



**Five Important Spiritual Thoughts from the Liturgy of the Word
 ...and follow up for the Secular Franciscan
 August 17 – August 24**

1 -- "You shall be my people, and I will be your God." (Ezekiel 36:28)
 ...As I study my life yesterday, is it clear that I have truly chosen God?

2 – "Many are invited, but few are chosen." (Mt 22:14)**

Extended meditation

In his story, Jesus tells those who have not put on the wedding garment that they are not "chosen." What does it mean "to be chosen"? Looked at as the ending of Jesus's story, it might mean that those who are "chosen" will celebrate eternal life with God. Looked at from the point of view of "right now," it probably means that the person who is "chosen" will do the best that he/she can do given the circumstances, the definition of the spiritual life, and therefore the Franciscan's way of life.

The minister called it the most interesting story that he had ever heard. He was a part-time chaplain at a local hospital. A person whose profession was a rodeo clown had come into the emergency room and had been immediately hospitalized with an extremely serious infection in his leg. Having suffered it during a performance in another town, he finally had to come to the hospital to try to have it treated. Unfortunately, the infection was so pronounced that the man died within a matter of days. Since the man had no family according to the records, the minister located the rodeo which had already moved to another town, informing them of the death. One person, likewise a rodeo clown came back to his funeral. He was the only mourner as they buried the man.

He told the minister the story. The mourner who came back to the funeral had been a policeman, a man very talented in law enforcement who had managed to destroy a major drug operation in a southern United States city. But he paid the price. Although his family was in protection, the drug cartel had managed to murder them all—his wife and two children—burned their home, and left the policeman despondent and ready to end his life.

He had already given notice that he would retire from the police force, and really had no plans for the future except to live his life in misery. His captain had given him easy duty on his last day—watching a stoplight at a major intersection in the city. What happened at that stoplight changed his life, and inspired him to become a person who "made people laugh while saving lives" as he described it.

A comedy magician in a crazily painted car approached that stoplight during the policeman's last day at work. The magician was late for a performance, and had already put his oversize shoes on as he approached the



intersection. When he went to brake the car, suddenly his shoe caught, then slipped off the brake and hit the accelerator. The car went flying through the intersection. Luckily there were no other cars at that time, but the policeman knew that he had to approach the vehicle which had suddenly stopped when the man finally found the brakes.

When he approached the car, he saw a thoroughly distraught man made up as a clown for his performance. Because of his sudden stop after his flight through the intersection, a number of his gimmicks that he used in his show had "gone off." There were plastic snakes moving all over the car, shot out of a two toy guns which had been discharged when the guns hit the floor. There was wild music coming out of the tape recorder in the back seat that had been programmed to play when there was a sudden jerk to the machine. And when the policeman had asked the man to roll down the window, the comedian knew what would happen with the tape recorder because after the wild music, it was set up to deliver the sentence, "You are the most handsome man on the face of the earth."

The policeman-turned-rodeo clown told the minister that he began to laugh for the first time since his family's death. He laughed so hard that he barely could tell the comedy magician to leave. He began to understand some things about his life. He later found the magician, and thanked him for saving his life. He told him that he had inspired him to save people's lives while making them laugh. He later became a rodeo clown to do exactly that.

In fact, both of them became close friends and joined the rodeo together as rodeo clowns. The man who died was the comedy magician rodeo clown, and the policeman attested that the man had saved his life. At the end of their lives both policeman and magician had moved into a path of love and chosen a future of showing love toward others.

They both understood what it meant "to be chosen."

3 -- The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted." (Mt 23:11-12)**

Extended meditation:

In this chapter in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is speaking about the hypocrisy of the religious leaders of his day. Hypocrisy is an interesting phenomenon to talk about. It is an automatic trap or problem area for anyone who gives direction to others: priests, ministers, teachers, parents, legislators, anyone showing leadership of others. In our case as Franciscans, it is anyone who chooses to do something good that others see, and therefore anyone understands the importance of God in our lives. For whatever reason, we say to the world: "I believe in God through Jesus Christ." We must listen to Jesus in the Gospel today. It is possible to say 'I believe', and not put it into practice.

SHAPING THE FRANCISCAN FOOTPRINT
by Father Mike Scully OFM Cap., Regional Spiritual Assistant



We should be very interested in what we say in Church. We say strong words during the service, words like, we *believe*, we *will*, we *do*. We must truly listen to what we say and do. We receive the Lord in the words of the Gospel and in the Eucharist. How can someone receive the Lord and with the same mouth tear down someone else or allow foul language to come out of it? How can someone receive the Lord and continue a life-style that makes a shambles of a marriage or parenting? How can we miss the sacredness of life itself by being bitter and angry most of the time? Or refusing to see the good in life?

How?—according to Jesus, we have allowed religion to be nothing more than something to be seen or performed.

What's the antidote to hypocrisy, how do we stay away from it? This Gospel gives us that as well. Jesus says:

The greatest among you must be your servant.

Service—we have heard that before from Jesus, in fact a number of times. The way to keep ourselves from the hypocrisy of saying one thing and doing another is to work on behalf of others. Serve people, give to them without expecting anything in return, make others feel important because they are—really.

By the very fact that we say we believe in God, by the very fact that we have professed to be a Franciscan, we are making a statement to the world outside. We must realize that we could be hypocrites... or if we carry through, we could be people who are helping this world.

4 -- "Strive to enter through the narrow gate" (Luke 13:24)**

...Is daily discipline of some type part of my Franciscan life?

5 -- "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites." (Mt 23:13)**

...Do I tend to criticize others when I'm doing the same thing myself?

**** one of the most important passages of the Gospels**