



Tau Maria Franciscan Formation Meditations
Love's Reply
Cajetan Esser O.F.M. & Engelbert Grau O.F.M.

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Meditation – Works of Mercy
Service of the Kingdom of God

II. The Motive of the Franciscan Apostolate

Neither the esteem of men nor the desire for visible results but only the love of Christ is the true motive of the Franciscan apostolate. “Because we must do all things according to the pattern of what we see in him as on the mountain:” this is the real reason why the Friars Minor choose to live and work after the manner of the Apostles. In that pattern on the mountain, the life of the Incarnate Word, we behold a constant revelation of God’s love for man, of Christ’s love for souls. Themselves filled with that love, the sons and daughters of St. Francis must in turn bring the good news and the grace of the Gospel to all men. In this they follow their seraphic model:

“If Francis’ love made him the brother of other creatures, it is not surprising that the charity of Christ made him much more the brother of those stamped with the image of the Creator. There was nothing higher, Francis said, than the salvation of souls, and the proof he offered was that the only-begotten Son of God deigned to hang upon the cross for souls...He would not consider himself the friend of Christ unless he too loved the souls which Christ had loved before him.” – Thomas Celano

Such words are a meager expression of the love that filled the heart of the seraphic Francis and drew him to the apostolate. The love of Christ for us so fired his soul with love that he too loved souls because Christ loved them and in the way Christ loved them. Nothing he would say, was to be preferred to the salvation of souls. For this reason he loved and honored those who were dedicated to the salvation of others:

“This for him was the most important reason for respecting teachers and preachers, that as Christ’s helpers they fulfilled their office in union with him.” – Celano

To engage in the apostolate meant for him to share in the work of Christ, to continue and prolong his mission in the Church. To be an apostle was to him to be a co-worker of Christ out of love for those whom Christ loved. The one all-embracing motive therefore of the Franciscan Apostolate is the love of God which has come to us in Christ and is made visible to us in his earthly life. By such a love the whole Franciscan apostolate must be inspired and guided, for only those can the Lord call his friends, “Who love souls as he loved them.”



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III. The Special Form of the Franciscan Apostolate

For Francis, the apostolate was not to be understood in the narrow sense we perhaps give it today when we think of it primarily as preaching the word of God and announcing to men the glad tidings of salvation. Francis does not speak of apostolic activity, but always of an apostolic life, as when he wrote to the Chapter:

“Praise the Lord, for he is good, and exalt him in your works. For unto this he has sent you into the world, that by word and deed you should give testimony to his voice.”

What Francis meant by “word and deed” he himself shows us in speaking, in the early Rule, of the friars who were among the Saracens. His words are a kind of primitive mission-method that retains its value even today:

“The friars who go can conduct themselves among them in two ways. The first is this: not to engage in strife and controversy, but to be subject to every human creature for God’s sake, and simply confess that they are Christians. The other way is this, that should they see it pleases God, they announce the word of God.”

The first way is the ordinary apostolate of example, while the second, that of preaching the word, is exercised when and if God’s grace ask it of us. Both must be found together, for the second without the first Francis considered of little importance. For him, the sermon of one’s life was always more effective than the sermon of one’s lips, since we must first practice ourselves what we preach to others. Hence Francis rejoiced, relates Celano,

“...when he heard that his sons gave a holy example, and upon those friars who by word or deed led sinners to the love of Christ he heaped his choicest blessing.”