

## JOY: Jesus ~ Other ~ You

### Francis journey from youthful joy to Perfect Joy

#### The Youthful Francis

1. We don't know a lot about the youthful Francis, but what we do know helps us to see and know a happy, fun loving, extravagant Francis. We know that he enjoyed having fun and being the life of the party. Life was easy for Francis, he was wealthy, carefree, indulged, easy to like, a natural leader with a band of youthful followers. In one of the stories I read, the reader is invited to **Picture a young man, draped in fine silks**, tossing handfuls of gold coins into the air as he carouses through the streets of medieval Assisi, singing and laughing, making merry with his companions.

At this time in his life, if he were to have one of his talks with Brother Leo, he might say something like this. Brother Leo write this down: If I had a father who loved me and desired for me to take over the family business, if he indulged my every wish and if I had money and talents to keep my friends entertained, to lead them in merriment and if all the people of

my village would see me and say “there goes Francis, son of **Pietro di Bernardone**”.

This Br Leo would not be perfect Joy!

This laughter, merriment and pleasure sees only me and not our Lord or his Church. Tell me then how can this be perfect joy?

And in this journey of Gospel to Life and Life to Gospel, I think about the disciples and their journey with our Lord. In the story of the first miracle at Cana. They are having fun, celebrating with our Lord, his family and friends and then He changes water to wine. They are experiencing the earthly joy of being with Jesus but they really do not know Jesus yet. At this point in their journey with Jesus it's exciting, new and fun but it's not about our Lord, His mission or the church. Their faith is immature.

(how does this relate to our Franciscan journey) For just a minute think back to when you first began your Franciscan journey...So much happiness, excitement and joy. Your joy was true and real, it was the joy of new beginnings, but it wasn't PERFECT JOY.... how might this help you, encourage

someone just beginning the journey?

Take a few minutes to reflect on your early days (try to remember when your journey was young, unknown and filled with joy).....Take moment to share with the person next to you

I remember when I first heard the story of Perfect Joy it made me uncomfortable. I couldn't see how that was perfect joy, like Francis I was still too focused on me.

So Francis is growing and maturing...

2. He has returned from his 2<sup>nd</sup> attempt to go to war to become a knight, a hero. On his journey he Hears the voice of God, a God who ask him; Why do you serve the servant when you can serve the master? What is he to do. Here begins his introspective journey. He returns home, not really sure what it all means. However a few days after his return he is making merry with his friends **(p.71-72 ask someone to read)**

So, what did we just hear? The Lord visits Francis again, He filled his heart with such tenderness that Francis was unable to speak or move. He could only feel and hear this

marvelous tenderness. It was in that moment that he met his bride. His dear lady poverty. From this very moment Francis begins to change. He begins to think less of himself and to despise all those worldly things he once loved. This does not happen overnight; it is slow and gradual.

Francis has a number of conversion moments, each one bringing him closer to knowing and desiring “Perfect Joy”. As Seculars we too are on a journey of conversion moments **(Daily Conversion)**, with each of those moments, when we hear, feel or sense that we are being called to something more, when the Lord fills our heart with such tenderness, we are that much closer to Lady Poverty and perfect joy.

This is the beginning of his journey to “perfect joy” to dying to self.

If Francis were talking with Brother Leo at this time he might say... “Brother Leo write this down. If I returned from my dream of being a knight, never making it to battle because I was asked to serve the Master and if I fell in love with a woman more noble, wealthier and more beautiful than you have ever seen and if I left all the pleasures of this current life to pursue her, would this Brother Leo be perfect joy? No,

Brother Leo it would not. You see Brother Leo Our Lord is working on my heart, my pride, my stubbornness.

Perfect joy is more than a dream, more than the fairest of women.

Francis is changing but since he is not yet entirely detached from worldly vanities, this change was not yet perfect. He begins to step away from the business world, and from his youthful ways. He begins to really see the poor and to care for them.

