



Tau Maria Franciscan Formation Meditations
Tau Maria Franciscan Rule of Life

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Meditation – Francis Charism

I have recently been meditating upon some facts about one of my heroes, St. Josemaria Escriva. Although I am not called to be a member of Opus Dei, I have gained a great deal from studying their spirituality. Their resources are extremely helpful in understanding, inspiring, and bringing the laity to the universal call to holiness.

So you can well imagine how their founder's reluctance to encourage lay people taking vows would cause me to rethink my own walk with the Lord. His preference was to call his followers to simply living the virtues.

Certainly, he knew that there was no conflict between living out a vow to live a rule of life and seeking to strive to live the virtues.

It would seem that he sought to protect his followers from a very real trap; holiness through formula. I that know in my personal walk I have often confessed a tendency to seek to "accomplish" the requirements of the Rule of Life rather than the genuine purpose of the Rule, so well expressed in Paragraph #3 of our rule:

Penance:

- 3. We wholeheartedly embrace Christ's call to radical faith and conversion (Mk. 1:15) under the spiritual fatherhood of St. Francis. His first exhortation to those who sought to follow his Gospel way of life begins as follows:*

All those who love the Lord with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind, with their whole strength and love their neighbors as themselves, who hate their bodies with their vices and sins, who receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and who produce worthy fruits of penance. Oh how happy and blessed are these men and women while they do such things and persevere in doing them, because the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon them and make His home and dwelling place among them, and they are children of the heavenly Father Whose works they do, and they are spouses, brothers and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(St. Francis – First Letter to the Faithful)

These words summarize well our Franciscan Charism. The tertiary Franciscan vocation has always been a call to a life of penance. This should not be understood as consisting first or mainly in external acts but in a continual striving for authentic holiness. Ascetical practices are essential but must reflect a genuine interior transformation. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come." (2 Cor 5:17) "My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!" (Gal. 4:19)



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Yet, it is this very Rule and my vow to live it that draws me back to “a continual striving for authentic holiness.” The fact that I have fallen from the spirit, or even at times the letter, of the Rule of Life, renews my need for penance. Who am I to be thrown by a need for penance? After all, “The tertiary Franciscan vocation has always been a call to a life of penance.” Even when I am doing well and can clearly see Christ working through me, while I rest in the discipline that the Rule provides, I relish the penance I am able to practice, which joins me to Jesus on the Cross, and through Our Blessed Mother relieves the burdens of others.

In my home parish, on Christmas morning, our parish priest told us, “When you make your New Year’s resolution this year, please do not focus on how fat you are, or how stupid you are. Please resolve to love more, and love better.” I could not help but reflect on how taking and living out my vow to live the Tau Maria Franciscan Rule of Life had prepared and allowed me to love more, love better, and see where more work needed to be done.

God has blessed Opus Dei with many holy and wonderful people. I have known some of them and felt honored to work with a few. I understand St. Josemaria’s belief on vows for the laity. And I know that taking each of my vows, baptismal, marriage, and TMF, have all contributed greatly to my living a more virtuous life, and in that being more open to hearing and obeying God’s will for me. Our daily consecration has had the same affect, and is indispensable in showing me what work God has for me.

Consecration:

...Holy Immaculate Conception, Spouse of the Holy Spirit, taking you into our home, we consecrate and entrust ourselves and our fraternity totally and forever to your Immaculate Heart, as your slaves and your property.

Make us your true sons and daughters and use our fraternity as an instrument of Christ our King to convert sinners, to sanctify souls, to serve the poor and sick, and to strengthen and renew the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, that God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—may be glorified, praised and adored by all mankind. Amen.

What a wonderful Church we belong to that can create great saints like Francis and Josemaria, and still provide a hope for holiness, for a man like me.