

# Conversion and Reconciliation

Rule, Art. 7. United by their vocation as brothers and sisters of penance, and motivated by the dynamic power of the gospel, let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the gospel itself calls conversion. Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily.

On this road to renewal the sacrament of reconciliation is the privileged sign of the Father's mercy and the source of grace.

## General Constitutions, Article 13

1. *Rule 7* Secular Franciscans, called in earlier times "the brothers and sisters of penance," propose to live in the spirit of continual conversion. Some means to cultivate this characteristic of the Franciscan vocation, individually and in fraternity, are: listening to and celebrating the Word of God; review of life; spiritual retreats; the help of a spiritual adviser, and penitential celebrations. They should approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation frequently and participate in the communal celebration of it, whether in the fraternity, or with the whole people of God.

2. In this spirit of conversion, they should live out their love for the renewal of the Church, which should be accompanied by personal and communal renewal. The fruits of conversion, which is a response to the love of God, are the works of charity in the interactions with the brothers and sisters.

3. Traditional among Franciscan penitents, penitential practices such as fasting and abstinence should be known, appreciated, and lived out according to the general guidelines of the Church.

## Conversion <sup>1</sup>

### Conversion

Judeo-Christian Scriptures describe conversion as having two parts:

- Turning away from sin—metanoia/repentance
- Turning to God—epistrophe/enlightenment

### Spirituality of Conversion

- Not easy to grasp, is complex process of transformation
- Involves identifying our biases and clarifying through questioning
- Mystery of God's grace acting in our lives
- Ways of looking at conversion: personal biography, insights from Scripture, Sacraments and Liturgy, insights from theology

### Aspects of Conversion

- Conversion is symbolized as JOURNEY of TRANSFORMATION led by Spirit of God
- Communal experience—encouragement and witness
- On-going process, celebrated in stages with Eucharist as highpoint
- Conversion is a lifetime experience of transformation

### As Relates to Franciscan Vocation <sup>2</sup>

- Goal is closer union with God, which was envisioned for us before time began
- Grace to live out this call is a free gift of God to all of us
- Turning back towards God (metanoia) means being open to inner promptings of the Spirit and acting upon them

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<sup>1</sup> Most of the bullets in this section come from Pihokker, Ron (2011) *Penitence and Conversion* (document Conversion – 3-23-2011).

<sup>2</sup> Baker, Teresa, SFO (2011). *The Rule of the SFO* (document The Rule of the SFO – 3-23-2011), p24.

## Conversion and Reconciliation

### Penance and Reconciliation <sup>1</sup>

#### Penance <sup>3</sup>

- The virtue which enables us to acknowledge sins with true contrition and a firm purpose of amendment
- Fundamental to this is confidence in God's mercy and forgiveness
- Includes determination to practice mortification that will erase effects of sin and strengthen our resolve to turn away from sin in the future
- In this way we are more perfectly confirmed to Christ, Who suffered and died for our sins

#### Order of Penitence in History

Developed from early form of Sacrament of Penance

- Received as one time opportunity to be reconciled with the community
- Public Sin—Public Penance
- Once readmitted to the community, person received into Order of Penitence
- This signifies a lifetime commitment to live in a very strict and rigorous penitential lifestyle, which was designed to assist one to remain faithful
- Eventually evolved Voluntary Penitents seeking "perfection"—origin of SFO as St. Francis "refounds" Penitents

#### Five Fundamental Elements of Penitential Lifestyle <sup>4</sup>

- To love God
- To love our neighbor
- To resist sinful tendencies of our fallen nature
- To receive the body of Christ in the Eucharist
- To act or live in conformity with our conversion

#### Reflection Error! