

# THE ORDER OF FRIARS MINOR CONVENTUAL

## CENTENARY OF THE ORIGINS OF THE FRANCISCAN CHARISM

First Stage 2005-2006

From inner restlessness and existential search to conversion

### *LORD, what do you want me to do?*

*“The Lord gave me, friar Francis, the grace to begin to do penance...”* (Test. 1; FF 110)

1. My dear brothers, may the Lord give you peace!

As is clearly affirmed in the programming document, *“Following Christ today with Francis”*, the celebration of the Eighth Centenary of the origins of the Franciscan charism 1205/1209-2005/2009 is for us Franciscans the occasion to “make remembrance” of our origins by turning our attention to St. Francis of Assisi in order to rediscover with renewed force for the life of our Order and for each of us, *“the spark of inspiration from which began the following”*<sup>1</sup> of Christ and of the Gospel in the footsteps of our Seraphic Father.

It can happen to us, as in fact it happens to so many, that we approach St. Francis as we would a wonderful fairy-tale, that is, detached from reality, as if we were living in an ideal and magical world, far from the worries and concerns of life.

We ought to admit that such a image comforts our feelings and creates in us a nostalgia for a world without problems, almost an oasis where we feel better, stronger.

Inspired furthermore by the love of Francis for nature and by the praise which he lifts up to the Lord for creation, we discern his attention for creation as an anticipation of interest in ecology and in the defence of the environment; likewise, we often make him a promoter of pacifist movements, seeing that he himself tells us in his Testament that the Lord revealed to him the greeting with which he welcomed all those he met: *May the Lord grant you His peace!*

Poet... man of peace... of ecology... aspects which nurture that sympathy with which Francis of Assisi is approached by non-believers and those far from the experience of faith, i.e., with respect, tenderness and interest. We often make of him the object of reflection conferring on this man of the Gospel an image which distorts the meaning of his existence.

We cannot permit ourselves, however, to enclose Francis in such a category: he is the model that we have embraced in order to live the Gospel, to be conformed to Christ, to be disciples of the poor Crucified One (cf. *Constitutions*, 3.2)

2. Francis is the man of the Gospel which is believed and lived; the man who had his heart fixed on the mystery of God: Christ Jesus made flesh, mediator between the Father and mankind, crucified and resurrected. His adventure begins with the icon of the Crucified of San Damiano: *“Go, Francis and repair my church which is all in ruins.”* And from that moment he made himself an authentic “constructor” of the Church by his witness and by his announcing of the Gospel, which he took for himself and his followers as his Rule of Life.

This mandate became for him an active commitment to evangelise through his simple and poor existence, and, as his biographers say, wherever he went he would call everyone to be converted and to change their life, to keep their inner eye on Christ Jesus in order to begin from there with a different sense of what life was all about, with a new and enlightened look on the Word of the Lord, with a heart capable of pardon and of promoting peace. *Homo alterius saeculi*. “A man

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<sup>1</sup> CIVCSVA, Instruction *“Ripartire da Cristo”* n .22, Rome, May 19, 2002

of another era”, the eternal one, that of God, that time which has no time, but is always the same time in every generation. Eight hundred years have passed and yet this time is still alive and keeps alive that “Gospel utopia” as embers do the fire beneath the ashes of the daily routine.

3. To celebrate this Centenary, then, permits us to rediscover the meaning of our embracing the call of Christ and at the same time helps us to re-found our life on the charism that the Holy Spirit has made to rise in the Church through Francis of Assisi. Certainly, the changes of time, of history, or culture move us to examine and comprehend our charism so that we can understand it better and make it impact on our daily life. The charism is not one possibility of life, but it is that which establishes our identity; it is the gift of the Holy Spirit confirmed by the Church. In this perspective to live and celebrate the Centenary means to return to the origins of our form of life and from there to begin again a renewed commitment to the Gospel life. *“It becomes increasingly indispensable for every Institute to make a renewed return to the Rule, because in it and in the Constitutions is found a particular itinerary distinguished by a charism authenticated by the Church. An increased consideration of the Rule will not fail to offer to consecrated persons a secure criterion in the search for adequate expressions of witness which knows how to respond to the needs of the time without distancing itself from the initial inspiration.”*<sup>2</sup>

### **To make remembrance**

4. In the biographies of the Franciscan Sources there is recounted the episode, now corroborated by historians, which happened probably in 1209, when Francis had recourse to the Pope to ask the approbation of the Rule. *“Let us go to our mother, the holy Roman Church, and let us communicate to the Holy Father what the Lord has begun to do in our midst, so that we may proceed and do what we have begun according to his will and his dispositions.”*<sup>3</sup> This icon of the Saint which is sketched for us by his biographers becomes the very place for us to return to the origins, to reflect together on what the Lord has given to the Church through the Poverello of Assisi. It is an image that helps us to make remembrance, to celebrate and to recall and to make present in today’s context, in this time, so complex and yet so near because of the various divergent views in vogue, to the time in which Francis lived.

