

Franciscan Federation 2011

Becoming a Sacred Flame: Francis, Clare and John's Gospel Nancy Schreck OSF

Introduction:

Last year when Ramona called to ask if I would be a presenter at this year's conference the first thing I reminded her of is that I am not a scholar of the Franciscan tradition. What I am is a Franciscan educated in Biblical Studies so this is the perspective I will use to look at our topic. My focus will be on the ways the gospel of John can assist us in living our Franciscan life today.

From Michael's excellent presentation yesterday we see more clearly the significance of John's gospel in the life of Francis and Clare. What his presentation does is to give the historical impetus for asking ourselves how we experience John's Gospel and whether or not it causes us to become a sacred flame. So we will draw on some biblical scholarship of our own time to explore the ways this gospel has the potential to turn today's Franciscans into flames of fire.

Returning to one's origins is not simply an abstract archaeological operation but is something vital to do. It is a means of connecting ourselves as far as possible and in a living manner to the experience of our founders. It is in this experience that the institute's proper charism is incarnated by way of example. But knowing and appreciating that fact, we cannot remain there. Our work is a matter of attempting to relive the original charismatic experience rather than to simply study it. This attempt is neither illusory nor presumptuous, for the same Spirit who once gave the charism to the founders, today gives the identical charism to the followers. This means that the grappling with the spiritual understanding today makes possible a living interpretation of the original experience. It is all about the spiritual energy it takes to make the charism live in a new time. (Adapted: Greyfriars Review Vol. 5 1991 Supplement)

Michael Guinan in his book The Franciscan vision and the Gospel of John, gives several instances of the preference Francis had for the gospel of John. He uses the Early Rule Chapter XXIII to give us hints that Francis had a special relationship with the Gospel of John in this way. He looks to the prayer beginning with verse six:

"Because of your love, we humbly beg, the glorious Mother, the most blessed, ever-virgin Mary, Blessed Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael, and all the choirs of the blessed seraphim, cherubim, thrones, dominations principalities, powers, virtues, angels archangels, Blessed John the Baptist, John the Evangelist, Peter, Paul the blessed patriarchs and prophets, the innocents, apostles, evangelists, disciples, the martyrs, confessors and virgins, the blessed Elijah and Henoah, all the saints who were, who will be and who are, to give you thanks for these things... etc.

(Exercise: ask them what they see: share with a partner)

Guinan suggests that the surprise in the list is not only that John the evangelist is included, but that John comes before the great apostles Peter and Paul. Guinan also makes a case for Francis' preference for the gospel of John by reminding us that when Francis is dying he requests the gospel of John be read to him especially John 12 which is the story of Jesus

anointing before the Passover, and John 13 perhaps to chapter 17 which includes the foot washing and in 17 and the great priestly prayer of Jesus. Though it is not always clear as to what actual references Francis made to the gospel and what adornments were added by others, what is significant is that when he was sick he wished to listen to it, and in what was almost his last breath, he asked for this gospel. (Pause for reflection: what gospel passages would you want read to you?)

So certainly our work is to know about the place of John's gospel in the lives of Francis and Clare, but we can't leave it there. We can't stop with being inspired, moved, illumined, and enriched by the Franciscan–Johannine vision. That is just not enough. Rather, we must be transformed by it so that others may also come to see and enjoy this vision as well. For better or worse, the lens they have is the witness of our Franciscan lives in this time and in this place. So my question is: what is there about the Franciscan embrace of John's gospel that could be really transformative for us today? What turns us into fire?

As we know well, the life of the followers of Francis and Clare was formed, organized, pervaded and completed by "the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." The words of the Gospel held the highest place above all other precepts and admonitions and Francis and Clare frequently placed them at the beginning of and within their prescriptions. So what does this mean for us? I say that in the measure we know and live the Gospel, in that measure, we are truly Franciscans. We must follow the example of Francis and Clare listening carefully to hear what God is saying to us in the words of the Gospel heard in a entirely new time.

With this in mind, I have read and re-read two things in preparation for this assembly: The Third Order Regular Rule and the Gospel of John.

In doing so there are some conclusions I have drawn or perhaps I should say questions I have raised. The Volterra Document setting the context for the Rule is filled with intimacy and love talk.

- Paragraph one: "All who love God with their whole heart, with their whole soul, and mind, and with their whole strength and love their neighbor as themselves..."
- Paragraph Two: The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon them and God will make a home and dwelling place with them. (Jn 14:27)
- Paragraph three: We are spouses when the faithful soul is united by the Holy Spirit with our Lord Jesus Christ.

