

EXPERIENCING THE GOODNESS OF GOD THROUGH FRANCISCAN VALUES
FRANCISCAN JOY

Topic: Franciscan Joy

Goal: The participants will gain an insight into the meaning of joy as Francis taught Brother Leo and then as Jesus teaches us.

Level: Beginning to learn about Franciscanism

Time: 1 ½ hours

Opening Prayer:

Francis' teaching on Joy

Leader: Francis, the son of a well-to-do cloth merchant, was already twenty-five years old when, in the church of San Damiano, he received the call to repair the ruined house of God. Before the famous Crucifix, now preserved in the church of St. Clare at Assisi, he answered the Lord in the following prayer :

Most high and glorious God,
Lighten the darkness of my heart
And give me sound faith,
Firm hope
And perfect love.
Let me, Lord, have the right feelings and knowledge,
Properly to carry out
The task you have given me. (2 Celano 10)

Leader: Francis' Rule states: "Let them (the brothers) be careful not to appear outwardly as sad and gloomy hypocrites but show themselves joyful, cheerful and consistently gracious in the Lord."

FRANCIS OF ASSISI: The SAINT Early Documents
Earlier Rule Chapter 7, line 15

N = Narrator

L=Leo

F=Francis

P=Porter

N. One winter day St. Francis was coming to St. Mary of the Angels from Perugia with Brother Leo, and the bitter cold made them suffer keenly. St. Francis called to Brother Leo, who was walking a bit ahead of him, and he said:

F. Brother Leo, even if the Friars Minor in every country give a great example of holiness and integrity and good edification, nevertheless, write down and note carefully that perfect joy is not in that.

N. And when he had walked on a bit, St. Francis called him again, saying:

F. Brother Leo, even if a Friar Minor gives sight to the blind, heals the paralyzed, drives out devils, gives hearing back to the deaf, makes the lame walk, and restores speech to the dumb, and what is still more, brings back to life a man who has been dead four days, write that perfect joy is not in that.

And going on a bit, St. Francis cried out again in a strong voice:

F. Brother Leo, if a Friar Minor knew all languages and all sciences and Scripture, if he also knew how to prophesy and to reveal not only the future but also the secrets of the consciences and minds of others, write down and note carefully that perfect joy is not in that.

N. And as they walked on, after a while St. Francis called again forcefully:

F. Brother Leo, Little Lamb of God, even if a Friar minor could speak with the voice of an angel, and knew the courses of the stars and the powers of herbs, and knew all about the treasures in the earth, and he knew the qualities of birds and fishes, animals, humans roots, trees, rocks and waters, write down and note carefully that true joy is not in that.

N. And going on a bit farther, St. Francis called again strongly:

F. Brother Leo, even if a Friar Minor could preach so well that he should convert all infidels to the faith of Christ, write that perfect joy is not there.

N. Now when he had been talking this way for a distance of two miles, Brother Leo in great amazement asked him:

L. Father, I beg you in God's name to tell me where perfect joy is.

N. And St. Francis replied:

F. When we come to St. Mary of the Angels, soaked by the rain and frozen by the cold, all soiled with mud and suffering from hunger, and we ring at the gate of the Place and the brother porter comes and says angrily:

P. "Who are you?"

F. And we say: "We are two of your brothers." And he contradicts us, saying:

P. "You are not telling the truth. Rather you are two rascals who go around deceiving people and stealing what they give to the poor. Go away!"

F. And he does not open for us, but makes us stand outside in the snow and rain, cold and hungry, until night falls-then if we endure all those insults and cruel rebuffs patiently, without being troubled and without complaining, and if we reflect humbly and charitably that that porter really knows us and that God makes him speak against us, oh, Brother Leo, write that perfect joy is there!

F. And if we continue to knock and the porter comes out in anger, and drives us away with curses and hard blows like bothersome scoundrels, saying:

P. "Get away from here; you dirty thieves-go to the hospital! Who do you think you are? You certainly won't eat or sleep here!"

F.—and if we bear it patiently and take the insults with joy and love in our hearts, oh, Brother Leo, write that that is perfect joy! And if later, suffering intensely from hunger and the painful cold, with night falling, we still knock and call, and crying loudly beg them to open for us and let us come in for the love of God, and he grows still more angry and says:

P. “Those fellows are bold and shameless ruffians. I’ll give them what they deserve!”

F. And he comes out with a knotty club, and grasping us by the cowl throws us onto the ground, rolling us in the mud and snow, and beats us with that club so much that he covers our bodies with wounds—if we endure all those evils and insults and blows with joy and patience, reflecting that we must accept and bear the sufferings of the Blessed Christ patiently for love of Him, oh, Brother Leo, write: that is perfect joy!

