



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO FRANCISCANS OF THE FIRST ORDER AND OF THE THIRD ORDER REGULAR

*Clementine Hall
Thursday, 23 November 2017*

[Multimedia]

Dear brothers,

The “Lord Pope”, as Saint Francis called him, welcomes you with joy and in you welcomes the Franciscan brothers who live and work in all the world. Thank you for what you are and for what you do, especially for the poorest and most disadvantaged.

“Let all be called in general ‘Friars Minor’”, we read in the *Regula Non Bullata*.^[1] With this expression, Saint Francis does not speak about something optional for his brothers, but manifests a constitutive element of your life and mission.

In effect, in your form of life, the adjective “minor” qualifies the noun “Friar”, giving to the bond of fraternity its proper and characteristic quality: it is not the same thing to say “friar” and to say “friar minor”. Therefore, when referring to fraternity, it is necessary to keep in mind this typical Franciscan characteristic of fraternal relationship, which demands of you a relationship of “Friars minor”.

From whence came the inspiration to Francis to place minority as an essential element of your fraternity?^[2]

Since Christ and the Gospel were the fundamental option of his life, in all certainty we can say that minority, while not lacking its ascetic and social motivations, was born from contemplation of the incarnation of the Son of God, and is summarized in the image of making oneself small, like a seed. It is the same logic of “becoming poor, though he was rich” (cf. 2 Cor 8:9). The logic of

“renunciation”, which Francis implemented to the letter when he “divested himself of all earthly goods, to the point of nakedness, in order to give himself entirely to God and to his brothers and sisters”.^[3]

The life of Francis was marked by the encounter with the *poor God*, present in our midst in Jesus of Nazareth: a humble and hidden presence that the *Poverello* adores and contemplates in the incarnation, in the Cross and in the Eucharist. On the other hand, we know that one of the evangelical images that most impressed Francis is that of the washing of the feet of the disciples at the Last Supper.^[4]

Franciscan minority is presented for you as a place of encounter and of communion with God; as a place of encounter and of communion with your brethren, and with all men and women; and finally, as a place of encounter and communion with creation.

Minority as a place of encounter with God

Minority characterizes in a special way your relationship with God. For Saint Francis, man has nothing of his own other than his own sin, and is worth as much as he is worth before God, nothing more. Therefore your relationship with Him must be that of a child: humble and trusting and, like that of the publican in the Gospel, aware of his sin. And beware of spiritual pride, of Pharisaic pride: it is the worst form of worldliness.

A characteristic of your spirituality is that of being a spirituality of restitution to God. All the good that is in us and that we can do is a gift from Him, He Who for Saint Francis was God, “all good, the supreme good”,^[5] and all must be restored to the “most high, all powerful, good Lord”.^[6] We do so through praise, that leads us to come out of ourselves to encounter others and to welcome them in our life.

Minority as a place of encounter with brethren and with all men and women

Minority is lived first of all in the relationship with the brothers that God has give us.^[7] How? By avoiding any behaviour of superiority. This means uprooting easy judgments on others and speaking badly of our brothers behind their backs^[8] – this is in the “Admonitions”! – rejecting the temptation to use authority to suppress others; avoiding making others pay for the favours we do for them, while seeing those others do for us as owed to us; turning away from anger and unease at the sin of our brother.^[9]

Minority is lived as an expression of the poverty you have professed,^[10] when one cultivates a spirit of non-appropriation in relations; when one values the positive that is in the other, as a gift that comes from the Lord; when, especially ministers, exercise the service of authority with mercy, as is magnificently expressed in the *Letter to a Minister*,^[11] the best explanation that Francis

offers of what it means to be minor in relation to the brothers entrusted to him. Without mercy there is neither fraternity nor minority.

The need to express your fraternity in Christ ensures that your interpersonal relationships follow the dynamism of charity, so while justice leads you to recognize the rights of each person, charity transcends these rights and calls you to fraternal communion; because it is not rights that you love, but brothers, whom you must welcome with respect, understanding and mercy. Brothers are important, not structures.