These themes repeat throughout the Rule – just a few examples:

- In regard to new members – let them only be concerned to serve, love, honor and adore God as best they can. (7)
- Let them always make a home and dwelling for the one who is Lord God...(8)
- The brothers and sisters are to be totally conformed to the Holy Gospel. (11)
- The brothers and sisters are to love God with their whole heart, whole soul, mind, and with all their strength and to love their neighbor as themselves. (29)
- Love one another as I have loved you. (23)

And so I can't help but wonder, how does one fall in love like that with God. How does one engage their whole heart? How does one make a home for God? How do we become spouses of the Lord Jesus Christ? How do we become so one with God that we can be sent into the whole world by God to give witness by word and work to God's voice as we heal the wounded,

bind up the bruised, and give ourselves up completely. (29/30) How do get from word to action? How do we do the gospel?

Does the Gospel of John offer any help? Is there something in it as meaningful for us today as for Francis and Clare in their time? What images or stories from our family's favored Gospel could help us? I know and you already know that passages related to the servant who washes the feet, the Lamb, the Good Shepherd, the Word of Father, the Beloved were images that drew Francis and Clare.

But how we get to them in the Gospel of John is important. Unless we understand the whole movement of the gospel it is difficult to make sense of the passages pulled from their context. So for a few minutes let us look to some important background information. This is a gospel that is a pristine theological creation flowing from a genius theologian using the oral traditions in the community in which she/he lived. It is a gospel of great and tender intimacy with God and of radical equality in community. The primary disciple is named "beloved" and the multitude of poetic images and stories come from the heart of someone passionately committed to Jesus Christ. Can you see why this gospel would be so attractive to Francis?

Though by the time of Francis and Clare this gospel is clearly part of the canon of the New Testament, it wasn't always that way and debates about regarding its inclusion which happened quite late in the canon creating process. What made this gospel so dangerous? The focus on the community of equals, and the role of the beloved disciple seemed to be especially problematic.

In understanding this gospel few things are more helpful than an appreciation of the literary techniques the writer uses. These are the techniques of a dramatist, using stories, dialogs, monologs, double meaning words, irony, and foreshadowing to set the stage for profound teaching. All this is for the purpose of calling forth a definitive decision for Christ from those straddling the fence. There were then as now many reasons for being on the fence. Perhaps because the people feared excommunication from the synagogue, or because of issues around the Eucharist, a loyalty pull from other leaders like John the Baptist, or due to the hard sayings of Jesus. So John has a strong emphasis on witnessing to Jesus and on faith in Jesus providing a powerful appeal for a definitive decision concerning Christ and the Christian community. You know as well as I that this would be very attractive to Francis.

Scholars are not really sure who the original audience was but it seems the writing of this gospel had some purpose of warning against synagogue leaders and fortifying the faith of the people by providing them with theological arguments to meet Jewish objection to Christ and Christianity. It also seems to have a purpose of encouraging and strengthening people in a time of persecution and hardship brought upon them by the opposition of the synagogue leaders. (By the way, I assume you know that "the Jews" is not a reference to those who are ethnically Jewish, but rather a reference to those passionately committed to the belief that Jesus is not the Messiah.)

Who would need such a gospel? Jewish Christians whose faith was wavering, who were under attack for believing in Christ and who, because of persecution, were tending to either remain in or return to the synagogue and thereby abandon their faith in Jesus. In brief: Christian Jews who were straddling the fence between the Christian community - a radical discipleship of equals, and the institutions of which they were or had been a part. Is it any wonder John would have Jesus say in 20:31 ... "These are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and that believing you may have life in his name." and in 16:1 'I have

said these things to you to keep you from stumbling... to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues....” Or in 10:16 “I have other sheep that are not of this fold, I must bring them also and they will listen to my voice, so there will be one flock and one shepherd.” (Does this sound like a familiar struggle?)

This is a gospel for those who live in ambiguity, who are trying to sort through difficulties, whose faith and institutional life do not always agree, who desire light and clarity and find in reality a lot of murkiness. What Francis found in this gospel were some things to hold on to. Grounding things: things like “the Word did become flesh,” and “Jesus is a Shepherd who will lay down life for the flock,” that “there is a way and truth and life,” and that no matter what we must keep “washing each other’s feet.”

So back to the question of how we get to this place of intimacy with God, become spouses of our Lord Jesus Christ, and develop a commitment to an inclusive community that seem to be hallmarks of what I believe was articulated in the Gospel of John and found so attractive by Francis. Is there a path that John gives us?

