



# Insight & Wisdom

## Franciscan Vocation Ministry

*"O Most High, Glorious God, enlighten the darkness of my heart and give me a right faith, a certain hope and a perfect love, insight and wisdom, O Lord, that I may carry out your holy and true command." St. Francis of Assisi, Prayer before the Cross*

## Lent and Franciscan Life - Means to Christian Joy

*The Lenten season is considered a grace-filled time. It is gifted time when we are invited once again to more purposefully turn away from the things that keep us from being who God calls us to be and to prepare to more fully embrace our risen Lord, Jesus Christ. It is a wonderful time for prayerful discernment.*

*During this Lent, our prayer for you is that you can hear with your heart what God is calling you to do with your life. If you think you are being called to the Franciscan life, may you find the fortitude to answer God's call and, in so doing, experience the joyfulness that comes from living the Gospel.*

*Peace and All Good.*

### A Lenten Reflection

by Fr. Bill Beaudin, OFM

It was my last semester of college, and the course was called "The Comic Spirit in Literature." I had signed up for the class, in part, because I was looking for an easy A to swell the grade point average and for a little grease to speed my way down the "senior slide." I figured that any course with "comic" in the title would be just the academic cream puff I was looking for at this late stage of my undergraduate career. I could not have been more wrong.

On the first day of class, the professor warned us that the comic spirit was best expressed in the knowing smile, rather than in the hearty guffaw, and I can assure you that nothing I heard in his lectures nor anything I read on his syllabus ever had me rolling in the aisles. After several of my classmates flunked the midterm exam, it became clear that the "comic spirit in literature" was no laughing matter. Obviously, comedy is not what I thought it was. Neither is happiness.

Those of us who are credit card-wielding members of a consumer society can easily assume that happiness comes from having more — more things, more outlets of entertainment, bigger and more expensive toys.

Happiness, we are told in subtle and not-so-subtle ways, is a commodity that can be purchased, like iPods or beer. However, there is not a shred of evidence that money can buy happiness.

True, people who can afford the necessities of life are, on the whole, happier than those who cannot. Yet, once a person has achieved a certain basic level of security, the bigger paycheck, the more prestigious job, the new and fully-loaded SUV, or the pricier vacation will add little or nothing to his or her overall happiness. Consider this paradox. Lawyers are the highest paid professionals in America. Yet, 52% of them report significant dissatisfaction with their lives. In statistically significant ways, lawyers are more susceptible to depression, alcoholism, drug abuse, and divorce than their peers in other professions. Can money buy happiness? Just ask an attorney.



Our Catholic faith offers us an alternate vision of happiness, one that is made of sterner stuff than the costly trinkets of our consumer culture. It is a vision that is rooted not in hoarding but in sharing, not in acquiring, accumulating, and possessing, but in letting go and giving away. It is a vision of happiness that flows from the heart of God, a trinity of persons whose very life is a ceaseless giving away of self and an eternal sharing of love. It is this



The friars talk with a guest during the Hospitality Weekend on December 8-10, 2006 hosted by the friars at St. Anthony's Shrine, Boston, MA.



*Franciscan  
Experience  
Weekend*

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*Holy Cross Friary  
Bronx, NY  
January 19 to 20, 2007*

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vision of happiness that Jesus preached and embodied in his own ministry of healing and in his table fellowship with outcasts.

The gospels abound with references to happiness. The very word "gospel" means "good news," a cause for rejoicing. Jesus begins his Sermon on the Mount with the word "happy": "Happy are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."

In the parables of Jesus, the man who stumbles upon treasure in the field, the shepherd who finds his lost sheep, the housekeeper who discovers her lost coin, and the father who recovers his lost son are all overcome with joy. Jesus says in John's gospel: "I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete." At the end of Luke's gospel, those who saw the risen and ascending Christ "fell down to do him reverence, then returned to Jerusalem filled with joy."

Clearly, the way which Jesus lays out for his disciples is not the road to misery. It is the road to happiness. It is the sure and straight path to a joy that is strong

enough to withstand what Shakespeare called "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" and to endure even the grim prospect of death. In the Easter sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist, we became sharers in the "comic spirit" of Christ and heirs to the abundant life and infinite happiness he came to bring us.

