



Tau Maria Franciscan Formation Meditations

San Marcos, Nicaragua

M Meditation – Life of St. Francis

I officially began my walk as a companion of St. Francis of Assisi in 1999, yet I always recognized a distance between our Holy Father and myself. After discussing this sense of detachment with a few fellow Franciscans, I discovered this was not uncommon. I did and do feel close to St. Anthony, who has found many important and even silly treasures for me. Fr. Solanus Casey is a good friend and local miracle worker, whom I talk to on a regular basis, even though he entered eternity when I was 5 years old.

I can only say that St. Francis always seemed out of my reach. I knew that it was me, and not him, but it was certainly a reality.

This separation ended on my 2014 Tau Maria Franciscan mission. Having been on the trip many times, it was with a deep sense of gratitude and relief that I returned to Nicaragua. Soaking in sweat, and short of breath, I felt the old familiar breeze that seems to reside only in San Marcos to refresh those who take the time to visit the Keiser University chapel. As I looked above Fr. Robert's head, I viewed the Crucifix.

We had done a novena to Our Lady of Guadalupe with the intention of seeing Jesus in those we helped, worked with, met, had received support from, and in each other. I was not surprised to see Jesus in Fr. Robert, the chapel, or the Crucifix. As I pondered the hard work it took to get back to the chapel, I realized that our Holy Father Francis had been with us the whole time.

I instantly saw him making pierogies with Andrea and the whole crew, as we began our journey as a group working for room and board.

I saw him in the pancake breakfasts with the Men's Club, as we learned the joy that rests in the heart of a true servant.

I saw him in the Lenten Fish Fries with the Knight's of Columbus, as I saw our need for the help of our benefactors.

I saw him in the rosaries, quilts, Bibles, AA literature, small and large donations, toys, costumes, candy, and assorted balls that were donated, as we witnessed to rewards for begging, "...in the name of God."

I saw him in the travel agents and airlines who had made the trip affordable, as we embraced our poverty and God's generosity.



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I felt like the prodigal son, who finally allowed himself a trip home. I felt like I had finally become a part of the family. I believe I gave up trying to arrive, and simply accepted that even I can be led by so great a saint. Then I looked around me.

I saw the elders in our group. Some of them moved too fast, some a little slower, and one just right. I saw St. Clare when they smiled, or held their tongue when I had disappointed them. I saw courage and determination in them, as they embraced all they encountered.

I saw the people in the group who had been to Nicaragua in earlier groups. Without them, all would have been lost. They showed me the patience and joy of St. Francis and St. Clare.

I saw all the new people whose energy and trust was indispensable in just getting to the next project. It is for them that St. Francis had brought us back. I saw that he had succeeded in showing them how to fall in love with the people of Nicaragua.

I saw the very youngest of our group be accosted and robbed, witnessing some of the worst of Central America, and refuse to have it dampen her spirit. St. Clare and her understanding of the life of the poor were there and showed brightly in this beautiful young lady.

Just as St. Francis joined Jesus on the Cross, through the mystery of the Stigmata, he had joined us on our mission.

Jesus was easy to find in the orphans, elderly, drug addicts, developmentally challenged, and children in day care that we visited, this year I saw Francis and Clare with them.

Our Blessed Mother was easy to see in those who ran and worked at l'Antorcha, Hodera, Gio's, La Casona, Keiser University, the Orphanage, Cristo Rey School, and Cas de Angel all serving Nicaragua, and she showed us Francis and Clare, who were happy to join us.

St. Joseph was easy to see in the work of Paul Rush and his Guadalupe Gardens and Gabe and Norma Negri who planned our week and joined us when they could. He revealed Francis and Clare to us as we saw that the cross enriches our lives.

Yes, the life of St. Francis of Assisi did not end in the 13th Century. He is alive and well.

If I continue to live our Rule of Life, to the best of my ability, I am certain that he will remain with me and in the Parish of San Marcos, Carazo, Nicaragua for all eternity.