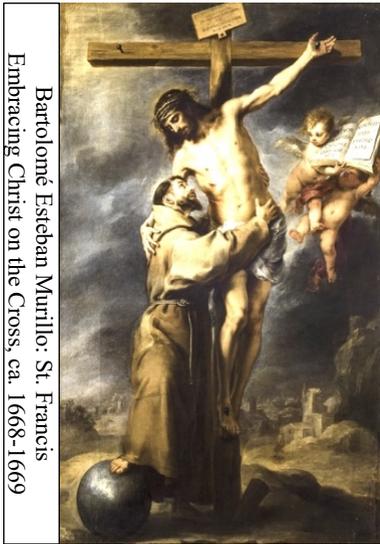


ST. FRANCIS' THREE LOVES – THE CROSS

Have on hand: O.F.S. Rule



Bartolomé Esteban Murillo: St. Francis Embracing Christ on the Cross, ca. 1668-1669

In the course of history, analyzers of St. Francis began to collect many aspects of his life around three themes: the **Crib**, the **Cross**, and the **Eucharist**.

Our Opening Prayer:

O God, who willed that your Only Begotten Son should undergo the Cross to save the human race, grant, we pray, that we, who have known his mystery on earth, may merit the grace of his redemption in heaven. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.¹

Someone should read from our *Rule*, Articles #7 and #8.

It is from the Cross that St. Francis received his first conversion message and it was the Cross that transfixed him at the end of his life. Seeing the naked figure of our Lord as a victim of expiation for the sins of the world became a daily theme for his meditations and contemplation.

Bonaventure tells us about St. Francis: “His soul melted at the sight [of Christ Jesus fastened to a cross], and the memory of Christ’s passion was so impressed on the innermost recesses of his heart. From that hour, whenever Christ’s crucifixion came to his mind, he could scarcely contain his tears and sighs ...”²

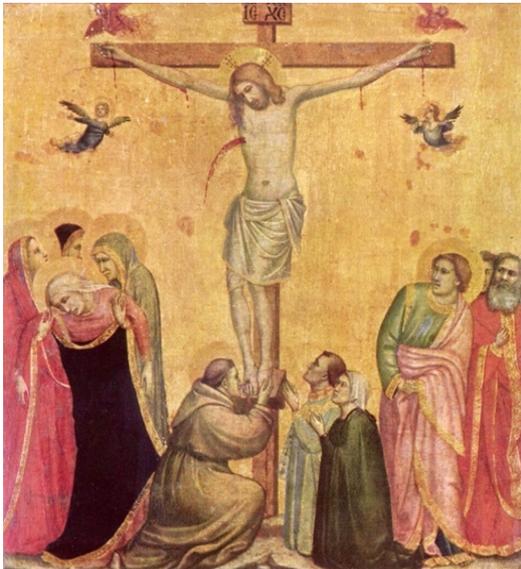
Similarly, Celano recounts: “From that time on, compassion for the Crucified was impressed into his holy soul. And we honestly believe the wounds of the sacred Passion were impressed deep in his heart, though not yet on his flesh. ... From then on, he could not hold back his tears, even weeping loudly over the Passion of Christ, as if it were constantly before his eyes.”³

In this same vein, Celano speaks about St. Francis in his conversion: “... he made for himself a tunic showing the image of the cross, so that in it he would drive off every fantasy of the demons. He made it very rough, so that in it he might crucify the flesh with its vices and sins. He made it very poor and plain, a thing that the world would never covet.”⁴

At the Portiuncula in Assisi, we find the Chapel of Tears, a reminder of St. Francis’ absorption with this love for Christ and what he was willing to do for us: “Once he [Francis] was walking by himself near the church of Saint Mary of the Portiuncula, weeping and wailing loudly. A spiritual man, overhearing him, thought he was suffering some sickness or pain. Moved by piety [sic] for him, he asked why he was crying. ‘I am crying because of the Passion of my Lord,’ he said, ‘for whom I should not be ashamed to go throughout the world crying in a loud voice.’ That man, in fact, likewise began to cry with him in a loud voice.”⁵

St. Francis himself writes in *The Admonitions* to us: “And all creatures under heaven serve, know, and obey their Creator, each according to its own nature, better than you. And even the demons did not crucify Him, but you, together with them, have crucified Him and are still crucifying Him by delighting in vices and sins. ... Let all of us, brothers, consider the Good Shepherd Who bore the suffering of the cross to save His sheep. The Lord’s sheep followed Him in tribulation and persecution, in shame and hunger, in weakness and temptation, and in other ways; and for these things they received eternal life from the Lord.”⁶

Sacred Scripture gives us the setting for all this. St. Paul writes in his *Letter to the Philippians* (2:6-11): “Who, though he [Christ Jesus] was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on



Giotto di Bondone: The Crucifixion, ca. 1303-1313

earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

And it is St. Luke (9:22-25) who reminds us of the requirement of discipleship: Jesus said to his disciples, “The Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised.” Jesus said to all, “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. What profit is there for one to gain the whole world yet lose or forfeit himself?”

St. Francis realized he was so privileged at Mass to be present to and identify with the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ, to be a living part of the Paschal Mystery – life/death/resurrected life of Jesus and ourselves.

- Q1. Thinking of *Our Opening Prayer* for this lesson, we prayed, “that we, who have known his mystery on earth,” – What does this mean?
- Q2. At every Mass, right after the Consecration we proclaim the “mystery” of faith – How is this the mystery of MY faith?
- Q3. Using St. Luke’s description, how am I a disciple?
- Q4. How can I use the devotion of the Way of the Cross (the Stations) to enrich my meditation on the Lord’s Passion – which he suffered for me?
- Q5. How might I, as St. Francis did, express my appreciation of the great price that Jesus underwent so that I might be reinstated in the holiness of God?
- Q6. How does our O.F.S. “Tau” symbol compare to the “habit” St. Francis adopted as his public sign of commitment?

¹ *Roman Missal*, The Exaltation of the Holy Cross, September 14

² FA:ED, *The Major Legend of Saint Francis*, 1260-1263, Vol. II, p. 534, Chapter One, v. 5

³ FA:ED, *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*, *First Book*, 1245-1247, Vol. II, pp. 249-250, Chapter VI: The image of the Crucified [at San Damiano] which spoke to him, and the honor that he gave it, vs. 10-11

⁴ FA:ED, *The Life of Saint Francis*, *First Book*, 1228-1229, Vol. I, p. 202, Chapter IX: How, when he had changed his habit, he rebuilt the church of Saint Mary of the Portiuncula, and how, when he had heard the Gospel and left behind everything, he designed and made the habit worn by his brothers, v. 22

⁵ FA:ED, *The Legend of the Three Companions*, 1241-1247, Vol. II, p. 76, Chapter V: How the crucifix spoke to him for the first time and how he henceforth carried the Passion of Christ in his heart until death, v. 14

⁶ FA:ED, *The Undated Writings, The Admonitions*, Vol. I, p. 131: V: Let No One Be Proud, but Boast in the Cross of the Lord; VI: Imitation of Christ