

A SIMPLE BIOGRAPHY AND SPIRITUALITY OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

LIFE. Francis was born in Assisi around 1182 to a rich merchant Pietro Bernadone and Lady Pica. He died on 3rd October 1226. As a youth, Francis loved merry making and he often collected a group of lads around him. Francis had what we would literally call today good life because he had everything, he needed at his disposal which helped him prosper in his worldly life. However, a turning point in his life was seen when his vocation of knighthood for Assisi's political pride was consumed into the knighthood for God's kingdom by the grace of God. Francis became totally converted until he became the other Christ by way of life and deeds and he is said to have devoured prayers as man devours food.

HIS VOCATION. By the time Francis received his vocation, the political and religious situations of the time were so unfair and inhuman. The Church too was affected economic situation of the time to the extent that; it was so materialistic and it neglected the poor and needy who often stayed at the periphery of the society. Within this circumstance, Francis received his call of going back to the gospel values; living the life of poverty as Christ lived and taking care of the poor and the needy. Francis conceived an idea of having a few brothers around him to help him bring renewal to the Church and society at that time. God in his goodness walked with Francis and used him to bring new life to His people and more so to the Church.

HIS SPIRITUALITY. Francis was inspired with a unique spirituality or way of life. From the beginning of his conversion, Francis conceived his group to be a penitential movement but it surpassed being a movement into an Order. His intention was to preach the gospel to all people and do penance for salvation of souls. Francis's spirituality is very rich and it embeds values such as humility, simplicity, obedience among others. Franciscan spirituality has 5 pillars that holds Franciscan missionary charism these include; penance, fraternity, prayer, commitment to evangelical counsels and mission. Through observing these values and pillars, all Franciscans will be able to bear witness to the love of God by following gospel way of life.

Franciscan spirituality and movement gave birth to 3 Orders; the 1st Order consists of 3 independent branches; of the Order of Friars minor, the Capuchins and Conventual. The 2nd Order is that of the poor Clares and 3rd Order consists of brothers and sisters of third Order regular and secular. These Orders follow the rule of life as prescribed by St. Francis. Through Franciscan spirituality, Francis becomes one of the most venerated Religious figures in history and in the Church up to date.

Franciscan spirituality is unique because it is centered on openness to God the giver of every gift and it refers everything back to God. This spirituality is rooted in the Trinitarian theology of the Church, it is Christ centered, based on fraternity and penance as ongoing conversion which find their perfection of love through gospel life with emphasis on peace and Franciscan joy. Francis put a lot of emphasis on fraternal bond and care for creation, Francis used to say; all without exception are brothers and sisters who are offered the same grace of salvation, are endowed with the same human dignity and the same estimable value and are creatures of the

same God. His insight of universal fraternity of all creation is a natural condition of human beings intended by God for us all.

Francis' experience of God was deeply personal and we see the experience of grace par excellence. What seemed bitter at the beginning before his conversion turned into sweetness after his total conversion. It was grace at work and it effected such a radical and total reversal of Francis's worldly values and perception into becoming an ardent follower of Christ. Francis leaves a lot for us to desire and follow through his values. In describing sin, he often said that it is that which impedes us from seeing others as brothers and sisters by contributing to their misery and suffering through our actions and inactions, attitudes and deeds, personally and systemically. Thus, Francis encourages us to do penance which helps us to distance from all that ruptures the bond of human fraternity and the whole creation at large.

After all is said and done, Francis describes what perfect joy is. To Francis it is not being able to feed the hungry, raise the dead, talk all languages, make the dumb speak, being a great example of holiness and edification, make the lame walk, **NO**. For Francis it is in the face of rejection by the friars but still love and forgive them from the heart, that is perfect joy. If we bear all injuries with patience and joy thinking of the sufferings of our blessed Lord, which we would share out of love for him, then **THIS IS PERFECT JOY**.

Francis redefined what he understood of discipleship and being a radical follower of Christ. He followed the gospel to the letter and passed the same values to his followers. Prayer was the center of everything he did. His life and works have been a mirror and light for the world today. His life teaches us to be inclusive in terms of human relationships based on fraternal bond. Francis did his part and may the Holy Spirit teach us what is ours to do.

MY GOD AND MY ALL, ST. FRANCIS PRAY FOR US.