



# OFS-USA

## NATIONAL FRATERNITY OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER-USA

### NATIONAL MINISTER'S MESSAGE

by Jan Parker, OFS

#### LET US SERVE THE LORD WITH A PURE HEART AND MIND

All of us like to get things done, and like many of you I have quite a to-do list. My list is kept on individual note cards, one task per card. I like to shuffle through the cards to prioritize what's next and then work to get it done. There is something very satisfying about accomplishing a task collegially, creatively and joyfully, knowing you have done what is yours to do. What a great feeling to get something off our to do list!

No matter what method we use to help us get things done, there are times in life when we are stopped dead in our tracks. It may be loss, conflict or confusion, but when something big lands right in our path, we are often stopped short. We are consumed by what is before us, with little energy to do anything else. I had a profound experience of this a few years ago. I was paralyzed by a gut-wrenching quandary. My stress level was high, deadlines were upon me, and I faced a situation with seemingly no Franciscan way out. It was horrible. I kept asking myself what is the right thing to do? I went back and forth. I prayed and prayed. I consulted with friends, but I was stuck. On top of everything else, I was a new minister, and our council was preparing for its first visitation. More stress! Little did I know; it was this visitation that would change everything.

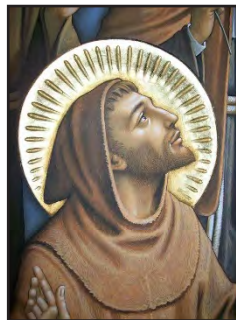
On the day of our visitation, our fraternal visitor asked to meet with each council member one-on-one. Somehow I knew I needed to go first. I sat down to talk with her, filled with both hope and fear. I knew she was there to help me, but what could she do? She began by simply asking, "What's going on, Jan?" and that was all it took. I could not hold back my tears. She listened with compassion as I poured out the whole story. When I was finished, she looked directly into my eyes, and said, "*Jan, you must have purity of heart.*" Her words cut keenly. She was right. Her wisdom at that moment was God sent.

It may seem odd to you that this answer would be so very helpful to me, but purity of heart was exactly what I needed.

Purity of heart sets us free. St. Francis calls us to this freedom, to "put aside every care and anxiety, to serve, love, honor and adore the Lord God with a clean heart and a pure mind."<sup>1</sup>

Purity of heart begins with prayer. We must "pray always with a pure heart."<sup>2</sup> I had been praying, but where was the center of my heart? Was it in God, or in myself? Purity of heart means we must clear our hearts of any ego attachments – our self-image, self-concern, self-preservation. Surrender is key. I needed to put aside the workings of my mind and let go of my obsessions – all my questions, doubts and fears. Only then would my heart be pure – and free to be open to the direction of God's Spirit dwelling within me.

Purity of heart gives us new sight – a new way of seeing things. I was seeing things from my perspective, not as God sees them. "A pure heart sees into the depth of things. Our hearts are pure when we see earthly things from on high, that is when we see their true value."<sup>3</sup> What was the true value in this situation? I needed to see this clearly. Once I could see the activity of the Holy Spirit in the midst of all that was happening, I was no longer paralyzed.



Ever since that day, the words "pure of heart" jump out at me. My understanding and appreciation of being pure in heart have steadily deepened. I see it in Francis's prayer before the crucifix, "bring light to the darkness of my heart," and in his Later Rule, "Desire above all things (*supra omnia*) to have the Spirit of the Lord and its holy activity [and] to pray always with a pure heart." Most especially I see it in our OFS Rule: "Witnessing to the good yet to come and obliged to acquire purity of heart because of the vocation they have embraced, they should set themselves free to love God and their brothers and sisters."<sup>4</sup>

Interestingly enough, a few weeks ago I learned that the Chinese word for "intelligence" or "bright" (慧) has a connection to purity of heart. The word consists of two pictograms: at the top is the word for broom (扫); the bottom is the word for heart (心). The bright person, the person of wisdom, has a heart swept clean. Blessed indeed are the pure of heart!<sup>5</sup>

*"We must not be wise and prudent according to the flesh,  
but, instead, we must be simple, humble and pure."*

*Francis of Assisi, Second Letter to the Faithful*

<sup>1</sup> Francis of Assisi, Earlier Rule 22. 25-31

<sup>2</sup> Francis of Assisi, Later Rule 10.8

<sup>3</sup> Ilia Delio, Franciscan Prayer, pg 112

<sup>4</sup> Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order, Article 12

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 5:8