



**Annual Franciscan Federation Conference
Keynote Address – Joanne Schatzlein OSF
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Talk 4

Pilgrimage of Transformation: Strangers No Longer

INTRODUCTION

A **Pilgrimage of Transformation** happens when *“one person sets out on a journey and another returns.”* This echoes a story that Thomas of Celano tells about Francis’ visit to a cave.

“He withdrew for a while from the bustle and the business of the world and tried to establish Jesus Christ dwelling within him...Now since there was a certain man in the city of Assisi whom he loved more than any other because he was of the same age as the other, and since the great familiarity of their mutual affection led him to share his secrets with him, he often took him to remote places, places well suited for counsel, telling him that he had found a certain precious and great treasure...The man of God...would enter the grotto, while his companion would wait for him outside; and filled with a new and singular spirit, he would pray to his Father in secret...He prayed devoutly that the eternal and true God would direct his way and teach him to do his will. He bore the greatest sufferings in mind and was not able to rest until he should have completed in deed what he conceived in his heart...He was afire within himself with a divine fire and he was not able to hide outwardly the ardor of his mind; he repented that he had sinned so grievously ...past evils nor those present gave him no delight...still he had not as yet won full confidence that he would be able to guard himself against them in the future. Consequently, when he came out again to his companion, he was so exhausted with the strain, that one person seemed to have entered, and another to have come out.” Omnibus p. 234.

In his book entitled *Pilgrimage: exploring a great spiritual practice* by Edward Sellner (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books 2004) quoted earlier, he says,

“Pilgrimages change us, touch us at the core; we are not the same when we return to our ordinary lives and daily living. This experience of transformation can happen whether we go halfway around the world or down the block to a local, perhaps somewhat neglected, shrine; whether we travel to foreign lands or out into cemeteries where our loved ones rest from their labors.” P. 14-16

TRANSFORMATION IMAGES AND A STORY

It is **difficult to define transformation** because it is not a static word. It is so much more:

- It is a process...**a life long process**
- It is an **experience**
- A **desire**



- **Sometimes a surprise**
- Often a **purification**
- It is a **more powerful word than conversion...transformation is its outcome.**

IMAGES THAT HELP UNDERSTAND IT

A **sunrise or sunset** that changes the color of clouds, land, buildings, shadows – THE Earth is transformed. Brother Sun can transform us.

Words that describe this transformation: **SPLENDOR, RADIANT**

A **snowfall** ... one that etches every single tiny branch. This past winter in Wisconsin nurtured my Minnesota soul with several snowfalls that lasted, and it was simply awesome to walk through woods and take this incredible moment of transformation in.

Words that describe this would be **REVELATORY, BEAUTY UNLEASHED**

The Human Being – I had the opportunity in April to visit the exhibit *Body Worlds by Guenther Von Hagens*. I wanted to view this because of my past studies in anatomy and physiology. With this knowledge, I wanted to visualize what we could only try to imagine from charts and textbooks in our classes.

The section that moved me most was the exhibit charting out Embryonic development showing how a single cell divides becoming two, and two become four...and cells are set in place that become the heart and lungs and fingers and spine and brain...a human being. Controversy abounds, with legitimate concerns about different groups applying the process created by Von Hagens in unethical ways. But I was convinced that this particular exhibit could produce the voluntary documentation of those who had chosen to donate their bodies for our medical enlightenment.

My experience in the museum was with hundreds of others who walked with hushed respect and a sense of awe and wonder at the workings of a human being, who undergoes transformation every second of its life.

Words to describe this transformation for me would be **MIRACULOUS
FRAGILITY, DYNAMIC, RESPONSIBILITY**

A story about Mom – “She will never change!” After 27 years, my parents divorced, and it was tense, with Mom not wanting to be anywhere near Dad. He wanted to be around Mom, still loving her. We felt “she would never change.” One day we each got a call and an invitation to her home for dinner. Dad wondered what was up! She made a meal of our favorite foods, which we all enjoyed, and then led us to the living room where she apologized to each of us for any way that she may have “fractured” our family...this led to many tears...and to apologies on all of our parts for the ways we too had held attitudes or acted in ways that had hurt each other. “She will never change” Oh really?



In the book *Walk in a Relaxed Manner* Joyce Rupp cautions us not to limit the possibilities of a “transformation of the heart.”

“To be a pilgrim is to be willing to live with the mystery of what will happen both interiorly and exteriorly as one walks day after day after day toward the destination of the sacred site. What happens inside cannot be planned or mapped out in the same way that the physical route is mapped. Becoming a pilgrim means there are no maps of the heart. One simply holds onto the hand of the Great Pilgrim and travels with hope that one day the spiritual benefits of the road will reveal themselves and be understood.” P 40.