I believe the way revolves around something not often given attention and as far as I can tell is not referenced in the Franciscan tradition. However it holds great significance in the gospel of John.

The Samaritan woman at the well:

Several reasons make me chose this portion of John’s gospel: It is the best example of a spousal relationship I can find in the New Testament. Secondly with the TOR charism of conversion it is a significant wisdom story regarding this process. This is a pivotal story of the spiritual journey. Thirdly, I am also led here because of an important line in John 17 – this is what Jesus prays for and Francis quotes: “for those who believe in me through their word.” This is a story of the revelation of the word of God.

By entering a Samaritan village and speaking with this woman, Jesus has crossed ethnic, religious and gender boundaries. The Samaritans were seen as ethnically impure, having intermarried with colonizers after the Assyrian invasion in 722 BC. They were religiously suspect, worshiping in a different manner and having their own version of the Torah. That “the Jews use nothing in common with the Samaritans” is an understatement, for there was strong animosity between the two groups. “Jews do not associate with Samaritans.” The story was at least partially included in the gospel to establish the full equality in the community between Samaritan Christians and Jewish Christians. We can’t get to an understanding of the inclusive community of foot washing, Francis’ movement toward the Sultan, his embrace of the leper without the boundary crossing wisdom of this story. And finally this is a story full of intimacy images, of marriage, and eros. We are helped in our journey to intimacy with God in its telling.

In exploring the context of this story we see a movement from disbelief through inadequate belief to more adequate belief. Early in chapter two the people in the temple are openly skeptical about the signs Jesus performs, later in the chapter Nicodemus believes because of Jesus’ signs but this is not an adequate concept of Jesus. By chapter four we have this example of someone coming to know Jesus as the Christ in ever deepening stages of intimacy. As I talk about this your job is twofold: to think about what you know about the conversion journeys of Francis or Clare, and to be in touch with your own movements toward intimacy with God and how revelation happens for you?

With all the stories we have heard about this woman we are not conditioned to think of her as a model for the spiritual journey. In interpretations of this story the woman experiences classic trivialization, marginalization, sexual demonization. And in fact I would guess because of the misinformation about her so called husbands I assume we tend to think of her more as the converted sinner rather than a mystic in search of an ever deepening oneness with God. Now this is not to say that it is unimportant to have repentant sinners model conversion, but in this case the type of conversion modeled is from good to better, conversion as growth that comes from a long and arduous spiritual search. In reality this woman is one of the most sharply drawn characters in the gospels. The intense symbolism surrounding her should warn the reader against sexual literalism and focus our attention on issues of intimacy with Christ. The struggle for clarity in knowing what we believe is one of life's great sacred works. The process is deep and long. It is about knowing ourselves well enough to know our hunger and thirst and what satisfies us. This gospel passage is a reflection on that journey to true worship – deep relationship with God. This is what should be apparent to us as soon as we see the setting at the well. So let us look at the encounter of this woman with Jesus. From the outset the conversation is theological and religious. She begins by questioning Jesus' break with Jewish tradition. He is speaking publicly to a woman and asking to share utensils with a Samaritan.

The stages of the story:

Setting: at a well: this is a type story, A story recounting the meeting of future spouses who then play a central role in salvation history: Abraham's servant finding Rebecca the future wife of Isaac at the well of Nahor, Jacob meeting Rachel at the well in Haran, Moses receiving Zipporah as his wife at the well in Midia. In this story Jesus meets the woman at the most famous well of all, Jacob's well in Samaria, that is in ancient Israel. Jesus has already been identified at Cana (chapter 2) as the true bridegroom, and by John the Baptist as the "true bridegroom to whom God has given the New Israel as bride." (Jn 3:27-30.) Now the new bridegroom who assumes the role of God the bridegroom of ancient Israel, comes to claim Samaria as an integral part of the Christian community. The marital theme is underscored by the male female dynamic of the scene and the conversation between the woman and Jesus about marriage, as well as the abundant fertility symbolism of the story: well, water, vessel, fruitful fields, sowing and reaping. So we do well to understand the image of the Samaritan as the spouse / bride of Christ, following the allusions to the wells of betrothal of the Old Testament.

