

A Reflection on Franciscan Attentiveness

Spirituality is ... the intention to direct our lives in response to God's grace ... it includes being intentional in what we attend to in our lives

(Black, 2009).

YOU COULD USE THIS REFLECTION WITH STAFF OR LEADERSHIP TEAMS
IN A STAFF MEETING OR SPIRITUALITY DAY

Consider what Francis and Clare were attentive to in their lives and ministries?

- **The need to live simply.**
In the final Testament, Francis reminded his friars of what was most essential. For example, every person who came and found him, wanting to live the way Francis was living, gave away their belongings to the poor. Every one of them lived simply. They agreed to work diligently. Each one was happy to live with less... In summary, Francis says, 'we were simple and subject to each other' (Sweeney, 2021, p.165).

How can you live more simply?

How can you inspire others, especially the young, to be happy with less?

- **God's presence in the natural world.**
Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically. He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace (Pope Francis, 2015). Francis' actions teach that if we reverence even the smallest works of art in God's creation, we will not desecrate the more

significant ones. If we respect a worm, can we choose to harm a human? (Normile, 1996, p.82).

Where can you show greater reverence for the natural world?

How can you inspire others, especially young people, to care for the Earth?

- **People everywhere.**
The most quoted passage in Francis' writings is not any of the famous hard sayings of the Gospel about poverty or renunciation, seven times Francis cites the 'golden rule' of human relationships: whatever you would wish a person to do to you, do you also to them (Matthew 7:12). The emphasis is not on particular practices but on what will open the heart and bless life (Davis & Cotter, 2012, p.12).

When have you seen people bless life through their attentiveness to others?

- **Vulnerability and failure.**
It's not Francis's wonders but his failures and embarrassments that make him able to speak most poignantly, meaningfully, and relevantly to us. Too many saints levitate, bilocate, and leap tall mountains in a single bound, but fewer have obviously unachieved goals, complete disappointments, and friends who abandon them at critical moments – as Francis did (Sweeney, 2021, p.47).

Can you describe a time when you felt vulnerable in your own ministry work?

- **The need for peace.**
Violence and threats decided who ruled and who didn't. Walls and weapons determined safety. And churches spoke a language of power that their faithful did not. But there were other sources in the Christian tradition that did not point to power and to human structures: A God who walks with his creations in a garden; a God who later becomes one of them to feel, see, taste, and experience human life; and a God who is a Mother as much as a Father-these were Francis's inspirations. (Sweeney, 2021, p.123).

We live in a violent world. How can you be an apostle of peace today?

- **The importance of community.**
The notion of 'fraternity' is at the heart of the Franciscan way and the struggle to live a common life of love and companionship is often its greatest challenge... this quality of interpersonal living reflects the Christian understanding of God ... as a communion of persons in a loving relationship of mutual self-giving (Davis & Cotter, 2012, p.34).

How do you build community in your ministry?