Thus Mom’s Banquet of Reconciliation...her Banquet of Transformation!

AGENTS OF TRANSFORMATION

The underlying desire of every pilgrim is to be transformed by their pilgrimage experience. Some agents of this process are:

- **God of course**...as Joyce Rupp calls God, **the Great Pilgrim**
- **Our fellow travelers** – the community of people that we choose to walk our journeys with...some by choice and others not by choice. I think of Francis’ advice in his Letter to the Minister, where he suggests that perhaps that very person that the Minister wants to run away from is in fact “an agent of transformation.”
- **Personal and communal prayer**
- **Openness to everything within and outside** of us that has the “grace power” to transform. (**sunrises, winter snows, human beings**)

TRANSFORMATIVE ATTITUDES

- **Intentionality** Sellnar (previously referred to) says that “**a pilgrim’s journey implies intentionality...a pilgrim is someone who travels with the desire for renewal, wisdom and a change of heart. The focus is on the sacred journey...on deepening their spirituality, not just for themselves but for the families and communities to which we belong.**” P. 27.
- **Hope** – In a dissertation on Franciscan Leadership by **Dr. Peter Holbrook** from Cardinal Stritch University, Pete names **hope** as one of three key elements that contribute to the sustainability of Franciscan Leadership 800 years after the death of the founder. **Hope is expressed in Francis’ own belief in the Goodness of God**, his hope of eternal life and salvation which he passed on to others, his hope and expectancy that allowed others to see a different future than what was being projected for them.



- **Possibility.** I have seen the movie *Pay It Forward* many times, and am ALWAYS struck by Mr. Simonette's (the teacher) assignment to his seventh grade sociology students: **Think of an idea for world change and put it into action. Think of possibilities.** Trevor, one of his students played by Haley Joel Osment took it seriously, searching for possibilities, and coming up with a plan called "Pay it Forward."...only to find out later that Mr. Simonette didn't actually believe in the possibility that people could do good for each other.

TWO MOMENTS OF TRANSFORMATION FOR FRANCIS AND CLARE

For Francis: La Verna

For Francis I believe one place of great transformation for him was at La Verna.

Ilia Delio sees this event in the life of Francis through the lens of St. Bonaventure who believes

- *"that devotion to the humanity of Christ is to lead one to the height of ecstatic union which is union with the Crucified Christ. The mysticism of the historical event, as the mark of Bonaventure's doctrine of contemplation, means that to attain to union with God is to become like Christ, crucified for the sake of the world." P. 137 The Cord.*
- **Bonaventure sees the power of the Spirit being both impressed and expressed** in the marks of the stigmata by the **"finger of the living God."**
- As Ilia goes on to say, *"To attain the height of mystical union is not to transcend the world and become absorbed in God; rather, it is to become, like Francis, an alter Christus, and thus to express the love of the Father through the power of the Spirit. Mystical union is to manifest cruciform love".*

Richard of St. Victor, in his treatise called **The Four Moments of Passionate Burning Love** describes the stages of love as follows: love of self; that enables us to move outside ourselves in love for others; a mystical encounter with God so transformative that one would think this would be the most perfect form of love; but the fourth and most perfect moment is movement beyond this mystical experience of God's love and **back down into the reality of the valley**. This movement of sharing the mystical encounter with others is what Francis does when he leaves La Verna.

This is cruciform love, transformation revealed, Word Made Flesh dwelling in our midst.



Murray Bodo's description of the **Stigmata event** is powerfully described in the docu-drama entitled **The Reluctant Saint**: A compassionate God moves toward a suffering and disillusioned Francis and the moment of convergence, the moment of transformation is what we call stigmata.

One of the first to witness this cruciform love of Francis is **Brother Leo**. He's in trouble on La Verna and is as disillusioned and depressed as his best friend. Francis sees this and calls him over, writing for him the *Blessing* with the Tau slashed right through Leo's name. Transformative, compassionate, burning love.