Minority must also be lived in relation with all the men and women you encounter in your travels in the world, avoiding with the greatest care any attitude of superiority that may distance you from others. Saint Francis expressed this demand clearly in two chapters of the *Regula non bullata*, where he links the decision not to appropriate anything (to live *sine proprio*) with the benevolent welcome to every person, to the point of sharing life with the most despised, with those who are considered truly the least of society: “Let the friars beware of themselves, wherever they have been ... that they appropriate no place for themselves nor defend it against another. And whoever has come to them, friend or adversary, thief or brigand, let him be kindly received”.^[12] And also, “And they ought to rejoice, when they conduct themselves among vile and despised persons, among the poor and weak and infirm and lepers and those begging along the road”.^[13]

Francis’ words urge you to ask, as a fraternity: where are we? With whom are we? With whom are we in relation? Whom are our favourites? And, given that minority calls not only to the fraternity but each of its members, it is appropriate for each person to carry out an examination of conscience on his own style of life; on his expenses, on his robes, on what he considers necessary, on his own devotion to others, on fleeing from the spirit of caring too much about oneself, also one’s own fraternity.

And please, when you carry out an activity for the “little ones”, the excluded and the least among us, do not do so from a pedestal of superiority. Think rather that all you do for them is a way of recompensing what you have freely received. As Francis admonishes in his *Letter sent to the whole Order*, “Keep nothing of yourselves for yourselves”.^[14] Make a welcoming and available space so that all the minors of your time may enter into your life: the marginalized, men and women who live on our streets, in parks and stations; the thousands of unemployed, young and adults; many sick people who have no access to adequate care; many abandoned elderly; mistreated women; migrants in search of a worthy life; all those who live in the existential peripheries, deprived of dignity and also of the light of the Gospel.

Open your hearts and embrace the lepers of our time and, after having become aware of the mercy that the Lord has used towards you,^[15] use mercy with them, just as your father Saint Francis used it;^[16] and, like him, learn to be “infirm with the infirm, afflicted with the afflicted”.^[17] All this, far from being a vague sentiment, indicates a relationship between people so profound

that, transforming your heart, it will lead you to share their destiny with them.

Minority as a place of encounter with creation

For the Saint of Assisi, creation was “*magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of His infinite beauty and goodness*”.^[18] Creation is “like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us”.^[19]

Today – as we know – this sister and mother rebels because she feels mistreated. Faced with the global degradation of the environment, I ask you as sons of the *Poverello* to engage in dialogue with all creation, giving your voice to praise the Creator, and as Saint Francis did, take particular care over this, overcoming any *economic calculation or irrational romanticism*. Collaborate with various initiatives for the care of our common home, always remembering the close relationship there is between the poor and the fragility of the planet, between economics, development, care for creation and the option for the poor.^[20]

Dear brothers, I renew Saint Francis’ request: *be minor*. May God keep and nurture your minority.

Upon you all I invoke the Lord’s blessing. And please, do not forget to pray for me.

Thank you.

^[1] 6,3: *FF* 23.

^[2] Cf *1Cel* 38: *FF* 386.

^[3] *Letter to the bishop of Assisi for the Inauguration of the Shrine of Renunciation*, 16 April 2017.

^[4] Cf. *Regula non bullata*, 6, 4: *FF* 23. *Admonitions* 4, 2: *FF* 152.

^[5] Praise to God Most High, 3: *FF* 261.

^[6] *Canticle of the Sun*, 1: *FF* 263.

^[7] Cf. *Testament*, 14: *FF* 116.

^[8] Cf. *Admonitions*, 25: *FF* 174.

^[9] Cf. *ibid.*, 11: *FF* 160.

^[10] Cf. *Regula bullata*, 1, 1: *FF* 75; *Admonitions*, 11: *FF* 160.

[11] Cf. *FF* 234-237.

[12] 7, 13-14; *FF* 26.

[13] 9,2 *FF* 30.

[14] 2,29: *FF* 221.

[15] Cf. 1 *Cel* 26: *FF* 363.

[16] Cf. *Testament*: *FF* 110-131.

[17] *Legend of the Three Companions*, 59: *FF* 1470.

[18] Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 12.

[19] *Ibid*, 1.

[20] Cf. *Ibid.*, 15-16.

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