And in this journey of life to Gospel and Gospel to life, I find myself once again thinking about the disciples. What Joy the disciples experienced with each miracle, the feeding of the 5000, the Transfiguration, the entry into Jerusalem, but all of this was earthly joy. However, there were moments in the mix of miracles when the Father revealed the Son. Martha, Lazarus sister says to Jesus, “ I know that you are the Christ, the son of the living God, Peter’s confession...”you are the Christ the Son of the living God.” They are beginning to hear the Father, and like Francis their conversion was happening one experience at a time and with Jesus’ guidance they were learning to die to self.

Take a few minutes to reflect on your vocation journey, can you see the conversion moments, the ways that the Holy Spirit is working on your heart, your pride, your vanities? The times when you let go of your desires and respond to the will of God. Reflect on how God is moving you beyond your desires to that place where you desire to desire what He desires....share with the person next to you (the other person)

3. Francis begins to spend more quiet time in solitude, and in prayer. His love and commitment to the poor consume him. He desires to possess real poverty, a poverty worthy of Lady Poverty.

***There is a shift. It is no longer about Francis, it is now about others***

***(Have the letters JOY. Building JOY in reverse)***

**Meeting the Lord** - Like most of the villagers and his companions, Francis felt revulsion for lepers and avoided them at all costs. One day, before his conversion, Francis was riding his horse alone in the countryside. As he moved along the road, he caught sight of a leper walking toward

him. Francis' instinct was to turn back or move off to the side to avoid contact, not just physical but also eye contact with the leper. But instead, Francis rides directly toward this man with parts of his face and hands eaten away by this dreaded disease.

Francis dismounted his horse and embraced and kissed the leper tenderly on his lips. In his Testament, Francis writes, **“When I was in sin, the sight of lepers nauseated me beyond measure; but then God himself led me into their company, and I had pity on them. When I had once become acquainted with them, what had previously nauseated me became a source of physical consolation for me. After that I did not wait long before leaving the world.”** Francis eventually came to realize that he had actually embraced none other than his Lord, Jesus Christ. ***It was a cracking of his heart, Francis the troubadour, the joyful merry maker, the indulged and generous young man was leaking out, so that the heart mended by Christ could be filled with and in the image of Christ.***

*Francis soon found himself living with lepers and caring for them. His meeting and embracing the leper was the best*

*preparation Francis could have had for the founding of a new order in the Church, whose highest ideal was to live in poverty, detached from worldly needs and to serve the poorest of the poor.*

*And if Francis were to speak to Brother Leo, he might say: Brother Leo tell me, if I were to kiss each and every leper would this be perfect joy? What if I were to live with them, no longer able to be with family and dear friends, would this be perfect joy? No dear brother this is still not perfect joy, but Brother Leo we are moving closer to what is truly perfect and true joy.*

*The story of perfect joy is only possible when we allow the Lord to crack open our heart. So that our stuff, stuff not of him can leak out and we can begin to hear God speaking in our hearts, empty of us and filled with Him. We also might hear like Francis, (Pause hear name being whispered...) “\_\_\_\_\_ **my church is in ruin, Go rebuild my Church**” For Francis there is a direction, he has a purpose, something to do beyond just thinking about his inner turmoil. His gaze is beginning to shift from his turmoil to the needs of the body of believers.*



For Francis, as it should be for us, Perfect Joy would flourish if he/ if we could only suffer adversity and still be at peace within ourselves. *From praying the Secular Franciscan Rule, Art. 19, page 57*

***Francis is now desiring to live a life of JOY: Jesus~ Others~ You(self) and much like our opening song, there is joy in His journey to Perfect Joy***

For me there are days, sometimes just moments in a day when I think, yes Lord, I will take whatever happens today with joy and gratitude.

There are also times when I do what I must do to serve and care for others but it is from a place of obedience and not of joy and gratitude and there are those times when all I can do is think about me and all that is going on with me. Things done without love and joy, stuck in my own thoughts...no Br Leo, this is not perfect joy, but like Francis those moments of conversion bring me closer.

***Someday soon Francis will be talking with Brother Leo and he will say, "Brother Leo write this down..."*** and this is another story for another presentation.

I invite you to take a few minutes to reflect on where do you find yourself on your journey to perfect joy? How can this help you as you journey with those in initial formation?

Large group sharing