As is indicated in the Document cited above, “to make remembrance” means for us not only to recall but “to celebrate” the meaning of the events from which sprang the origins of the Order, guided by the Spirit of the Lord, to bring about that renewal of our life as Franciscans according to the charism and inspiration of the origins about which the Church has indicated some parameters: the return to the Sources and the wise and prudent attention to be given to the signs of the times in order to “begin again with Christ” for the purpose of casting out into the deep of the Kingdom of God present, active and growing throughout the course of history, under the “pedagogical icon” of St. Francis. He in his Testament “makes remembrance” of his journey, first his personal one and then that of his community, which led him and his friars, under the inspiration of the Spirit, to the development of the “form of life” approved by Innocent III and subsequently confirmed by Honorius III.

Accordingly, our celebratory journey of the memory will follow fundamentally the succession of significant events in the personal and communal life of Francis and of his first companions, from the beginning of his existential search to his welcoming the life-project inspired by God and approved by the Church.

Assuming that this journey of Francis and his disciples is a pedagogical one to enable us to re-read our own vocational journeys, to deepen our understanding of our being “friars minor” in communion of life and spirit, and to increase awareness of our vocation and our embracing the Rule and spirituality bequeathed to us by Francis, we desire to renew our option for the radical nature of

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<sup>2</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consacrata*, Rome, March 25, 1966, n. 37

<sup>3</sup> EFR, Fonti Francescane, new editino 2004, “Legend of the Three Companions” 46 FF 1455

the Gospel as a response to de-spiriting relativism, to existential restlessness, and to the search for meaning which pervade ourselves and all persons of the third millennium.

5. The four stages of the itinerary of this “remembrance”, to be developed over the next four years, will lead us toward the celebration of the centenary of the gift of the Rule (1209/2009) which the Church, through the prayer of St. Francis, has given us as a basic instrument for our sanctification:

2005/2006: “*Lord, what is it that you want me to do?*” - From the restlessness and existential search to the conversion.

2006/2007: “*The Lord gave me, friar Francis, (the grace) to begin to do penance...*” - Francis in the following of Christ.

2007/2008: “*The Lord gave me brothers...*” - The life of fraternity and the apostolic mission based on the Gospel.

2008/2009: “*The Rule and life of the Friars Minor is this: to observe the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ...*” - The gift of the Rule. To live the Gospel in common obedience with the Church.

Wishing each of you, my brothers, that this centenary celebration will be the occasion *to begin again with Christ* for a renewed commitment to the following of Christ in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi, I would like, then, to begin with this first letter of mine to the Order, sharing with you on the theme of prayer and reflection suggested by this first stage of the remembrance.

### **From restlessness and existential search to conversion**

6. Every path of conversion begins with a particular event which gives rise to a change of direction. Likewise in the life of Francis we can find, as narrated in the biographical sources, a series of episodes which follow one another and which produce in him a change in life and in approach toward himself, God, other people, the world itself. It is a slow and progressive maturation which takes place in the inner depths of his heart and takes on the form of a true and real travail, arousing in this young man an inner restlessness which becomes a searching until his decision to change his existence. We ought, however, to be attentive lest we enclose our Seraphic Father in a “magical world” as if his road to conversion were a fable, detached from the reality which we, people of the third millennium, are living today.

What strikes us even today after eight hundred years, is the “contemporary nature” of what happened in the life of Francis, who experienced all the toil necessary to change his frame of reference until the moment, in which the presence of the Lord knocked at his heart.

### **Interpreters of a dream**

7. In order to know from where the conversion of Francis began, I would like to take a Biblical icon that could help us understand better the dynamic of what happened in the heart of the Poor Man of Assisi. The well-known page about the dream of Jacob, which we find in the Book of Genesis (28: 10-19) helps us to make the journey by means of the common element of a dream, which we also find in Francis in the episode of Spoleto.

