

Beyond Rivotorto: Understanding our Franciscan Charism
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Begin with – **Most High glorious God, enlighten the darkness of my heart. Give me right faith, sure hope, and perfect charity. Fill me with understanding and knowledge that I may fulfill your holy and true command**

Rivotorto – The first home – a perfect place. Bug-infested and sweltering in the summer – wet and bone-chilling in the winter. It was a small space

But how was he, how were they able to live this way?

It is the charism of our founding father that enabled them to live in such a place, to find joy in such a place and to live in such intimacy in such a place.

If we are to understand how this was possible we will need to better understand our Charism and in understanding our charism we will begin to understand “how they could live in such a perfect place. To understand this we have to know and understand our charism.

From the CCC:

Charism – is the gift of perceiving life and the world around us, in a typical specific way. It is a lens! It is the lens of the Founder

Charism is a term that indicates a personal gift of the Spirit used for the good of all the Church.

Charism – A way of perceiving life in a specific way & a personal gift of the Spirit for the good of the Church.

So our charism is the specific way St. Francis perceived life and when we live it authentically it is our personal gift of the Spirit for the good of the church.

From Divine Renovations p.44 – If we are confused about our deepest identity, there will be pain: institutional pain, and pain in the individual members. If the church is to be rebuilt, it must first be healed. The first step in healing is

acknowledging the pain. ____ (thinking about our order) - If we are confused about our deepest identity (our Charism), there will be pain: fraternal pain at all levels, and pain in the individual members. If the order is to help rebuild the church, it must first be healed. The first step in healing is acknowledging the pain, the pain of not knowing we are.

What is our Charism?

The charism of St. Francis of Assisi is to live the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Francis lens was the lens of Christ. Francis only had eyes for Christ who only had eyes for the Father. It was this lens that helped Francis to see and recognize the universal fatherhood of God over all of creation and with this same recognition the universal brotherhood of mankind with the whole of creation. **Francis was able to see all created things the way God the Father sees them. With the same love that God the Father showered on him.**

Our Charism consists of "Looking at Christ with eyes of Francis! It's not about looking at Francis but it is about looking at Christ through Francis eyes and being able to see our place in the universal brotherhood.

It is from this foundation that we should see our brothers and sisters through the eyes of Francis who only had eyes for Christ. With these eyes he saw first and foremost the gifts in his brothers.

Charism – A way of perceiving life in a specific way & a personal gift of the Spirit for the good of the Church.

Perceiving life through the lens of universal kinship is a gift for both the good of the order and the good of the church.

For Francis and his companions – It was here at Rivotorto that they experienced their Christian vocation, not in solitude but in community. Francis was no longer living alone; it was here that he realized that from this point on he will live the rest of his life in community. In very close quarters. It was here in community that the

brothers began to live a way of life directly model after that of Jesus and the first disciples. The Gospel life could not be lived in isolation, it had to be lived out with others.

Francis only had eyes, heart and mind for Jesus and constantly contemplated His donation of Self. Christ, who is totally emptying can only be filled by doing the will of the Father. Francis lived the Gospel in this same self-emptying manner.

His first companions could only do this by living the Gospel in the same self-emptying manner. Like Francis we too are called to live the Gospel by emptying our self to the will of the Father.

This is the foundation that his communal life was built on...this should be the foundation of our fraternal life. Like Francis we are called to live in fraternity in the same self emptying manner as Christ lived in the world with his disciples. So empty of self and so filled with the will of the Father. It is from this same place of emptiness that we will be able to see our brothers and sisters through the eyes of Francis who only had eyes for Christ.

Like Francis we cannot be in fraternity alone. Each month our coming together as fraternity should be a joy filled, self emptying occasion; an occasion to see our brothers and sisters through the eyes of Francis, who only had eyes for Christ.

For just a moment imagine if every time we gathered in fraternity we only saw Christ Jesus, our Lord, our Savior, our brother, the Son of our Father in each and every one of our brothers in sisters. (For a moment just imagine the face of Christ on each of your brothers and sisters)

With his eyes always on Christ what did Francis see? He saw in Jesus the Father's kenotic (self giving) love as the very essence of who God the Father is. Francis had 1 thought, 1 desire, 1 insatiable thirst to be Christ like, to mirror his life, thoughts, and deeds after Christ and in, as humanly possible, to be son as Christ

is the Son. What Francis saw in Christ was a son who held nothing back from a Father who held nothing back.

Francis could live in such close quarters, in less than ideal circumstances precisely because he understood the very nature of God, the Father's kenotic (self-emptying) love.

Creating us in His image and likeness to be in relationship with us. Emptying himself to come to us a baby for no other reason than to be with us: vulnerable, small, needing to be cared for, giving up Heaven for love us. It is this same love that Francis saw when Christ totally emptied himself on the cross for us, so that we could be fully restored in our relationship with the father and how He continually empties Himself in the Sacrifice of the Mass. Fully present to us in simple ordinary bread. Hidden in the Host, so that we may fully gaze on Him who is fully gazing on us. Whether at Mass or in Adoration we too gaze on Him who empties Himself so that we can empty our self. It is with this emptiness that we are to see our brothers and sisters.

The Charism of St. Francis of Assisi is simply to live the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ! By looking at Christ through the eyes of Francis, who lived in complete son-ship with the Father.

If we as formators could truly witness this in fraternity and assist our brothers and sisters in being in fraternity in just this way we would then truly be capable of rebuilding the church.

We choose our friends, not our brothers and sisters. It is when we like Francis recognize our universal kinship; recognize our son ship with the Father and with all of creation that we truly embrace our Charism. It is then that our fraternities will begin to heal and we can be about the business of rebuilding the church.

If we are confused about our deepest identity (our Charism), there will be pain: fraternal pain at all levels, and pain in the individual members. If the order is to

help rebuild the church, it must first be healed. The first step in healing is acknowledging the pain, the pain of not knowing we are.

Comments – Questions

Sources:

CCC

“Passion, Poverty and the Man who transformed the Church” Brett Thoman OFS

“From Divine Renovations” Fr. James Mallon

FUN manual

National Formation emails

So what did Francis see?

Simplicity & purity of Leo

The courtesy of Angelo

Gracious disposition, eloquence & natural sense of Masseo

The contemplative spirit of Giles

The virtuous & constant prayer of Rufino

The patience of Juniper

Brother James had a devotion to the lepers, possibly greater than even Francis

Brother Simone had a gift of deep spiritual contemplation

Brother Tebaldo was known for miracles

Brother Agostino had a reputation for saintliness

Brother Pacifico was called the King of verses