be on good terms with his family, but he could not do it*
- *For the Christian and therefore Fcan, working out a good relationship with family is necessary because it is part of Christian living now (part of our spirituality)*
- *In previous times: (in Jesus’ times and difficult times in history, for example in F’s life) there may have been reason to break with family when things were not acceptable*
- *But there must be the understanding for the Fcan that God is always more important than family*

6 WORK WITH THOSE MOST IN NEED

- F forced himself to greet the leper because he understood that he had to address some personal feelings and sinful inklings in his life. Embracing what once was repulsive, he learned to question himself about what direction his life had to take, about how he should think, and why he was acting the way he was*
- *The Christian and therefore Fcan must work with those most in need of help in our society (by giving money/volunteering)*

- Also the Christian and therefore the Fcan must be willing to spend serious time in prayer and carefully study his or her direction with a willingness to change if need be.

Fr. David Knight's idea of prayer:

“To reflect on the Word of God is prayer—on one condition: that we do it with the intention of calling our own life into question. Just to think about God’s Word in the abstract is academic speculation. But to reflect on God’s Word with the intention of continuing to reflect until we come to decisions that change our lives—that is to meet the mind of God in prayer.”

- that is “confrontatory” prayer

7 BE CONCERNED ABOUT SIN

- F’s idea of a “brother of penance” is captured in the first two chapters of the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order:
- A Christian and therefore Fcan will be very much concerned about the possibility of sin in his/her life
- therefore a Fcan will work with the Sacrament of Penance on an average of once every two months or so

8 READ THE GOSPELS

- The Gospel must be the primary prayer (and cause for prayer) of the Christian and therefore Fcan

A) WE MUST READ THE NEW TESTAMENT GOSPELS

- and not only read them, but read them with the idea of **trying to get into the mind of Jesus Christ**

(We are speaking of the spiritual approach to the reading of the Gospels)

- we have to know the Gospels correctly (but do not be obsessed with what is historical or not)

B) AND WE HAVE TO TAKE THE TIME TO THINK ABOUT THE GOSPELS

- we will not be able to assimilate what Jesus said, unless we give ourselves **time**
- here we are saying, find some daily time to read what Jesus said and did, and think carefully about it in light of where I am right now in my life—10-15 minutes / that is 12 minutes: **THE 12 MINUTE DAILY**

9 SHOW RESPECT FOR THE CHURCH

- *Respect for the Church and the Church's authority*
- *When we completely disagree with Church and/or some ministers*
 - *Never in a mean way, always respectful*
- *There should be no open semi-public articles/talk in criticism of the Church or authorities in the Church*
 - *exception: theologians, people set up to discuss*
 - *"I respectfully disagree...." should be our language*

10 DRESS SIMPLY

- *A Fcan should have a simple dress style*

11 BE PEACEFUL

- *A Christian and therefore Fcan will maintain a peaceful relationship with everyone*
 - *So called "Prayer of St. Francis" should be prayed every day*

12 PREACH BY EXAMPLE

- *The Christian and therefore the Fcan should always show good example*
- *In a sense everyone and therefore a Fcan is called to "preach"—Vatican II, Decree on the Laity:*

"There are innumerable opportunities open to the laity for the exercise of their apostolate of evangelization and sanctification. An apostolate of this kind does not consist only in the witness of one's way of life; a true apostle looks for opportunities to announce Christ by words addressed either to non-believers with a view to leading them to faith, or to the faithful with a view to instructing, strengthening, and encouraging them to a more fervent life. "For the charity of Christ impels us" (2 Cor. 5:14).

*Therefore all must preach, remembering the words widely attributed to F-- **Preach the Gospel, and if necessary, use words.***

13 WORK WITH GOD'S PLAN

*For the believer, everything that happens must be looked at as **God's plan** in some way because we have the Holy Spirit acting within us. Or another way of saying it in a*

personal way: **“Everything that happens to us is meant to help us in one way or another.”**

We should study the example of Joseph in the book of Genesis, chapters 37-45, and Joseph’s statement: **“It was really for the sake of saving lives that God sent me here ahead of you.”** The rational person would say—God did not send him there at all—it was evil that did it. But Joseph could say, and we should be able to say—in every circumstance—God sent me here with these circumstances, with what has happened in life, and it is for the good—somehow, some way.