Jacob left Bersabee and directed himself toward Carran. He happened to arrive in a place where he spent the night, because the sun had set; he took a rock, placed it as a pillow and lay down in that place. He had a dream: a ladder was resting on the earth, while its top reached the sky; and behold the angels of

God were ascending and descending the ladder. Behold, the Lord stood before him and said: "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you are lying I will give to you and to your descendants. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth and I will extend them from west to east, north to south. And all nations of the earth will be blessed through you and your descendants. Behold I am with you and I will protect you wherever you go; then I will make you return to this country, because I will not abandon you without having done what I have told you." Then Jacob rose from sleep and said: "Certainly, the Lord is in this place and I did not know it." He was afraid and said "How awesome is this place! This is truly the house of God; this is the gate of heaven." Early in the morning Jacob arose, took the rock which he had placed as a pillow and erected it as a stele and poured oil on top of it. And he called this place Bethel, since before this the city had been known as Luz.

In the Biblical world of the Ancient East a dream was considered a place of mystery and a place of revelation; it is an experience which almost always takes place at night during sleep. There are two types of dreams: a dream which carries a message in which an order of the divinity is communicated and a symbolic dream which announces the future. In the dream of Jacob, both meanings are present; it is a dream with the message that announces the future.

**8.** While reading this page, we are keeping as a background the dream of Francis at Spoleto, and trying to make a kind of synopsis. We remember that almost all the biographical sources relate that the beginning of the journey of conversion begins with this fact which took place as he was moving along the road in search of success with his ultimate ambition to become a knight—the real “dream” which filled his thoughts.

Having set out on his way, he arrived as far as Spoleto and while there he began not to feel very well. Nevertheless, concerned about his journey, while he was resting but still half-awake, he heard a voice asking him where he was going. Francis explained his ambitious project. But the voice asked: "Who is more useful to you, the master or the servant?" He answered: "The master." In reply the voice said: "Then why are you abandoning the master to follow the servant, the prince to serve the subject?" Then Francis asked: "Lord, what do you want me to do?" The voice concluded: "Return to your city and it will be told you there what you ought to do; since the vision that appeared to you, you need to interpret in a totally different way." On getting up, Francis began to reflect carefully about this revelation. While the earlier dream, since he was so taken up with the pursuit of success, had literally put him almost beyond himself with happiness, this new vision obliged him to withdraw into himself. Astonished, he thought and re-thought so intensely about the message he had received that he did not succeed in closing his eyes the whole night. When morning broke, he hastily directed his horse toward Assisi, happy and exultant. And he looked forward to the time when God, whose voice he had heard, would reveal to him his will, showing him the way of salvation. By then his heart was changed. He was no longer concerned about his trip to Apulia; he was ardent only in conforming himself to the divine will. (Legend of the Three Companions, 6; FF 1401).

From these texts there emerge some points toward which we should direct our attention:

**9. A. The journey.** The text opens with a departure: we know the story which precedes the episode of the dream at Bethel: Jacob is fleeing, terrified of the threats of his brother Esau, whom he had defrauded, taking away his rights as the first-born. The motive of his journey then was flight—Jacob is a frightened man and at the same time someone in search of something; he had with him the blessing torn away from his father Isaac and along with it the inherited sovereignty over the family clan and the promise made by God to Abraham. If we look at the text of the Franciscan Sources, the episode narrated in the *Legend of the Three Companions* also begins with a journey: *having set out on his way, he arrived at Spoleto and there began not to feel so well.*

Francis is on a journey for Apulia where he was thinking he would win the title of knight on the field of battle. Some days earlier he had had another dream: he had seen someone calling him and leading him into “*a splendid palace filled with armour of a most beautiful bride... he asked himself what all this might mean... and someone told him that all this was destined for him and his fellow knights...*”<sup>4</sup>

All this set him in motion; he had an objective, a motivation which drove him to search but something was limiting his thrust: *he began not to feel so well*. It is a search which starts from the restlessness which the young man notices in himself, it is something which makes him uncomfortable with himself. Francis and Jacob are on a journey, both in search of something which will satisfy the thirst for something more: one of them to become a “noble knight”, the other to find a worthy wife among the members of his tribe (cf. Genesis 28, 1-5). Restlessness characterizes the journey of both of them; Francis began to feel ill and Jacob was in perilous flight.

