

ENTERING THE CAVE

OUR THREE-YEAR JOURNEY OF OUR FRANCISCAN RENEWAL WORKSHOPS HAS ONCE AGAIN TAKEN US THROUGH THE LIFE OF ST. FRANCIS, BUT HOPEFULLY THIS TIME ALL OF US WERE ABLE TO SEE THE PRAYERFUL SIMPLICITY AND NUANCES OF HOW ST. FRANCIS MADE HIS DAILY CHOICES AND WHAT RULED HIS LIFE.

IN TRYING TO FIND EVEN MORE WAYS FOR US TO INVESTIGATE FRANCIS' LIFE AND HOW HE CARRIED OUT GOD'S WILL IN HIS LIFE,

WHEN DID FRANCIS ENTER THE CAVE?

AFTER TRYING TO LIVE LIFE ACCORDING TO HIS OWN RULES AND DESIRES, FRANCIS, ON HIS SECOND ATTEMPT TO GO TO WAR TO BECOME A HERO AND THUS BE DUBBED A KNIGHT, HE HEARS THE VOICE OF GOD SPEAK TO HIM. IT IS CLEAR. IT IS SPECIFIC. IT PIERCES HIS SOUL. "GO BACK TO ASSISI AND HE WILL LEARN MORE WHAT HE IS TO DO." HE KNOWS HE MUST OBEY.

THIS IS NOT AN EASY CHOICE. HE ALSO KNOWS WHEN HE ARRIVES HOME HE WILL BE LABELED A COWARD WHO HAS LOST HIS NERVE. HIS FATHER WILL BE FURIOUS WITH HIM AFTER ALL THE MONEY HE INVESTED ONCE AGAIN IN HIS SON. HE WILL BE OSTRASIZED BY HIS FRIENDS. BUT HE CANNOT DO OTHERWISE.

UPON HIS RETURN HOME IS THE PERIOD WHEN FRANCIS CONSTANTLY ENTERED THE CAVE.

WHERE WAS FRANCIS' CAVE?

WHY DID FRANCIS ENTER THE CAVE?

THERE ARE MANY REASONS FRANCIS ENTERS THE CAVE. MAYBE FIRST TO FIND HIMSELF AGAIN. HE NO LONGER KNEW WHO HE WAS. HE WAS NOT TO BE A KNIGHT, AS HE THOUGHT HE WAS SUPPOSED TO BE. HE WAS NO LONGER THE LIFE OF THE PARTY WHO COLLECTED FOLLOWERES LIKE THE PIED PIPER AS HE HAD BEEN. HE WAS DEFINITELY NOT THE SON HIS FATHER WANTED HIM TO BE. SO, WHO WAS HE?

DO YOU FIND TIMES IN YOUR LIFE WHEN YOU FEEL LOST AND CAN'T HEAR THE VOICE OF GOD TO TELL YOU WHAT TO DO? DO YOU HAVE

TIMES WHEN YOU CAN'T EVEN MAKE A DECISION BECAUSE YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW YOUR OWN HEART? THESE ARE TIMES WHEN WE NEED TO ENTER THE CAVE TOO.

FRANCIS ALSO WENT TO THE CAVE TO HEAR GOD'S VOICE ONCE AGAIN. THAT VOICE HE HEARD IN SPOLETO THAT WAS SO STRONG. THAT VOICE THAT SEEMED TO PENETRATE EVERY MOLICULE OF HIS BODY. THAT VOICE THAT KNEW WHO FRANCIS WAS AND WAS SUPPOSED TO BECOME. HE NEEDED THAT VOICE FOR DIRECTION. IF HE COULD NOT FIND GOD IN THE NOISE AND CHAOS OF THE WORLD, THEN ONCE AGAIN IN THE DARK AND SILENCE HE WOULD THROW HIMSELF TIME AND TIME AGAIN UNTIL THE SMALL FAINT WHISPER OF THE VOICE STARTED TO RETURN. AND ONCE IT STARTED TO COME TO HIM ONCE AGAIN, YOU COULD NOT KEEP FRANCIS FROM THE CAVE.

WHAT HAPPENED TO FRANCIS IN THE CAVE?

IN THE CAVE, FRANCIS DID NOT FIND HIS PURPOSE IN LIFE, BUT HE DD FIND HIS LIFE – AND THAT LIFE WAS GOD. HE FOUND A RELATIONSHIP THAT HE HAD IGNORED IN HIS OTHER LIFE. OH, YES, HE WENT THROUGH THE MOTIONS OF BEING A GOOD CHRISTIAN – ATTENDED MASS AS REQUIRED, GAVE ALMS AS REQUIRED, AND GENERALLY FOLLOWED THE RULES.

AND HE HAD A NATURAL HEART OF GOLD WHO WANTED TO HELP PEOPLE. EVEN IN HIS FORMER LIFE, HE WAS GEREROUS TO THE POOR, TRIED TO MAKE HIS PARENTS HAPPY AND LOVED TO SEE HIS FRIENDS JOYFUL AND TAKEN CARE OF. BUT, HE ALSO WAS EXTREMEY SELFISH WITH HIS TIME AND WITH HIS

HOW WAS FRANCIS CHANGED WHEN HE LEFT THE CAVE?

WHERE IS OUR CAVE?

WHEN SHOULD WE ENTER OUR CAVE?

WHAT DO WE DO IN THE CAVE?

IN MORE DETAIL AND WITH MORE OF AN EYE AT OUR CALLING AND OUR DAILY CONVERSION IN IMITATION OF FRANCIS' LIFE OF FOLLOWING HIS CALLING BUT NOT WITHOUT DAILY CONVERSION.

IF WE CAN NOW FINALLY SEE MORE CLEARLY THROUGH FRANCIS'S EYES

AS WE DAILY TRY TO PLACE OUR FEET IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ST. FRANCIS

BUT WE MUST REMEMBER HOW FRANCIS WAS ABLE TO COMPLETELY TRANSFORM HIS LIFE TO IMITATE THE LIFE OF CHRIST. FIRST, HE ENTERED THE CAVE. AS CHRIST HE FIRST AND FORMOST FOCUSED ON PRAYER.

IDEAS ON PRAYER FROM DIANE MENDITTO

+Prayer is the longing of the human heart for God. It is a yearning and desire for relationship with God.

+...prayer is God's desire to breathe in me, to be the Spirit of my life and to draw me into the fullness of life.

+Francis did not recite many prayers but rather he lived in a deep relationship with God—he became prayer.

+Prayer is the expression of intimacy with God and ultimately must shape the way we live our lives ...

+Prayer is the way to life because in prayer we are invited to change and to grow in love.

+Prayer ... requires an honest encounter with God, a turning of the mind and heart to God.

+Franciscan prayer is not an escape from the world but an entrance into it.

+Franciscan Prayer is centered on the Incarnation and on the Trinity.

Idea for initial or ongoing formation:

--How does prayer influence and shape your life?

--What helps you to pray? What distracts you from prayer?

--What is in your heart that you want God to know?