14 FOLLOW YOUR CALLING

Following your call: Presumption is that you have followed the Holy Spirit as you have chosen your way of life.

Now, you must work with it as best you can, or ask the Holy Spirit to be part of a new decision with you.

15 BE RESPECTFUL OF OTHERS

A Christian and therefore a Fcan will always show sacredness and utmost respect in close relationships with others, male to female, female to male, etc.

16 CONQUER PRIDE

Concerning pride and F’s desire not to think well of himself

One of most beautiful prayers contained in Scripture is the one attributed to Mary the Mother of Jesus. Known as the Magnificat, Luke 1:46-55.

Mary takes justifiable pride in what God has done for her, and at the same time understands what will happen to those who are “arrogant of mind and heart.” Both parts of pride are important for anyone interested in living a spiritual life and therefore a Fcan life.

First, there is a justifiable pride in being accepted by someone we love. Or in carrying out something that is good for others. But, there is a pride that is harmful as well. A person who only wants applause, that is, a person who only wants praise from others can easily fall into arrogance, placing him/herself “above” others, making others feel less important in their lives, and in general, desiring only what they want as a guide to life in general. In day-to-day living, we must be aware of both of those elements. We must have pride in ourselves, recognizing the abilities that we have, and understanding the contributions that we can make to the ones that we love. It is the foundation of being able to accomplish what we want to achieve as we grow. But we must know the sinfulness of pride as well. Too many people who are accomplished in life forget about the importance of others, what

others have done for them, and often destroy any possible relationship, whether romantic or otherwise.

The virtue of pride helps us live well because we know that we can learn from others. The sin of pride makes us lose sight of others because we only see ourselves.

17 PRAY THE “CANTICLE OF THE SUN”

The prayer “Canticle of the Sun” should be part of every “major” Fcan event by praying it out loud, or singing it in one of the songs of the Church.

18 RESPECT THE EUCHARIST

F “never wanted to be without the E”

A Fcan should try to go to Mass at least once during the week as well as on the weekend.

Take the time to realize what we believe:

- *We come into close intimate contact with a person we claim to be our God and guide*
- *and we believe that for the few minutes the bread and wine is in our bodies, we have close personal contact with our God*
 - *Too many of us let that moment pass us by without any effect at all*
 - *We truly do not recognize what we have*
 - *What can we do about it?*
 - *it is the whole thing of concentration—*
- *We do that by simply bringing our minds back once we realize that we are not concentrating*
 - *Perhaps we need the help of reading the words quietly*
 - *or closing our eyes and getting into what is happening*
- *We are easily distracted, but we can overcome the distraction at least somewhat*

19 BE OBEDIENT

F was always “obedient” (with his own understanding of obedience) to the Church

We must listen to the significant voices concerning our choice of what to do.

Obedience to God, obviously—a Fcan has made a promise to God over and above obedience to rules of a Church;

“Obedience” to Others—husband, wife, parents, children, grandchildren, etc.;

“Obedience” to Self—health, exercise, etc.

20 GO TO EUCHARISTIC ADORATION

A Fcan will always be interested in some type of Eucharistic adoration—visiting a Church, specific adoration, or the like.

During the adoration, Fcans should center themselves around Gospel thoughts

21 HAVE NO DESIRE TO BE “IN CHARGE”

A Christian and therefore a Fcan generally speaking will not desire to be “in charge” of anything.

There are some situations which require a Christian and therefore a Fcan to be “the boss” or “where the buck stops,” but Fcans will always consult others and try to rule with “gentle direction”

22 ACCEPT REJECTION WELL

Passive acceptance of rejection is a virtue

We do not like to be shunned, and we often want to retaliate in some way

23 HELP YOUR COUNTRY WHEN AT WAR

How to live in a Country at War

“F went among the soldiers.... “

Perhaps this means that a Christian and therefore a Fcan should be interested in what their country (nation) is doing with regard to protecting, fighting, and killing and should volunteer in doing ways to help people rather than hate them. See also Virtue # 2

24 DO NOT SPEAK “ILL”

A Christian and therefore a Fcan will not speak ill of others, but will work to overcome their “evil” by good works and prayers

25 ACCEPT THE “THORNS” IN LIFE

As F goes through his “annus horribilis,” we are reminded of Paul’s famous “thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7). Though the exact nature of this affliction is not certain, its purpose is. Paul twice emphasizes that this “thorn” was given to him precisely to prevent his being “too elated.”

