

## **Francis' Credo** ***Austin SSF***

If you have reached the back page by carefully reading all that came before, you will have read of how some people live their lives - their spirituality - based on or influenced by Francis' 'Rule for those who live in Hermitages'. You will have seen how even a Rule can be life-giving, and Francis produced several. His 'Earlier Rule', finalised by 1221, can be life-giving as well - particularly Chapter 23. Here, surprisingly, towards the end of a document primarily concerned with running an Order we find a very long prayer and an impassioned plea to the whole world.

There is not space to give the whole prayer but we can at least give the first three verses:-

All-powerful, most holy,  
Almighty and supreme God,  
Holy and just Father,  
Lord King of heaven and earth  
we thank You for Yourself  
for through Your holy will  
and through Your only Son  
with the Holy Spirit  
You have created everything spiritual and corporal  
and, after making us in Your image and likeness  
You placed us in paradise.  
Through our own fault we fell.  
We thank You  
for as through Your Son You created us,  
so through Your holy love  
with which You loved us  
You brought about His birth  
as true God and true man  
by the glorious, ever-virgin, most blessed, holy Mary  
and You willed to redeem us captives  
through His cross and blood and death.

Those of you who know Francis' "Exposition on the Our Father" may be able to recognise his hand in this, for within this prayer you can see that Francis is giving his profession of faith. For it could be seen as an exposition based on the Nicene Creed. We who regularly recite the Creed, Sunday by Sunday, could also have our profession of faith in what, I hesitate to say, is a more attractive form than the Council elders of Nicaea left us, certainly a greater outpouring of praise and thanksgiving coupled with a statement of faith.

Francis' credo is really only the first six verses of Chapter 23 but the whole of it must have been dear to him as he used it as a glorious finale to his gospel plan of life, and it is amazing to find such passion and poetry, richness and balance. It is a remarkable achievement for "the little poor man"; the prayer is so completely and unwaveringly centred on God and humanity but,

surprisingly, it is difficult to say which of the two is the main focus. It refers to the Trinity, to Christ, and to the universe all cast in the form of a hymn to the Trinity.

But whereas in the Creed we humans appear there only in passing on the occasion of the Incarnation and Passion, in Francis' prayer we are as present in every verse as God is. In one sense this act of thanksgiving singles us out as the focus of God's loving attention. The prayer is centred on us, our destiny and our vocation. When Francis speaks of us, he sees us as the objects of God's eternal will. God keeps us always in mind and wishes to have us with Him and so with Francis we can truly say "we thank You for Yourself".

If we follow Francis in this prayer we will gaze on God with awestruck wonder, glimpsing something of the divine immensity of what he and we can see is not something shapeless but a reality showing "holy love" for us: a great depth of love waiting to receive us; that God loves us and in some way cannot do without us. God whose majesty Francis evokes by piling term upon term becomes no abstract deity but the "holy and just" Father of Jesus Christ.

Much more could be said of this prayer of Francis, of its Christological dimensions, of its universal all embracing scope; most beautifully in how he sees that all is swept up into the love of and for the Trinity. He ends his Credo with almost a 'roll-call' of the whole hierarchy of beings, heavenly and earthly to give God thanks and praise. It is a prayer that we can echo, a profession of faith we can assent to and a great hymn of praise to God that we can all join in.

So much of Francis' writings can be found to be of real value to us in our age when we look closely at them. Francis' Rule for Hermitages can be lived today with complete integrity and his prayer from the Earlier Rule can be our prayer and can be our profession of faith today as it was his all those years ago.

Based on 'Francis of Assisi, the Message in His Writings' by Thaddée Matura OFM, (ISBN 1 57659 127 1 The Franciscan Institute, S.Bonaventure NY USA, )

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