The conversation with Jesus: It is important to note that the discussion from the very first moment is religious and even theological. The woman does not introduce extraneous theological issues as a smokescreen to distract Jesus from probing into her shameful sex life as some contend. She begins by questioning Jesus' breaking with Jewish tradition, first by speaking in public to a woman and asking to share utensils with a Samaritan, and second by his implication, in the offer of living water that he is on par with the patriarch Jacob. (Characteristic of Samaritan theology was its Mosaic-patriarchal tradition as opposed to the Davidic monarchical tradition of the Jews) Thus for the woman, Jesus' implicit claim to be on par with the patriarch Jacob has enormous theological implications which she will explore. So the journey to the well is a theological necessity, and the great revelation happens at noon, which the John's passion is the time of the revelation of Jesus to all at the hour of his death.

Immediately after the exchange on the five husbands, to which we will return in a moment, the woman recognizes Jesus, whom she had at first identified as merely a man, and a Jew, and now as a prophet, and she asks him where true worship is to take place. To paraphrase we could ask: How does one get to real intimacy with God – how are we able to say "my God and my all." According to Samaritan theology true worship was to take place on Mt. Gerizim not in

Jerusalem as the Jews believed. In addition the Messiah would not be a descendant of David but a prophet like Moses (Deut. 18:18-19) who upon his return would **reveal all things** (remember this) and would restore true worship, not in the temple of Jerusalem, but in Israel. (Northern Kingdom) So the woman is exploring carefully the identity of Jesus who has indicated his affinity with the patriarchs and his prophetic capacity to “tell her all things.” She wants to know where he stands on true worship, meeting God. Jesus then transcends both the Jewish claim and the Samaritan claim in favor of worship in spirit and in truth. And the connection is made. Jesus confirms her intuition and reveals himself to her as the messiah. “*Ego eimi*” – that is using the Samaritan’s preference for God. So we have the superabundant fulfillment of expectations.

Five Husbands: The woman has questioned Jesus on virtually every significant tenet of Samaritan theology and then the exchange about the husbands occurs. It is not a prelude to the discussion or a distraction from it, but in the midst of it. If we follow the story as one about desire for true worship and intimacy with God, understand the type scene, and know that in prophetic literature adultery/idolatry symbolism is prevalent for speaking of Israel’s infidelity to God, then conversation about “husbands” would be appropriate. The people’s infidelity to the Mosaic covenant was symbolized by its acceptance of the worship of the false gods of five foreign tribes. The five conquering tribes referred to in 2 Kgs.17:13-34; Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath. Sepharvaim) Samaria’s belief was tainted by false worship and therefore even the “husband” she now has is not the completion of the relationship. The five prepared the way. This image of five husbands also provides a sense that conversion and growth happen in stages and over time. As we move through and grow with what happens in our lives we are able to move from what is “false” to that which is more and more true, from darkness to dawning light, from that which is immature to more mature relationship, always on a journey into God. So the question is do you know your five husbands. Can you name your stages of growth in intimacy with God, in understanding of your beliefs etc.

The entire dialogue between Jesus and the woman is the “wooing” of Samaria and us to full covenant fidelity by Jesus, the new bridegroom. It has nothing to do with the woman’s private moral life but with the covenant life of the community. Nowhere in the fourth gospel is there a dialog of such theological depth and intensity. It teaches us about the process of gradually experiencing Jesus’ self revelation even as she and we reveal ourselves to him. The whole thing could not have been more artistically constructed:

In the final scene the woman leaves her water jar, which is a symbol of the abandonment of her ordinary life to follow Jesus and become an apostle. This is just as the fishermen left their nets, and the tax collectors their tables, only somehow we see it with them and miss it with her. Don’t you wonder why! She goes into town and first says to the people “Come and see the one who told me everything I have ever done.” We mistakenly think this is about her secret sex life, and miss that fact that the Samaritans believed that when the Messiah came the Messiah would be the one to “reveal” all things.

The story concludes with the line: “Many Samaritans believed in him because of the woman’s testimony.” Or a better translation is “Many Samaritans believed through the word of the woman bearing witness.” Remember the connection I made earlier to John 17 “for those who believe in me through their word.” The effectiveness of her ministry is that townspeople “came to Jesus” which is John’s expression for “beginning to believe.” And then they entreat Jesus to “remain with them” which in John is a term for “union with Jesus. These new believers are presented as coming to full faith. The pattern is the same, they are brought on the word of another, and come to believe because of Jesus’ own words. This is what Francis desired in the life of the

community, that the members would be the word of the one who was the Word. That the brothers and the sisters would bear witness to the word made flesh.

By the way this is profoundly unsettling to the male disciples who see themselves as privileged associate of Jesus but we won't take time to explore that reality.