The Christian and therefore a Fcan will recognize that there are many “thorns” in their lives that they are an indication of weakness (as it was for F). What is called for is an acceptance of the thorns as a sign of the weaknesses of human nature, and working with them is necessary since it will make us stronger.

26 ACCEPT EVIL DONE AGAINST US

A Christian and therefore a Fcan will “turn the other cheek” and accept any evil that is perpetrated on them

There may be the necessity to defend oneself against false accusation, but we will do it only after consultation with someone we feel is “holy”

27 WORK TO UNDERSTAND FRANCIS’ PERSONALITY

Probably the biographer who most captures F’ personality is G.K. Chesterton in his book “Saint Francis of Assisi.”

What Chesterton does (with uncanny but, for him, typical brilliance) is draw the reader into the mind-boggling simplicity and singleness of vision that characterized Francis’ view of life after breaking with his old way of life as the son of Pietro di

Bernardone. Chesterton treats F sympathetically, describing him as a man who, quite literally, started over. When F gave himself to God, embracing the principles of poverty, chastity, and obedience, he did so with a startling purity and, some might say, naiveté. Chesterton is at his best when defending this naiveté. He recognizes the danger of trying to institutionalize or force these virtues on all of Christendom in the way that F embraced them personally, arguing that it was more necessary for F to be absorbed into Christendom than for Christendom to be absorbed into F, but he sees F nonetheless as a necessary and crucial reminder and challenge to the church and the world

28 WORK WITH “MENTAL PAIN”

The “mental pain” of F:

One of the most important “virtues” that a Christian and therefore a Fcan should learn is the ability to work with mental pain. Some very practical directives for example:

- Talk to someone you trust*
- Get moving: exercise, etc.*
 - Learn how to relax*
- Be aware of your emotional triggers*
 - Avoid self-medication*
 - Focus on the positive*

29 WORK WITH SPIRITUAL SUFFERING

We have spiritual suffering

The solution is to talk to someone

In our thinking we must guard against scrupulosity--a modern-day psychological problem that echoes a traditional use of the term scruples in a religious context to mean obsessive concern with one's own sins (or imagined sins) and compulsive performance of religious devotion

30 READ FRANCISCAN MATERIAL

Every Fcan should be reading something “Fcan” at least once a year, and part of the reading ought to include F’s own writings

31 PRAY THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

A Fcan should pray at least a Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer from the Divine Office (including modern adaptations when they feel better about the translations), and it should be done slowly so as to completely understand the words

32 BE CONCERNED ABOUT THE SALVATION OF ALL

F was very concerned about people's souls. He wanted all people to go to heaven and it bothered him immensely that there were some people who might not. He was governed by a set of laws that spoke of sin and especially mortal sin. (As was the Church at that time.) He was concerned especially about his friars, but he could see what was happening in the world.

A Christian and therefore a Fcan should be very concerned about what is happening in the world, praying that everyone use the grace that God gives them (without judgment of the person)

But remembering this thought from Vatican II, Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: The church must read the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the Gospel. The church does not exist alongside or apart from the world; the church is part of the world, and its mission is to serve the whole human family in order to make the human race's history more human

33 TALK "WELL" OF LEADERS

...Thinking about "Leaders that are not what they should be"

A Fcan would look into understanding how those leaders understand things

- not complain about them in a condemning way

- attempt to work with them as best we can ("tug on the tunic")

34 BE LESSER

'Lesser Brothers'

Every Fcan should be concerned about the possibility of "pride." They should be concerned about it especially if they have an office in the fraternity. Pride can be described as "a feeling or deep pleasure or satisfaction derived from one's own achievements." The truly prideful person will not consider the possibility that others have helped with what has been accomplished. (See Virtue #16)

35 SHOW POVERTY IN YOUR LIFE

The Secular Fcan view of Poverty

The religious leaders that have taken the time to try to talk to us about poverty have always had a very difficult time. Simply put, we cannot live a life of poverty as F and the early Fcans did. We live in the twenty-first century, not the twelfth. We have to have cars, we have to have money, we have to have conveniences. One cannot live in the world without them.

