

REFLECTIONS ON THE VIRTUES OF MOTHER FRANCES STREITEL

LOVE OF GOD



Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother
Third Order Regular of Saint Francis of Assisi

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DEFINITION

Charity is the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for His own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God. Jesus makes charity the new commandment. The practice of the moral life animated by charity gives to the Christian the spiritual freedom of the children of God. He no longer stands before God as a slave, in servile fear, or as a mercenary looking for wages, but as a son responding to the love of him who 'first loved us'. Charity is superior to all the virtues. (CCC #1822-1828)

Mother Frances loved God intensely and integrally. She also loved her neighbors demonstrating this love by following the commandments. The divine love that she kept in her heart showed outside through her strong pity, her deep faithfulness to religious duties, her unquenchable thirst for the Eucharist, her immense patience, and her conformity to God's will in her suffering. Charity made the Servant of God capable of acting in communion with God.



TESTIMONIALS ... of the past ...

Her life was characterized by her great love of God. Her love of God seemed to be the basis of all her virtues. From my personal observation I have never noticed any fault or imperfection in her. (Msgr. Joseph Joch)

I know that doing the will of God was her all. This she demonstrated through all of her sufferings and humiliations.

(Sr. M. Johanna Ankenbrand)



SOURCES

SACRED SCRIPTURE: Jn 13:1 – 1 Jn 4:19
1Cor 13:4-7 – 1 Cor 13:13
Rom 12:1-2

OUR WAY OF LIFE: Articles: #7, 12-13, 33-34, 39, 49, 140

WRITINGS OF MOTHER FRANCES

Letters to Fr. J. F. Jordan: Letter 2 (2), February 18, 1883, #3
Letter 17 (8), March 14, 1883, #2
Letter 43 (32), September 2, 1883, #2
Letter 72 (53), December 1883, #5
Letter 80 (82), December 1883, #4
Letter 81 (68), January 1, 1884, #2



REFLECTIONS

COMMUNITY QUESTION:

How aware are we as a community that everything we have is given to us by God?
What does it mean for us to live God's love?

PERSONAL QUESTION:

How much of myself do I "invest", in terms of desire, time and availability to develop a closer relationship with God?



TESTIMONIALS... of today ...

Mother Frances managed to fill her life with many activities yet maintained a contemplative life. Her virtues of: Faith, Hope, Love of God and Neighbor, Prudence, Justice, Temperance, Fortitude, Humility, and Poverty are well known but we do not find them outlined in her letters or biographies. Instead, they permeate her works and prayer life and are taught by example. She was bone-tired at the end of the day, fought despair, struggled with obedience, searched in Faith for God's Will, and was tormented in the discernment as to whether it was His, hers or Satan's. How could I not be affected as I journey with my Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother and my Associates? I have wonderful models who embody those virtues and who are living examples of Mother Frances' active and contemplative life. They have put into my heart a compassion for the sufferings of Mary, a spirit of giving to those less fortunate, a devout love for Jesus in the Eucharist, a strength to stand up to injustice and a heart of joy and welcome for family, friends and strangers.

Louise, SSM Associates (USA)



The life of our Venerable Mother Frances Streitl was remarkable, difficult and very rocky. Her absolute trust in God's guidance, no matter how dark and far-fetched it seemed, always made her answer with a "yes". Her patience and perseverance in hopeless times, when she did not know where God would lead her, fill me with deep respect and great joy. Her determined action and the realization of what she recognized as God's will is admirable and fascinating. Both stem from her deep piety, great humility and heroic love of God, Mary and her neighbour.

I try to follow her great example every day and to trust Him absolutely, to listen to Him, to accept His will, not to despair and to seek His kingdom first, even to realize it. Above all, I pray for the strength and fortitude I need to be His instrument, because I also want to say as Mother

Frances once wrote: ... “I want to allow the Lord to do what He wants”, because “He does everything well!”

Sr. M. Renate (Germany)



Like everyone else I had to xero in on only one story. I hope it is not too long.



I chose her experience teaching the LITTLE ONES. No surprise at her choice as she herself was one of God’s LITTLE ONES. She could easily identify with their littleness, their honesty and simplicity.

I had a fun time “playing” school with her and her class. I became one of her “little ones”. Mother Frances was a wonderfully patient teacher...even with Billy who just could not put two and two together to make four.

She did need extra patience with me since I always wanted to be chatting and singing. I appreciated how she quietly took me aside one day, sat in one of our little chairs with me, and holding my hands explained very calmly and quietly that all my other friends also needed her to help them. She showed me how I could do that. I really enjoyed her chat with me and I did better after that. I was not going to disappoint her.

I greatly enjoyed her as my teacher. Besides learning the abc’s, I learned how to love Jesus.

Sr. Lucille (USA)



I am so happy that you have asked us to share a personal reflection on Mother Frances’ life that influenced our life and ministry.

I am coming at this a little inside-out. My relationship with our Foundress is influenced by the culture of the people with whom I minister. I think of her as my Grandmother – a term of great respect and honor. When I use things to the last bit, in my heart is her example of respecting and using even the smallest thing – not wasting even a thread. When bad things are said of me, in my heart I feel her patience and love of the Cross for the years she never stopped looking at what was God’s will for her at the moment. I try to have such a forgiving heart. When I help with dishes or cook, with others or alone, I feel her humble spirit as she would help in the kitchen. When I am in the company of persons who happen to have little, I feel her spirit of being a loving friend with the poor. When I reach out to another sister, I do so with her loving spirit in my heart. She is with me in my heart and helps me live as a religious.