Now, if the Christian life is meant to be a happy one, where does Lent fit into this picture of bliss? Is it supposed to be a season of mourning and misery, a kind of black and gray photographic negative of the light and lightness of the Easter season? Should we be any less happy during Lent than we are at any other time of the year? I don't think so.

Like all the seasons in the Church's year of grace, Lent is a joyful time. There is no less reason to be happy in the first week of Lent than on the feast of Pentecost, because Jesus is no less risen from the dead on Ash Wednesday than he is on Easter Sunday. Lent, with its attendant penances and sacrifices, is not meant to make us miserable; it is meant to bring us joy. It is in the service of greater happiness. If there is pain in Lent, it is the pain of

someone who is trying to break free from his or her addictions and illusions, to move beyond our culture's woefully inadequate account of what constitutes human happiness, and to overcome our death-dealing dependence on manufactured highs in order to experience true joy, which only comes from living in right relationship with God, others, and oneself.

Franciscan life has a lot in common with Lent. Both involve doing penance. Both demand a dying to self, a turning away from one set of values and a turning toward other values that are more consistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Both are frequently misunderstood as "joy postponed" or as dismal refusals to engage in the

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active pursuit of happiness. This is the warped perspective on religious life that reduces its three vows of poverty, obedience, and chastity to "no money, no funny, no honey."

To be sure, Franciscan life has its share of penances. Putting others before oneself, serving others when one would rather be served, letting go when holding on seems so much more natural, accepting ourselves and our brothers in the fraternity as we are and not as we would like to be, carving out time for God when our days seem completely carved up to begin with, being rudely awakened from our illusions when we'd rather remain fast asleep in denial — these can be more or less unpleasant, even painful experiences. But the penitential aspects of Franciscan life are not ends in themselves, just as Lent is not an end in itself. They are both means to a deeper experience of Christian joy.

Although Francis did penance throughout his life (perhaps I should say, *because* Francis did penance throughout his life), those who knew him never doubted that they were in the presence of a truly happy man. Francis positively pulsated with joy, and he expected no less from his friars. "Let them be careful not to appear outwardly as sad and gloomy hypocrites but show themselves joyful, cheerful and consistently gracious in the Lord," Francis told his brothers.

The joy of St. Francis was not the disguised desperation of our culture's manic hilarity. Nor was it premised on the scrupulous avoidance of human suffering and grief. His joy was the real deal. It was the unassailable happiness of a disciple of Jesus. It was the joy of an Easter Christian, one for whom sin and death are no match for God's mercy, and every day resounds with the good news of God's love, and every human encounter draws us more deeply into God's own life of humble service and generous self-giving. It is the joy to which you, too, have been invited. Are you called to experience it as a Franciscan?



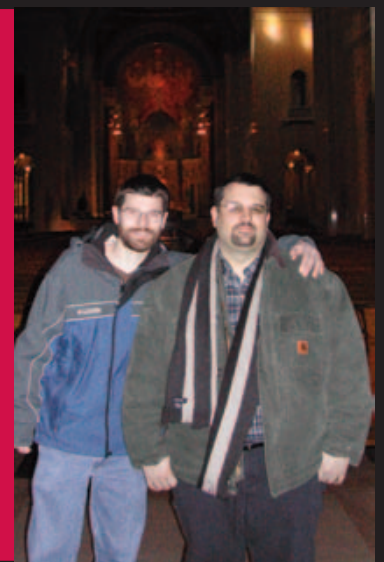
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Stephen of Hungary Parish in New York City, St. Francis Retreat Center in Rye, NH, St. Anthony Shrine in Boston, MA, and St. Francis Chapel in Providence, RI. Fr. Bill, a Siena graduate, came to the friars in 1976, professed his first vows in 1977, and was ordained a priest in 1981. He is a native of Bangor, ME.



*The friars at Holy Name College in Silver Spring, MD hosted a Hospitality Weekend from February 9 to 11, 2007.*

*Brother Raymond, the friars' yellow lab, also participated.*



Pax et  
Bonum

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