*Thinking in this vein, poverty becomes a very personal matter—how can I live the poverty that I have promised to the Lord? Granted that we must have the wherewithal to function in this world, **what can I do individually to insure that I am living more poorly?***

36 ADJUST TO CIRCUMSTANCES

“Fcan Adjustment”

Just as F was able to adjust to the circumstances of the Later Rule, so a Fcan should be able to adjust to situations that they never could foresee, taking them to be the will of God in their lives. (See Virtue #13)

37 CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS

The Celebration of Christmas

A Fcan ought to celebrate Christmas in a special way, remembering how F was so partial to accepting Jesus as a Child

38 RESPECT PRIESTHOOD

The clericalization of the order:

F felt that priests and bishops were special no matter whether they showed a holiness or not, even though he at first did not want his brothers to aspire to the priesthood.

A Fcan should remember that all priests are to be shown the greatest respect

39 MAKE THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS

A Fcan should make the Stations of the Cross often.

40 PRAY ONLY “THANKSGIVING”

Every Fcan prayer (perhaps every Christian prayer) should be a prayer of thanksgiving.

- *There is really only one kind of prayer, namely the prayer of thanksgiving*
- *here is the reasoning: we begin with the thought that God only gives good and therefore, everything is a gift from God:*
 - *no matter what happens, it is a good*
 - *whether we ask for it or not, whether we are believers or not, no matter what the circumstance, God only gives good*
- *in fact, no matter what has happened in our lives, if we are observant, we can see how God has brought good out of it*
- *that is difficult for us to believe because our problem is that we cannot see the overall picture, while God does*
 - *it means that we must thank God*
- *one of the drawbacks of our favorite memorized prayers—the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be—is that there is no direct statement of “thank you” to God in them*
 - *granted the idea of gratitude is implied, but it is not stated directly*
 - *we should say it directly—add it to your daily formal prayers*
- *some add it to the “Glory be” when they pray it privately by beginning the prayer “Glory and thanksgiving be...”*

41 PRAY FOR CIVIL AUTHORITY

A Fcan should pray for those in civil authority, making sure that it is prayer offered for all involved and not merely our opinion

42 ACCEPT SICKNESS

A Fcan should pray in their sickness

(from an article by Sister Frances Teresa, OSC, [Living The Incarnation.](#))

The most demanding struggles, and the ones which most mature us, psychologically and spiritually, are those that come upon us unsought, always undesired and for which we feel we have had no preparation at all. The struggles that we freely undertake, such as fasting, are much easier, simply because we remain in control. We can always decide to stop. What, though, are we to make of those formative experiences of pain and distress which we do not choose and do not like, perhaps can hardly bear, and which we cannot bring to an end when we are tired of them? ... What becomes of joy then? What happens then to our prayer and our praise and our thanksgiving?

43 PREPARE TO DIE

A Fcan Looks at Death

(readings from Catholic Ritual of Vigil for the Deceased)

The second letter of Paul to the Corinthians 5:6-10:

We have an everlasting home in heaven. We know that if our earthly dwelling, a tent, should be destroyed, we have a building from God, a dwelling not made with hands, eternal in heaven. So we are always courageous, although we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yet we are courageous, and we would rather leave the body and go home to the Lord. Therefore, we aspire to please him, whether we are at home or away. For we all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive recompense, according to what he did in the body, whether good or evil.

The gospel according to Luke 12:35-40

Be prepared. Jesus told his disciples: "Gird your loins and light your lamps and be like servants who await their master's return from a wedding, ready to open immediately when he comes and knocks: Blessed are those servants whom the master finds vigilant on his arrival. Amen, I say to you, he will gird himself, have them recline at table, and proceed to wait on them. And should he come in the second or third watch and find them prepared in this way, blessed are those servants. Be sure of this: if the master of the house had known the hour when the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come."

44 BE A FRANCISCAN ALWAYS

F's final wish for his brothers—just be a true brother: no more, no less.

Just do what you said you would do.

Live the Gospel as best you can.

Nothing else....

45 VALUE FRIENDSHIP

A Fcan should not shy away from close friendships. Everyone needs the help of someone else no matter what situation they are in

[46 VISIT THE BASILICAS AND PORZIUNCULA

The Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi.

Obviously, not what F wanted, but as with so many things, the popularity of the saint would justify such an edifice.

If they have the chance, every F can should spend some time of prayer in the Basilica and the Basilica of St. Clare (the location of the San Damiano Cross) and Portiuncula about a mile from the Basilicas.]