From these two men on the road there emerges the first basic element: the call of the Lord is a call to move, to follow His Word, but this meaning is not immediately perceived clearly, because in the first moment, God disturbs the heart. The following of Christ begins with discomfort which we experience in our daily life, in the passing of the days; it is there that we feel that routine is taking the place of joy, of enthusiasm. “*The consecrated life demands a renewed striving toward holiness which, in the simplicity of the everyday, aims to achieve the radicalness of the Sermon on the Mount, of a demanding love, lived in a personal relationship with the Lord, in the life of fraternal communion.*”<sup>5</sup>

We are called, as authentic followers of Francis of Assisi, to renew each day this striving and searching, above all when everyday life tends to pull us into a vortex of things which engage us: like Jacob we flee from the danger of succumbing and like Francis we look for something more and we set out on a journey.

**10. B. The place.** In the two texts on which we are reflecting, the place is specified: in the Sources it is indicated with the name of the city of Spoleto; in Genesis, on the other hand, we find a term which does not define a specific geographical place but rather a spiritual reality: in fact this word in Hebrew has the precise meaning of “holy place.” We find ourselves consequently before two sites which put us on different levels and which define the reality of our life as composed of two aspects which play a role in our existence: the space (place) where we live and the sacred space which establishes us as believers and religious.

Spoleto and the holy place are both the sites of the manifestation of the Lord; in them God reveals himself to Francis as a stimulus to go somewhere else to follow his Word, while to Jacob as a hidden presence in the folds of ordinariness; in fact, that place will receive a new name: Bethel, that is, House of God. We ought to recover in our existence as Franciscans the sense of that double reality which constitutes ourselves and which is woven into our life in the response we give to the call of the Lord. From the restlessness of the journey, which puts us in motion, we arrive at the search for the place “where God is” and we are ourselves. We are speaking of completing a migration, of rediscovering the meaning of our calling to conform ourselves to God in the sense of mystery which characterizes the presence of the Son of God made man. In this sense, “*we can recall to mind those privileged places in which it was possible to contemplate the Face of Christ...: one to know the mystery fully.*”<sup>6</sup> The *place*, then, is a composite of different places which are truly for us the House of God, places which we ought to reclaim as expressions of our life; *places* which we ought to seek once again and re-locate in our daily life, if we have not revisited them for some time.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. 3 Comp 5 FF 1399

<sup>5</sup> CIVCSVA, Instruction “Ripartire da Cristo” n. 20, Rome, May 19, 2002

<sup>6</sup> Ripartire da Cristo n. 23

**11. C. The Lord.** The third element which emerges from the Biblical page and from the page of the Sources is the Lord Himself, the protagonist of the two dreams. Francis hears his voice, while Jacob, besides hearing his voice, also sees a vision: *the ladder* from earth to heaven and the *angels of God climbing and descending on it*. Here the experience of God for these two men is different and is open to two dimensions which engage respectively the ears, the organ of listening and the eyes the organ of sight. While Francis listens, Jacob sees while he listens.

The *journey* toward the *place* where God is brings us to an encounter with Him, to enter into a relationship with Him. The two basic elements needed to enter into a relationship with another are precisely listening and seeing, and to these we can add a third: *the mouth/word*, in fact, both Francis and Jacob, after having heard and seen, respond. The question which the Lord poses to Francis becomes the occasion to open a true and proper dialogue, while for Jacob the circumstances are different: he finds himself before the Lord who speaks to him. A dialogue occurs in fact when I find myself *before another whom I see, hear and to whom I speak and respond*.

The initiative then is of God who appeals to the man through his *angels who climb and descend* the ladder which puts heaven and earth in communication ; likewise with Francis, in his dream *he reveals his ambitious project* to which God responds with a question that raises him progressively, as if he were climbing a ladder from his own mind to the thought of God. In this way, Francis climbs across the various rungs of *servant to master* when he decides to change the direction of his objective.

In a few lines the dynamic of prayer is sketched which, in the icon of Jacob becomes visible through the words which the Lord directs to him, assuring him of *a land, a blessing and His presence*. There are the three elements which describe one's belonging to God, an existence lived in communion with Him and His becoming near to man in the ordinariness of daily life.

**12. D. The awakening.** The awakening is the fourth and last element on which I wish to reflect. It is interesting to note that in the two texts the awakening is defined differently. For Francis it becomes a light which makes him jump up after a tiring night: *at the break of day*. For Jacob, it is *an awakening from sleep*. The two expressions juxtaposed offer a unique picture which includes the two elements of discernment: the light and the decision to get up and act.