Now we will turn to some other stories in John. It is no surprise to me that Francis would be attracted to the Good Shepherd story, the foot washing and the passion. These stories capture his astounding insight into the depth, and height, the width and length of the incarnation. They do so by giving expression to what Francis experienced in living among those who were poor. I believe an appreciation of these Johannine passages comes right from his experience of being a good shepherd and washing the sore and broken bodies of those with leprosy, and from experiencing the pain and suffering of those who were poor - who were attracted to the passion because it gave expression and meaning to their lives. Where you stand determines what you see! We know that among people living in poverty today there is often an emphasis is on the passion of Jesus with much less attention paid to the resurrection. In wealthier places there is often great stress on the resurrection with discomfort around and less attention to the passion. Joel Osteen with his preaching and books titles such as *Your Best Life Now*, *It's your Time*, and *Become a Better You* is a typical example of this perspective. Resurrection without death is a falsehood; one without the other is a denial of Christ. Those who are poor need to be evangelized with a word of hope but resurrection has to come out of death and is most credible on the lips and from the hearts of those who have paid the price and gone through the suffering to another place. Those who are rich need to be evangelized with honesty about the reality of suffering.

So with this in mind let us briefly touch on two stories: First the foot washing. The context and pervading spirit of this story is love. The word appears thirty one times in chapters 13-17, and just six times in chapter 1-12. In the foot washing Jesus shows the great extent of his love. No doubt for Francis this was a story not only about Jesus love for the disciples but that of Francis for the brothers and beyond them for the brothers and sisters the little poor ones who filled his days. The story articulates Francis' desire to love completely; meaning 'fully' and 'to the end of his life' just as Jesus did.

In the story Jesus "takes off" his outer garment. The word "tithemi" is used here which is not the usual word for this action. Used elsewhere it has the sense of "laying down of life," not laying down an item of clothing. This is the same word used in the story of the Good Shepherd who "lays down his life for the sheep." Then Jesus washes feet, and we might note that he washes the feet of the one that will betray him. Jesus has no illusions about the fragility of his disciples. One is obstinate the other will strike him down. This heightens the impact of Jesus gesture and almost defies human understanding. An amazing expression of limitless love! Sharing in the divine essence is what leads Jesus to wash feet because as Jesus says in Jn. 5:19 Jesus does what he sees God doing. What I think Francis sees in this action is incarnation, the poor humble God bending low in service. It is the desire of Francis' own heart.

With the outer garment removed Jesus is left with his tunic. Now the image is that of the clothing of a slave ready to serve. Obviously this is not an image of the master and teacher that many are comfortable with. There is a Jewish text that says that washing feet is something a Gentile slave could be required to do, but not a Jewish slave. It was considered too menial for a Jewish slave and was usually reserved for the lowliest slaves of the household. Might we say the Friars Minor. On the other hand foot washing was also something that wives did for husbands, children did for parents, and disciples did for teachers. A level of intimacy is involved

here. (example of my mother washing the feet of my dying father, and their grandson Adam and his wife Jena using this ritual in their marriage.) The one into whose hands God had given all, now takes the disciples' feet into his hands to wash them. So we have images of an unimaginable reversal of roles, and real intimate love.

The story ends with the call to wash each other's feet. The community is to manifest the love of God revealed through serving one another with no vestige of pride or position. Not only has Jesus chosen fragile and failing disciples but he sends them out as his representatives. Isn't this the desire that burns in Francis and Clare's heart? They, as well as the original disciples, are to repeat in their lives what Christ has done, not as a moral performance but in imitation of the self gift offered by Christ. Once again knowledge flows into action. This is a most profound revelation of the heart of God. God is revealed in a love that surpasses all imaginable ways of loving.

Even more briefly, I want to offer just a word about the Good Shepherd. Again perspective is important. Think of the life of the Franciscans among those who are most pushed to the margins of society, those with no one to care for them. Can't you image that an image of God as a shepherd would move the hearts of those standing and serving people with leprosy, and every other sort of malady that pushed them from the care of others. This is a shepherd willing to lay down his life for such people, who will protect them, and will provide what is needed for life. This shepherd will make a way for them, walking ahead of them. And when this shepherd speaks the people will hear the kindness in 'his' voice and will respond. This is a shepherd who knows the human condition of wanting to separate the flock into the good and bad, the deserving and undeserving, the valued and not valued, and this shepherd claims that there is really only one flock, one people of God. This is a shepherd in the tradition of Micah: "And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great,...and he shall be the one of peace. (5:3-5) and that of Ezekiel and he (the shepherd) shall feed them; he shall feed them and be their shepherd. (34:23) Wouldn't that image of God be music to the ear and sustenance for the soul of ones living among those who were cast aside.

