



Celebrating the Gift of the Stigmata 1224-2024

Texts

1 Celano 94-95, *FF* 484-486; *Major Legend* 13: 1-10, *FF* 1222-1236; 1-2, *FF* 261; *Blessing for Brother Leo*, *FF* 262; *2 Celano* 49, *FF* 635.

The hagiographic sources tell us that Francis of Assisi, after an intense period of apostolic activity, withdrew to Mount La Verna to carry out a Lenten period of fasting and prayer, as was his custom. It was precisely in this context of silence and prayer that the Poverello received the visit from the winged Seraphim, because only in silence can one hear and be open to the words of the other. On Mount La Verna, the profound desire that motivated the Poverello to follow Christ and to conform himself totally to Him was realized in his encounter with the Crucified One, who imprinted the signs of His love on Francis' heart and body. St. Bonaventure summarizes Francis' experience in this way: "[The] true love of Christ transformed the lover into His image" (*Major Legend* 13: 5, *FF* 1228). The encounter with the Beloved became a song of praise; therefore, after his encounter with the Crucified One, Francis composed the *Praises of God*, a prayer which sprang from a heart in love, totally focused on the divine "You": "You are the holy Lord God Who does wonderful things. You are strong. You are great. You are the most high" (*Praises of God* 1-2, *FF* 261).

In celebrating the Centenary of the Gift of the Stigmata as a Franciscan Family, we are invited to restore the dimension of prayerful and contemplative silence in our daily lives, the silence that places us before the essential, that lets us recognize our desire for the infinite that resides in our hearts, that allows us to listen to ourselves, to others and to God. In fact, even today, the Poverello is presented as a person who made listening a way of life: "Saint Francis heard the voice of God, he heard the voice of the poor, he heard the voice of the infirm and he heard the voice of nature. He made of them a way of life. My desire is that the seed that Saint Francis planted may grow in the hearts of many" (*Fratelli tutti* 48).



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After receiving the sacred stigmata, “Francis came down from the mountain, bearing with him the likeness of the Crucified, depicted not on tablets of stone or on panels of wood carved by hand, but engraved on parts of his flesh by the finger of the living God” (*Major Legend* 13: 5, *FF* 1228). Moreover, just as the finger of God touched Francis, so, Francis went forth to touch the poor, the sick and the needy, to transmit that divine love to them. Francis’ meeting with the Crucified One prompted him to meet those who had been crucified throughout history, those whose pain he wished to alleviate. We see this in St. Bonaventure’s account of the man who was suffering from cold: “Burning with the fire of divine love, he stretched out his hand and touched him. A marvelous thing happened! At the touch of his sacred hand, which bore the burning coal of the Seraph, the cold fled altogether and the man felt great heat within and without, as if he had been hit by a fiery blast from the vent of a furnace” (*Major Legend* 13: 7, *FF* 1231). Remembering and celebrating Francis being touched by the Crucified One inspires us to come out of ourselves and go forth “touching Christ’s suffering flesh in others” (*Gaudete et exsultate* 37) at the same time, we allow ourselves to be touched and challenged by the dramatic instances of pain and suffering we see afflicting so many of our brothers and sisters around the world.

Our being in Christ

“I bear the marks of Jesus on my body” (Gal 6:17).

Objective

To renew the way we live our common Christian vocation, in order to achieve authentic conformation to the poor and crucified Christ, so as to bear the stigmata of his presence in ourselves.

Activities

- Revitalize the time we reserve for encountering the Lord, those moments already present in our personal lives.
- Realize the value of silence as a fundamental condition for listening to God, ourselves and others.
- Use the ascetic paths that the Church and our Franciscan tradition offer us, so that our desires, purified of any form of selfishness, may be centered solely on God.

“Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give” (Mt 10:8).

Objective

To deepen the culture of generosity and giving freely, so that it characterizes our life together in a meaningful way.

Our being brothers and sisters





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Our being in communion

Activities

- Foster an attitude of true dialogue in our families and fraternities, which allows listening, understanding, knowledge and mutual acceptance.
- Encourage concrete gestures of selfless service, which express and realize the gift of ourselves.
- Be prudent with our words and judgments, so that they always “touch” others with mercy and compassion.

“By his wounds we were healed” (Is 53:5).

Objective

To dedicate our lives, as members of the Church, witnessing to the merciful love that flows from the Crucified One.

Activities

- Foster making time to listen to and welcome young people, those whom life has tossed aside, those who are excluded and minorities
- Collaborate with the local Church to make it an “outgoing Church” one that reaches out to all those who have strayed from the faith, the needy and the least among us.
- Support ecumenical and interreligious initiatives, trying to contribute to the “healing” of the wounds that hinder communion.

“The Lord Himself led me among [the lepers] and I showed mercy to them” (*Testament 2; FF 110*).

Objective

To allow ourselves to be touched and challenged by the many instances of pain and suffering we see in the places where we live and work.

Activities

- Practice the art of contemplating Christ in the sufferings and difficulties of the people we meet every day.
- Gently and devotedly tend to the wounded bodies and spirits of all those in our fraternities and neighborhoods who are afflicted and hopeless.
- Promote encounters with those who do not believe in God or who profess no religion, encouraging common initiatives aimed at helping the poor and the needy.

Our being in the world