Sr. Margaret Mary (USA)



Experiences about our foundress Mother Frances Streitel:

Our novitiate director, Sr. M. Elmara, told us as novices a lot about her life, her simplicity and modesty.

I myself am very moved and touched by Mother Frances' life, by her letters, her writings, by her great trust in God, by her deep, heartfelt prayers, for example:

"Through her (Mary) be introduced into the mystery of "love and suffering," that I may truly become the "spouse of the crucified," that never withdraws from his bloody feet, until the crucified love will say: come up higher, take your place in the middle of my heart."

I am touched by her discretion in community life, her responsibility and faithfulness to God, to the Church and to the community. From St. Francis she learned a great love for the poor and her trust in the Sorrowful Mother carried her through her religious life.

I firmly believe that Mother Frances is already a saint!

An incident from my childhood:

As a child, I had a small picture of Mary on my bedside table in my bedroom. My mother was always sickly. She said to me: when I am no longer here, when I die, let this be your mother.

I lost the picture!

I rediscovered the picture when I entered the convent in Abenberg. It showed the Sorrowful Mother picture.

Greetings and blessings,



Sr. M. Michaela (Germany)



An aspect of the life and spiritual journey of Mother Francesca that has significantly influenced my life and ministry.

I have always read with particular interest and wonder what Mother Frances wrote in the Norms of 1883, #103. Citing the Book of Genesis and the Letter of St. Paul, she emphasizes the necessity and value of work and prayer, always aimed at fulfilling a mission of love.

"We, who profess to lead a contemplative-active life, must ... gladly go to any kind of work assigned us by holy obedience. All the Sisters are challenged by the love of the Good Shepherd to care for the sick with merciful love, to foster and train the little ones with motherly attention and watchfulness. In all these souls a dwelling must be prepared for the Lord..."

And then again: *"... have her hands at work and her heart with Him who will be her portion for time and eternity"*.

At every stage of her life, Mother Francesca lived these beliefs with intensity, she taught them and passed them on to the sisters, they came to me through the example and testimony of those

who went before me. These beliefs still guide my life as a Sister of the Sorrowful Mother for as long as I have days left to live.

Sr. Teresina (Italy)



One of Mother Frances' virtues that really resonates with me is her life of prayer, where she expresses a tender and passionate love for Christ Jesus, the love of her heart, and where she finds refreshment for her soul. She is a person who prays and inspires prayer. In her communion with Jesus, she feels stronger and that is where she finds the light to live with serenity all the trials of her life.

Other aspects that inspire me are Mother Frances Streitel's humility and selflessness. Practicing humility helped her grow closer to God, so much so that for many years many people didn't know she was a foundress because she always had room in her heart for the lowest positions. Her selflessness meant that she wasn't attached to anything. She would willingly devote herself to the needs of others without much effort. These fundamental aspects of Mother Frances' life have always made me stronger on my journey and in my surrender to God, because like her, I want to seek the things above every day.

May the Divine Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary help us to be faithful and persevering in living our spiritual heritage and may Venerable Mother Frances Streitel continue to inspire us to be her daughters on the path of self-giving, surrender and conformation to Christ Chaste, Poor and Obedient.

Sr. Maria Lucilda (Brazil)



When I think of Mother Frances, the first image that comes to my mind is that of a determined, serious and sincere person. She was determined to remain faithful to her mission, committed to



serving others with and out of love, sincere in her search for the Truth and in her interpersonal relationships. These characteristics not only define her essence, but also resonate deeply with my own spiritual journey.

I see how much I still need to grow, both spiritually and humanly, in order to serve those most in need and live a fulfilling life. Inspired by Mother Frances' example, I try to keep these three virtues alive within me. It is my hope that, through her intercession, I can achieve the grace to live the dimensions of action and contemplation as two twin sisters, intertwined in the daily life of my existence. May action always be enlightened by contemplation and may contemplation inspire me to act with love and devotion.

Sr. Arminda (Brazil)



Through the life of Mother Frances our foundress, one thing that helped me in the journey of my Vocation is the last words of the ritual of vows “I will care for those in need especially the poor and in my own poverty I will seek the lord above all.” These words helped me to grow in creating an intimate relationship with my God and although I have to serve the people and others not to forget to seek him before and to depend in his divine Providence. We read in the letter to Fr. Jordan 62 (43), 8: “Lord I desire nothing but you, but you I desire to possess entirely.”

Thanks so much.

Sr. Elizabeth (Tanzania)



I have always been touched and fascinated by the life of Mother Frances at Castel Sant’Elia. I am grateful to have been able to spend the first year after my novitiate in that community, to have experienced the value of small things, the real union of prayer and service, the preference for the little ones, but above all her silence. The younger sisters didn’t know she was the foundress. Not once did she mention the work she had done, 3 journeys to America at that time...I often wonder if—after 14 years in Assisi and 18 on a mission in Tanzania, I could not mention that I was among the first sisters to open the mission with all the adventures and misadventures of those years and more? Humility and charity, love for God, her sisters and the poorest of the poor, were her strength and a goal far from being reached. Mother Frances, pray for me.

Sr. Alessandra (Tanzania)