F. And now hear the conclusion, Brother Leo. Above all the graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit which Christ gives to His friends is that of conquering oneself and willingly enduring sufferings, insults, humiliations, and hardships for the love of Christ. For we cannot glory in all those other marvelous gifts of God, as they are not ours but God’s as the Apostle says: “What have you that you have not received?”

But we can glory in the cross of tribulations and afflictions, because it is ours, and so the Apostle says: “I will not glory save in the Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ!” To whom be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

(Fioretti 8) Omnibus 1318-20)

Discussion questions:

What was Francis trying to teach Brother Leo?

How did Brother Leo respond? What do you think Leo was thinking?

What do you think about the behavior of the Porter?

How would you have responded—as Leo? As the Porter?

Jesus’ teaching on Joy

Leader: Mt. 5:1-12 Jesus saw the crowds and went up a hill, where he sat down. His disciples gathered around him, and he began to teach them.

(Individuals say the first line and everyone reply)

Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor;
ALL the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to them!

Happy are those who mourn;
ALL God will comfort them!

Happy are those who are humble;
ALL they will receive what God has promised!

Happy are those whose greatest desire is to do what God requires;
ALL God will satisfy them!

Happy are those who are merciful to others;
ALL God will be merciful to them!

Happy are the pure in heart;
ALL they will see God!

Happy are the peacemakers;

ALL they will be called children of God!

Happy are those who are persecuted because they do what God requires:

ALL the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to them!

Leader: Happy are you when people insult you and persecute you and tell all kinds of evil lies against you because you are my followers. Be happy and glad, for a great reward is kept for you in heaven. This is how the prophets who lived before you were persecuted.

Discussion questions:

Francis talks about joy and Jesus happiness. What is the difference between joy and happiness?

What similarities do you see between the two teachings?

What was the message Jesus was teaching?

How have you experienced perfect joy?

Closing prayer

Leader: Where there is poverty with joy, there is neither greed nor avarice. Ps. 63: 1-8

Together:

All powerful, holy,
most high and supreme God,
all good, supreme good,
totally good,
You Who alone are good;
May we give You
all praise, all glory,
all thanks,
all honor,
all blessing,
and all good things.
So be it.
So be it.
Amen

RESOURCES

Following Francis of Assisi; a Spirituality for Daily Living by Patti Normile, a Secular Franciscan

St. Anthony Messenger Press 1996

“Patti Normile invites the reader to follow Jesus in the manner of St. Francis, a manner that she sees revealed in the lives of ordinary people the saints living among us. The holiness of these contemporary ‘Franciscan saints’ is the best proof that St. Francis’ spirituality is alive and well today.”-Murray Bodo, OFM

Journey out of the Garden: St. Francis of Assisi and the Process of Individuation by Susan W. McMichaels

Paulist Press 1997

In this fascinating new study of Francis of Assisi, author Susan W. McMichaels describes one man’s struggle to become the hero of his own life by following the deepest promptings of his heart. Using the map of Jung’s psychology to follow Francis out of the garden and along the road of his inner and outer quest, Journey out of the Garden offers insight into this remarkable figure and challenges the reader to discover the courage and humility to chart his or her own individual path through life.

Living the Incarnation by Sister Frances Teresa OSC

Franciscan Press 1993

‘Living the Incarnation will appeal to all those who feel dissatisfaction with their day to day living, or who have a deep instinct that the true riches of life have so far eluded them.’ Bishop Vincent Nichols

St. Francis and the Foolishness of God by Marie Dennis, Joseph Nangle, OFM, Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, Stuart Taylor

Orbis Books 1993

“This truly wonderful book introduces you anew to the person of Francis—the ‘truly catholic’ and always contemporary saint. There will be no Christianity as usual for those who read this book.” Richard Rohr, OFM

The Cord: Volume 44 No 3, March 1994 p. 69

“Reflection on Perfect Joy & Liberation Theology” by Jude Winkler, OFM Conv

The Cord: Volume 50 No 6 November/December 2000 p. 262

“Francis & Clare’s Joy in Being Human: the Mystery of the Incarnation”
by Michael Blastic OFM Conv

The Cord: Volume 52 No 1 January/February 2002 p 37

“Poverty: the heart of conversion & the Cornerstone of Franciscan Life”
by Dorothy McCormach, OSF

The Way of St. Francis; the Challenge of Franciscan Spirituality for Everyone by Murray Bodo OFM

St. Anthony Messenger Press 1995

Bodo sees Saint Francis’ life and example as a way of reconciling the opposites in ourselves and the world.

DVD

*True and Perfect Joy: Enduring Suffering, Keeping Peace, in **A Treasures of a Poor Man**; St. Francis of Assisi and Franciscan Spirituality. Lecture by Bill Short, OFM*