

**Shaping the Franciscan Footprint
Five Important Spiritual Thoughts from the Liturgy of the Word
...and follow up for the Secular Franciscan
April 13 – April 19**

1 – “You are witnesses of these things.” (Lk 24:48)

THE WITNESS WHO “SEES”

The year was 1906. A person who could be described as a normal young man graduated from school after having been educated in Braunau, a little town in Austria. He had a Catholic upbringing, was a Mass server, and as a young man, he struggled to be what he should have been.

About 17 years later, another young man graduated from school not far from Braunau, St. Radegund, Austria. He fooled around in life much more than the first youth. He also was Catholic, but showed little respect for anything. He was into drinking, motorcycling (he was first in his small town to own one), and was into sexual activity. In fact, he had a child out of wedlock after his graduation from school. He finally settled down because of his marriage to a good woman, had three small children, and began to live a “normal” good life. He farmed, worked in a factory, even did some military service, but was released from it temporarily to farm. He slowly began to think. He later was to call it beginning “to see.”

In February 1943, the first youth had become the head of state in Germany, a man by the name of Adolf Hitler. In that same month, the second youth was called into the Hitler’s army. The second was a relatively unknown person who would have remained that way had it not been for someone who wrote a book about him. The name of the book was “In Solitary Witness” by Gordon Zahn; the name of the youth was Franz Jaegerstaetter, now considered a saint in the Catholic Church.

In February 1943 Franz Jaegerstaetter knew that he had a problem because he believed that the war he was drafted into was wrong. Being a good Catholic by that time, he sought advice of priests, even the bishop, and was told to serve. He loved his wife and children. His wife knew what he was going through, and they did not want to separate, but no matter what anyone said, *he* knew what was right.

One of the major arguments for him to join the army was that his refusal to serve would not make a difference. His neighbors thought he was crazy, that refusing to join would be an act of folly, and more than that, a sin against his family, his community, and even his Church. His death would go unnoticed. It would have no impact on the Nazi movement. It would not bring the end of the war. His action would soon be forgotten. Who would remember or care about an anti-Nazi gesture of an uneducated farmer? He would be just one more filed-away name among the many thousands who were tried and executed with indifference during the Nazi era.

But he did what he had to do because he knew it was right. He went to the military induction center, told them he would not serve, was sent to prison, and executed on August 9, 1943. He was a witness to the truth.

The word "witness" means literally "to know." It implies that we know this Jesus, and are willing to make him known to others. Jaegerstaetter called it the "grace to see."

Whether he knew it or not, Franz Jaegerstaetter was a witness. He was given the grace to see Jesus and what he stood for. Franz Jaegerstaetter knew what he did was right. So do we. Our prayer is that we may have the grace to see, and when we see it, that we are willing to act.

2 -- "Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature." (Mk 14:15)

...Francis took this directive quite literally. Do my actions show that I am proclaiming the Gospel?

3 -- "Amen, I say to you, unless one is born of water and Spirit he[/she] cannot enter the Kingdom of God." (Jn 3:5)

...I have been; do I act like it?

4 -- "The community of believers was of one heart and mind." (Acts 4:32)

...In my fraternity, do I try to achieve this ideal?

5 -- "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life." (Jn 3:16)

...The miniature Gospel. I should spend some time in Thanksgiving to God today.