We can understand better what we have been saying if we pay attention to the responses which Francis and Jacob give to the dawning of a new day, which presents itself as a new condition of existence for both of them. Jacob becomes aware of God who dwells in the life of man and which itself is a *holy place*, a space, in which this presence is actualised; it is the meaning of the mystery of the Incarnation: God chooses humanity to make Himself visible, *to dwell with the sons of man*<sup>7</sup> and to enter into a relationship with man. In Francis this awareness becomes an intense awareness of himself, and in the morning, *he hastily directs his horse toward Assisi*, joyful and exultant. If we place this two images one upon the other, we have a unique reality: the awareness of the presence of God in one's own life is *a stone* upon which to construct a new relationship with Him beginning by re-entering into one self and by re-discovering within the urgency of a response which only the Lord can give to our search.

But *in this re-awakening*, there is one step more: *Jacob took the stone which had been put as a pillow and erected it as a stele and poured oil on the top of it*. Francis, on the other hand, retraces his steps, that is, returns to Assisi to await the response of the Lord. There is a sequence of movements which defines the attitude which emerges from these dreams: conversion, which begins with laying a different foundation from the previous one, with a decision which moves one to return to one's original project in order to re-orient one's life to God.

**13.** These four elements on which I have reflected describe a type of itinerary which begins with a *restlessness* and by means of *searching* reaches *conversion* at the end. Too often we reserve this

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Pr 8:31

term to define those who, having been far from God, return to Him and to the Church, or we use to describe the journey which has brought us to respond to the Lord. Let us find instead in this jubilee celebration the occasion to reflect on our inner attitude and retrace personally, in our local communities, and as an Order the meaning of conversion as a search for the “meaning” of our life.

### **Before concluding**

**14.** Let us return to Francis, who in his Testament, speaking about his conversion, opens up a window for us regarding the interior itinerary which led him to the choice of following the Gospel by conforming his existence to Christ, poor and crucified.

What happens after that dream at Spoleto? The response of the Lord to the question posed by Francis during that night is characterized by some episodes which determine a definite choice. It is Francis himself who speaks about it. *“For when I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I showed mercy to them. And when I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body. And afterwards I delayed a little and left the world.”*<sup>8</sup>

First of all, there is a condition which he defines as *sin* and which embraces his entire existence until this moment and from which only the direct intervention of God liberates him.

Then we have the *bitterness* which defines the taste of sin in relation to the *lepers*, living symbols of sin as the leprosy of the soul. Seeing lepers, Francis experienced a disgust for his own sin, which for him was not limited only to some precise faults, but was the sense of a life tied to pleasures and without Christ. His biographers recount: *“one day while we was riding his horse through the plain which extends at the foot of Assisi, he encountered a leper. This unexpected encounter filled him with horror. But, rethinking his proposal to seek perfection, which had already been conceived in his mind and reflecting that if he wanted to become a knight of Christ, he needed first of all to conquer himself, he got down from his horse and ran to embrace the leper, and while the leper extended his hand to receive an alms, Francis gave him some money and kissed him.”*<sup>9</sup> In Francis who had lived self-enclosed in the pursuit of himself, of his own greatness, this encounter signified a great change and indicated a liberation from himself, from his own egotism, from sin. Recognizing in the leper who was before him his own sin and coming down to embrace him with a gesture of mercy, is the central moment of his conversion. It is at this point that the *“bitter becomes sweet.”* And *this sweetness of soul and body* becomes the baggage which he carries as he leaves behind the world, that world in which he had lived previously.

But, even before leaving the world, the Lord reserves for him another encounter which marks him strongly: it is the Crucified of San Damiano: *“while praying and kneeling before that image, he felt himself overcome by a great spiritual consolation and while he fixed his eyes full of tears on the cross of the Lord, he heard with the ears of his body a voice coming toward him from the cross and saying to him three times: Francis, go and repair my church, which as you see, is all in ruins.”*<sup>10</sup> In this response Francis receives the mandate of his calling and at the end of his life, that image will be impressed in his flesh, because he himself, after an existence lived according to the Gospel, will be transformed into the image of Christ Jesus.

### **The Dream Today**

**15.** I wanted to proceed in my reflection on the journey of the “dream” and now this sequence brings me to consider the current time in which we are living, 800 years after that night in Spoleto. In trying to make real the journey of Francis so that it can impact on our life, I would like to pose a

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<sup>8</sup> Test 1-4: FF 110

<sup>9</sup> LM II, 5: FF 1034

<sup>10</sup> LM II, 1 FF 1038

few questions which ought to serve as a guide and reflection in this first year of the centenary celebration of the origins of the Franciscan charism.

