



Tau Maria Franciscan Formation Meditations
The Rule of Life of Tau Maria Franciscans

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Meditation – Franciscan Poverty

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.*

These words of our Rule can easily be passed over in an attempt to answer the question of all good Christians, “What am **I** supposed to do?” But our founders, in their wisdom, sought to prepare us for our Franciscan walk, using the words of our Rule to form us into good Franciscans.

The first word that stands out in paragraph #23 is “heroically.” As our Holy Father St. Francis tried to pay the debt that could not be paid, he was and is viewed by the world and the Church, as living heroic poverty. Yet, he was simply seeking to imitate his Lord in the greatest self-emptying of voluntary and spiritual poverty that the universe has or ever could imagine.

People, yes, just people, have for 800 years tried to return to a primitive observance of this heroic poverty. They have held this poverty as the keystone, or central principle to St. Francis’ ideal. This is what he was reaching for, not simply accepting as his fate, but reaching to achieve it. This is what TMF are called to do.

... 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.

Material wealth is easy to recognize, but what did our founders mean by “spiritual bankruptcy?” Bankruptcy indicates a complete lack of a particular quality, and in this case, of something spiritual. Our age has plenty of people who are “spiritual, but not religious,” so spiritual bankruptcy could mean many things. But our Rule is a Franciscan document, therefore we are talking about an age that has turned their back on the Holy Spirit and embraced consumerism in its many forms.

We strive to **witness**. We are presenting ourselves to those who would observe us. We actually care about what others think of us. In fact, we want them to think of us. We want them to look at us and see our “radical” trust in the Providence of God. Truth is, they will see our trust in the things of the world if we possess them. It is not likely that they will ask us if we are “detached” from our wealth. Most people will never ask us anything about our witness. There is only one way to witness to radical material poverty.

Even spiritually, we must embrace the “one thing necessary” and witness to that by allowing others to see our poverty, simplicity, and minority. How could they see this if it is only interior? The right to exterior wealth, indulgence, and power belongs to others. Even when we, as Franciscans, are called by God to such inextricable dangers we must be suspect of our own intentions, and seek to let them go as soon as Our Father allows.



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24. *Parents are responsible to provide for the safety, security and all needs of their children. The present and future needs of the family must be taken into consideration without excessive concern for the latter. With this in mind material possessions, savings and investments should be kept to a minimum.*

We are called. We are not just called to poverty. We also must embrace our state in life. For many TMF, this means providing for the safety, security, and the needs (genuine needs) of our family. This presents a dilemma that is not easy to resolve. The good news is that this frees us from the temptation to judge others and how they live the Rule. How could we know the internal details of another's state in life. Only the most presumptuous of us can pretend that they know. It is hard enough for us to determine the demands of our own state in life.

This is why prayer, our family, formation, spiritual direction, and discussions with other TMF can come to the rescue. Decisions have to be made and reviewed regularly.

Who can know what will be needed for the safety, security, and needs of the future be? How do you put a number on this? Even in this, we must trust in the Lord.

The "minimum" of material possession, savings, and investments has always been different for my wife and me. How could I ever know what that would mean to my neighbor?

...Neither our possessions nor our manner of living should ever give the impression of seeking social status, ostentation or luxury for its own sake. Ownership and/or stewardship of possessions or wealth dedicated to directly serving God's people is allowed and encouraged.

These two sentences help give us guidance in making these decisions. How would this relate to our "spiritual" poverty? What is spiritual wealth? Perhaps, we need to pass all spiritual gifts we receive on to others, as soon as we get them. Perhaps, we must recognize and positively state that we know that all that is good in us is a gift, since any merits we may have earned have been given to Our Blessed Mother. Truth is, as consecrated souls, we possess nothing in the spiritual realm. We simply wait on Our ever-Virgin Mother to make us her true sons and daughters.

25. *All unnecessary possessions and wealth should be given to the poor, the Church or some worthy charity, in a timely manner. "The decisive point of the social question is that goods created by God for everyone should, in fact, reach everyone in accordance with justice and with the help of charity." [Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) #2459] "The right to private property does not abolish the universal destination of goods." (CCC # 2452)*

Wealth waits for us after we die. Today, let us share so generously that it hurts. Daily we are able to worthily receive the greatest gift in existence, the body, blood, soul, and divinity of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The price to show our gratitude is, for us, Franciscan Poverty. Small price to pay.