Michael Cusato has studied the image in which the Tau rests on this Chartula...a head that may be a skull. Given the timing of Francis' visit to La Verna after his trip to the Middle East and his visit with the Sultan, **Michael wonders if perhaps Francis is aware of what is happening in the Middle East with the beginning of yet another crusade and brings this into his prayer, drawing the head of the Sultan himself.** Perhaps it was a prayer that the Sultan convert lest he die without having acknowledged Christ, or perhaps it is a **prayer that his friend the Sultan hold fast to non-violence, in the midst of the incredible violence being done to him.** (p. 300-301) The Cord 57.3

- How do the transformative attitudes of **Intentionality, Hope and Possibility** come into play at La Verna.
- **How does it inform the meaning of the Stigmata?** What are the possibilities of deepening relationships with our Muslim brothers and sisters intentionally and with hope, if Francis was indeed drawing the head of his friend Malek al Kamil?

For Clare: The Death of Francis

Francis dies in 1226. Prior to his death, **Clare is aware of several significant events** that create **fundamental building blocks** upon which Clare will build during the remainder of her lifetime.

- There is the **embrace of the Incarnate Word** in a visible tangible way at **Greccio**
- the **encounter with the Crucified Christ at La Verna.**
- Clare witnesses **Francis' activities as he walks through the most perfect moment of passionate burning love back in the valley**: writing letters of support for **Bernard and Anthony**, exhorting **Clare and her Sisters** to remain faithful to their ideals and setting forth his **Testament** to reiterate what God had called him to.
- In 1225 **Francis comes to San Damiano** and allows Clare to minister to him in his illness. **This alter Christus is physically present after a long absence.** Does Clare witness the writing of his *Canticle of the Creatures*? Besides his writing of *Exhortation to Clare*, what other thoughts does he leave her with?
- **Francis' death alone is transformative.**



After the death of Francis:

- Among his brothers there is a **loss of focus**, the beginning of a huge building project to house Francis' remains, leadership issues with Elias, a fracturing among those who see the need for study and housing and others who want to hold to the original ideals.
- **Hugolino, the Cardinal Protector emerges**, shaping the lives of small women's groups in the area, calling them the Order of Poor Ladies. He engages Clare because he needs her reputation for holiness, but more, he needs the link with the brothers to minister and take care of the sacramental needs of these groups (**cura moniales**)
- **His invitation becomes a defining moment for Clare.** She negotiates an agreement which firmly positions her retention of *Absolute Poverty* and as important to her, a **relationship with Francis' brothers**... Without these assurances, she will decline Hugolino's invitation. He acquiesces reluctantly. These privileges will both be rescinded after Clare's death, and only her sister Agnes will be allowed to implement these privileges in the monastery to which she has been sent during Clare's lifetime.

Clare's Transformation

- This Little Plant of Francis **has also become the One upon whom she has gazed.**
- **Jesus poor and humble resides in the poverty of San Damiano.**
- **Christ crucified** is the clearest **focus in Clare's mirror imagery**
- It is **Christ that awaits her in death.** She dies clutching the Rule of Life that describes all that she believes God had called her to do. **Death was her ultimate transformation into God.**

How do Intentionality, Hope and Possibility filter through Clare's life after the death of Francis?

FOR US

We **can't plan transformation**, nor can we name a specific outcome we desire...that is all mystery.

What we can do is continue to develop those five elements we outlined yesterday from **Doris Donnelley**:

1. We can continue **to nurture and embrace the internal dynamic** of what is going on within us as we make our pilgrimage toward transformation.



2. **Invest ourselves in the process...** truly commit ourselves to the journey.
3. **Allow the journey to affect us...to change us....to transform us.**
4. **Become content with the liminality** of our journeys...seeing it as a rite of passage...in **Victor Turner's** language, a place somewhere between where we were and where we are going.
5. **Value those companions** that accompany us on our pilgrimage... **this non-hierarchical, classless, totally equal body of persons and cosmic creatures who are participants in the transformative process.**

If we **commit to these five elements**, I believe our transformation experience will be

- Filled with **SPLENDOR and RADIANCE** of a sunrise;
- It will be **REVELATORY, BEAUTY UNLEASHED** like newly fallen snow;
- We will experience a **MIRACULOUS FRAGILITY, DYNAMISM and a sense of RESPONSIBILITY** like the ongoing, continuous, transformation of our bodies;
- We will know something of **GOD, becoming more and more the "One Upon Whom We Fix our Gaze."**

I close with a poem by one of our venerable sisters from the past, Margaret Halaska, OSF, entitled *Crossroads on a Footpath*.

**If I would know
just where these paths might go
or to what distant point
I could follow this magnetic mystery,
I would pack my thoughts
within my heart
and pilgrim to the limits of my fantasy,
and I, for sheer delight,
would travel on through courses
deep within the light and shadow
of it all.**

**But must I know the end
for the journey to begin?
Rather, what noble roads to find
when one begins in hope,
and somewhat blind!**