The existential restlessness of Francis is the restlessness of every person. It is interesting to recall an affirmation of the Danish philosopher Kierkegaard: *“God uses the restlessness to draw men... He is interested in the intensity—that is, when He puts forward the greatest restlessness possible, then man can reach that tension and that intensity which brings him truly to love God... He wants to disturb human existence down to its deepest level, breaking up everything, throwing everything up in the air.”*<sup>11</sup> The search of Francis, which follows the way of profound restlessness, is the search of every man.

The vocation, the call of God, is the response to the search for a meaning in life and of human existence; our vocation is the response to our personal search for meaning. Is it still meaningful for the fullness of our life? How do we discover and taste God as our Father who is in heaven?

In his *“leaving the world”* Francis finds the Face of Christ to contemplate in the least of society, in the marginalized, in those *“crucified in the world”* by suffering, solitude and every sorrow which wounds the human spirit. He comes near to them; in fact, he shares their condition, choosing to live the Gospel in poverty.

Is the love for Christ, poor and crucified, so efficacious for me that it radiates out in love of the neighbour who is alone and forgotten? Is the contemplation of His Face a thermometer for us to measure the total conformity of our being as a being-for-others?

The change of life which occurred in Francis becomes a visible sign of a new life which in turn becomes a concrete testimony of the love of Christ for mankind. *“An existence transfigured by the evangelical counsels becomes a prophetic and silent testimony, but along with an eloquent protest against an inhuman world. It commits us to the promotion of the human person and awakens a new imagination of charity.”*<sup>12</sup>

What do the people expect from a son of St. Francis today? What does the world ask of someone who choose the way of the Gospel as his *“form of life”*? What does the Church expect from us? How can we serve mankind in his deepest needs? What response are we able to give with our existence? What Face of God can be read in our life?

## **A conclusion**

**16.** I leave these as open questions so that they can become invitations to a healthy restlessness and search for a sense of meaning which we need to give continually to our response to the Lord Who calls us to walk the roads of the Gospel in the footsteps of Francis. The temptation to settle for set answers without any soul can always be present, but may our Seraphic Father intercede for us before His Almighty Father so that our life may always be more conformed to His Son, Jesus our Lord and illumined by the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete.

**17.** A **sign** which characterizes this first stage of the celebrational project of the Centenary: each friar will be given a copy of the **Testament** of St. Francis. And this so that the remembrance of Francis may become the paradigm of our contemplative memory of what God has done in our life and for our life, so that from the contemplation there may flow a renewed commitment of conversion, of asceticism and of personal and communal sanctification, here and now.

**18.** An **initiative** is also being suggested: a provincial or national pilgrimage of the friars to *Rivotorto* or else, if opportune, by the Conference. To this initiative there could be added that of organizing a gathering or a local chapter on the social and/or religious situation in which we find ourselves living and on the possible choices or initiatives which could be realized as Franciscans. It

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. S. Kierkegaard, *L'inquietudine della fede*: Gribaudo (Rome 1968) p. 17

<sup>12</sup> Ripartire da Cristo n. 33

is a suggestion which hopes to join together the initiatives regarding Conventual Franciscan life in one's own territory with a study of how we can respond to the invitations which arise from this same territory and to ask of ourselves a testimony of life and service which translates in the context of the culture and local church the model of incarnation of the Gospel which Francis transmitted to us.

**19.** I entrust this letter to you invoking the heavenly Father with the prayer which concludes the *Letter to the Entire Order*, which I would like to make our own especially during this year:

*Almighty, eternal, just and merciful God,  
Give us miserable ones  
The grace to do for You alone  
What we know you want us to do  
And always to desire what pleases You.  
Inwardly cleansed, interiorly enlightened  
And inflamed by the fire of the Holy Spirit,  
May we be able to follow  
In the footprints of Your beloved Son.  
Our Lord Jesus Christ,  
And, by Your grace alone,  
May we make our way to You,  
Most High,  
Who live and rule  
In perfect Trinity and simple Unity,  
And are glorified  
God almighty,  
Forever and ever. Amen.*<sup>13</sup>

My dear brothers, may the Lord bless you and keep you; may He show His face to you and have mercy on you, may we turn His face to you and grant you peace.

Through the intercession of our Seraphic Father, may the Lord bless you.

Rome, SS. Apostoli

The 29<sup>th</sup> of November 2005  
Feast of all the Saints of the Seraphic Order

Your brother,

Fr. Joachim A. Giermek  
Minister General

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<sup>13</sup> EpOrd 50-52: FF 233