



You are Love

800 Years of the Gift of the Stigmata

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

May the Lord give you his peace!

- **Presentation**

On the fifth of January, at La Verna, we celebrated as a Franciscan family the opening of the *eighth centennial of the gift of the stigmata* of our Father St. Francis. The centenary is a new window of grace from which we look through the experience of La Verna for a better understanding of our charism, with an invitation to contemplate with tenderness and compassion the realities of our world.

I thank you for giving me this opportunity to address you with a few opening words about the *Franciscan Vision Global Summit 2024*. From this point forward, I wish you the best of all fruits, as I do for our Franciscan family and for the whole Church.

The eighth centennial of the stigmata, together with the other centennials, is a stepping stone toward the celebration of the centennial of Francis' transitus, which will enable us to better understand his way of life and the current challenges of our Franciscan spirituality. The path is always the same: to understand through our charism the richness and potential of our past, and then steer toward our future with wisdom and decision. And it already seems to me a great thing that this initiative of bringing together for reflection members of the Franciscan family from more than 60 countries is born not in Italy, the land where our beloved St. Francis was born, but in a country as diverse and fascinating as India.

Permit me then to share a few simple thoughts.

- **The true love of Christ made His lover into the same image (LM XIII:5)**

With this famous expression, St. Bonaventure underscores the process of transformation that took place in St. Francis and reminds us that the experience of the stigmata is not something isolated or magical but is the conclusion of a love story that began long before in the process of his conversion. In the ruined hermitage of San Damiano, his first encounter with the crucified Christ, poor and naked, would later reach its fullness in his encounter with the same Christ on the mountain of La Verna. There is a profound continuity in which all the existential dimensions of his life are integrated. Ultimately, reflecting on the wounded bodies of lepers will help the young Francis to heal his own inner wounds (especially those of war), but will also enable him to understand, as few have understood, the meaning of the sign of Christ's passion: the stigmata. This love story is also made up of wounds, sores and the stigmata; and it reminds us that in the mystery of life there is no true love without pain.

- **From the *humility* of the Incarnation to the *love* of the Passion**

To better understand the experience and meaning of the stigmata, St. Bonaventure spent time at the hermitage of La Verna. There he wrote the *Lignum Vitae*, one of the richest and most profound reflections



etc.

on the theology of the cross. On the wood of the cross the true meaning of all reality is manifested (*In cruce omnia manifestantur*). What exactly is manifested in the contemplation of the Cross? We can find an answer in the prayer that St. Francis addresses to God Most High immediately after the mystical experience of the stigmata: God is Good, all Good, the Supreme Good; he is the living and true God. There is no other Franciscan language about God than what was revealed to us on the Cross: God is goodness, surrender, self-giving, self-emptying, kenosis, poverty, gratuitousness, freedom,

The cross thus expresses a beauty that attracts us and invites us to follow Christ, that raises our desire to meet Him, that moves our affections toward Him. Our encounters with Him gradually transform our sentiments into His, so that, as He did, we no longer live for ourselves but for others. Therefore, the cross also becomes a place of purification and discernment of our motives. How then can we fail to remember that the disciples themselves, at the foot of the cross, first turned their discipleship into betrayal and abandonment; but then, like Mary, our Mother, they also made their discipleship an experience of unconditional faithfulness.

- **By his wounds we were healed** (1 Pt 2:25)

Contemplating the wounds of the Lord Jesus should help us to look at the wounds of our world. The first step must always be to recognize and accept frailty and vulnerability, first within ourselves and among our fraternities, which often prevent us from establishing healthy and deep relationships, and cause us to fall into individualism and indifference; and then within the Church, wounded today in its credibility by the shame and scandal of abuse, but not only that ... also throughout the world, disfigured by poverty, injustice, mistreatment and exploitation of our Sister, Mother Earth.

Remembering and celebrating St. Francis, who was affected by the crucifix, should affect and challenge us through the many dramatic instances of pain and suffering we encounter among the many people in our daily lives. Closeness to the poor combined with contemplation of the Crucified will undoubtedly lead us to the place where we can truly and serenely contemplate our own wounds and heal them effectively.

- **From La Verna to the entire world**

In conclusion, I congratulate you again on the program you have prepared for this year of 2024, and ask everyone - organizers, teachers and participants - to do your best to actualize the meaning of the gift of the stigmata of St. Francis for our world today. In the guidelines presented in the letter of the General Ministers of the Franciscan Conference, we insist on the need to make the centenaries a great opportunity for presenting St. Francis and his vision of God and the world to all men and women of good will with beauty and creativity, just as Pope Francis insists.

Therefore, proclaim the Gospel of encounter and joy to all; indeed, become a living Gospel and a beautiful proclamation of the life of Jesus; humanize our world by creating bonds of brotherhood and friendship; contemplate with gratitude and admiration the beauty of creation; recognize the good that God



accomplishes in every human being; join in the song of the Virgin Mary, our Mother, to proclaim the greatness and goodness of the Most High Lord God.

Blessing

May the contemplation of the **FATHER**'s heart through the mystery of the cross fill your lives with his goodness.

May the following of the **Son** heal all your wounds and strengthen your vocation as lesser brothers and sisters.

May the **Holy Spirit** give you strength and wisdom to tirelessly proclaim, as our Father St. Francis did, peace and goodness to every creature.

And may the blessing of Almighty God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit remain with you always, so that you may always remain in Him.

Br. Roberto Genuin

General Minister OFMCap.