



Tau Maria Franciscan Formation Meditations
The Secular Franciscan Home Page:
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M Meditation – Franciscan Poverty

Ruth's Book I

How can we define Franciscan Poverty? We can, by picturing a stark, desolate moment in History. Close your eyes a minute and think of the summit of Calvary. See the poor Man Christ standing there literally stripped to the skin, the cross flat on the ground beside Him waiting for His almost nude body to be nailed to it. Next, think of St. Francis, “the little poor man.” To him Poverty was a strip act, too — a stripping off anything and everything that is worldly and not Christ-like. Now, let us think of ourselves, we who are striving for Franciscan perfection. For us, too, poverty can be and must be a strip act, a simple, steady endeavor to completely strip ourselves down to be Christ-like.

...The love of money is the root of Evil — with a capital E. It is rampant in the world and when it is coupled with a lust for power it becomes lethal. It becomes GREED, SELF-LOVE and SELF-GRATIFICATION. It becomes, a THING TO ADORE, an IDOL.

...How, in a practical way can we cultivate the spirit of Poverty? Let’s take a good hard look at the things we buy? How much of what we buy is sheer waste buying? Look in any store you go into, many counters display goods that are needed and useful; but, look at the counter upon counter of the absolute junk with a high price tag on it. How about the senseless waste of useful things only half used, things quickly tired of and discarded; things abused, carelessly broken, or allowed to rust and go bad unused? How about food — garbage cans that are partially filled with wasted, edible food?

...How about panic buying: Rumor has it there is going to be a shortage of beef, gasoline, or toilet paper; or that prices are going up on this or that. Buy! Stock up! Six months later the trash cans begin to collect the unneeded, unwanted, unusable, deteriorated excess; while somewhere, someone did go without because the panic buying did create a shortage. How about the energy crunch: Are we doing our bit to save energy? How about electricity? Are we still wasting it right and left? Do we go about splashing lights all over the place, turning on six lights where one would do or leaving them turned on in every room in the house when we are using only one room, or failing to turn them off when we no longer need them?

Another concrete element of poverty is the most common one of all, the tragic polarization of the haves and the have-nots, the all too common, worldwide poverty of human deprivation. Consider the situation here in America, where, on the one hand we see so many of our tables laden with a super-abundance of good nourishing food, while on the other hand we see a tragic picture (perhaps it is just a picture in a mission magazine, which we know is the real McCoy) of great big eyes in a bony face of a child out there somewhere who is undernourished or even starving.... How do we reconcile these contrasts with Christ’s own words, “*Come ... for I was hungry and you gave me to eat ... naked and you clothed me ...*” Or, the converse of that — Christ’s warning words, “*Depart from me ... for I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat ... Naked and you did not cloth me...*”



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These are some of the really hard things we each should ponder sincerely and work out in our own way, in our own consciences, in order to reconcile what we have, with what we give to those who do not have.

Now, we come to the deeply spiritual poverty that is the Poverty of Christ.

St. Francis, said, “Poverty is a royal virtue, it is shone so brightly in the King and queen,” — Christ and Our Lady. He said, “Understand that Poverty is a choice way of salvation; the fruit it bears is manifold, and rare are they who know it well.” He said, “If Christ lived it, I must live it.” And, if Francis lived it, we must live it if our goal is Franciscan perfection; by doing so we can continue the poverty of Christ on earth today. For us, who are followers of St. Francis the poor man, Christ must never stop walking through the world.

Jesus chose to be born poor, why?

The Spirit of poverty is a mental condition, or should we say conditioning? It is another of our spiritual freedoms — freedom from greed, especially greed for money and power and position beyond our proper status. It is contentment with, and gratefulness to God for what we have; for “*giving us this day our daily bread.*” The Holy Father says, “Holy Poverty flees from luxury.”

What is this luxury? It is an unrestrained indulgence in costly living. It is the gratification of desire for the empty pomp of living. Poverty flees this emptiness and seeks the fullness that is in Christ. Poverty loves little things, and is happy with the ordinary things of life. It enjoys having a good home, a few beautiful things, music, flowers, time-saving appliances, all on the level of our means to pay for them. These are looked upon as joyous things lent to us by God for a happy existence, and never for the purpose of showing off, or, of going someone else a bit better. Our Franciscan rule states, “In all things let the members avoid extremes of cost and style, observing the golden mean suited to each one’s station in life.” Franciscan poverty, instead of enslaving us to things, makes things our slaves. We choose things and use them wisely; we do not let things use us. Our attitude should be, I can take them or leave them. Poverty is full trust in the Providence of God....

Our Tau Maria Francis Rule Paragraph #23—reads:

23. The “Poverello” (little poor man) of Assisi heroically imitated his Lord in this great self-emptying of voluntary material and spiritual poverty. Throughout the history of his order all attempts to return to original observance, held holy poverty to be the keystone of fidelity to St. Francis’ ideal. We live in an age of unprecedented material wealth but widespread spiritual bankruptcy. Therefore, as sons and daughters of St. Francis, we also strive to witness to radical trust in the Providence of our loving Father and the total sufficiency of the “one thing necessary” (Lk 10:41) by freely choosing to live poverty, simplicity, and minority according to our state of life.