Just as truly as the woman encountered Jesus at the well, Francis, Clare and the generations of brothers and sisters who came after them encountered Jesus in the gospel. So in the prologue we don't just hear about the Word, we encounter the Word who is God. Imagine that is what our tradition says to us. Imagine that! We meet God. When we hear the story of the Good Shepherd we encounter the one who lays down life for us, whose voice we know, whose care we feel. When we meet the humble foot washer we literally meet Christ who invites us to generous service. For Franciscans the truth of the gospel is not a thing to be known but a living person to be followed, a life to be lived with this person Christ.

Conclusion: Francis was a person of the gospel par excellence, a living symbol of the incarnation of the Word of God. His life and that of Clare and so many of our Franciscan ancestors allow us to glimpse believers in direct contact with the gospels. "Francis," Marcel Daval says, "hears, ponders, and chews over the gospel. He receives it within himself as a presence that moves him interiorly and leads him along new paths. Francis received the word he heard in the liturgy, he savored it, for days, months, years. Finally it dwelt in him as a presence, a companion on his journey, constantly inviting him to bring his life into harmony and conformity with the demands of the Gospel. Thomas of Celano (2 Cel.102) tells us that "He (Francis) sometimes read the Sacred Books, and whatever he once put into his mind he wrote indelibly in his heart... his heart would mull over it with constant devotion." Truly, Celano says "he was no deaf hearer of the gospel." (1Cel 22) T Desbonnets notes that: "After blessed

Francis read the gospel or listened to it he always kissed the gospel out of the greatest reverence for the Lord.” (Assise et las ermitages.) So this was not an empty word, and as a result Francis, and again so many of our family ancestors, becomes a word given for the world. This is the grace of our origins

Now what about for us: The Mirror of Perfection says: “Blessed is that religious who has no pleasure and delight except in the most holy words and deeds of the Lord, and with these leads people to God with joy and gladness. (1 MP 96) Isn’t that what the Samaritan woman did!

Our task is to discover how we too become persons of the gospels, but one of our challenges is that it is difficult to remain in regular contact with scripture. It is difficult not just to be acquainted with the gospel but to become through it a person in love with God. The work is to sit, not before a mere text, but before the mystery of a living presence. Real encounter with Christ in the gospel must lead to loving awareness of God. It is to be an entering into communion with the one who desires to enter into communion with us. It is to participate in the exchange as did the woman at the well with Jesus. And to be ready because such a loving encounter always demands a response. Bonaventure uses the word: *redamare*” to return love for love.”

A caution: Unbelief can exist in the presence of great religious knowledge. We must be about surrendering ourselves into the mystery; about giving our hearts, living for, belonging to, becoming one with. So we must ask ourselves honestly: what efforts am I making in my life to understand the Christ mystery. Am I anxious to encounter Christ? Do I read scripture merely carry out something prescribed or it is about experiencing God. This is what happened to Francis when he pondered the gospel: He was, we are gradually enlivened with its power, its light.

Really opening ourselves to the scripture is about letting God lead us into a landscape where we don’t know everything, don’t have to know everything, indeed may be emptied of nearly everything we think we think we know. But it is also about giving ourselves to that place that frees us to receive the word, the wisdom, the clarity about who we are and what God is calling us to do, thus we drenched with discernment.

I want to close with a dangerous prayer for you: “May the love of the word that inhabited Francis and Clare dwell also in you, drawing you into its mysteries and inspiring your actions for the life of the world.”

Questions:

What are some of your reasons for straddling the fence when it comes to following Jesus?

Who/what are your five husbands? What are the stages of growth in your ability to receive the revelation of Jesus and to be intimate with God.

What is the water jar you leave behind as a symbol of your willingness to be a disciple of Jesus.

How does your living among people who are poor change your perspective when reading the gospel?

How do you become a person of the gospels? What efforts are you making in your life to understand the Christ mystery? Are you anxious to encounter Christ?

Do you read scripture to merely carry out something prescribed for you or it is about seeing /experiencing God? What is this experience like for you?

If you were to list a string of quotes from John's gospel that shape your life what would they be?

Francis was immersed in and indebted to John. Are you? How is John's gospel transformative for you?

Resources:

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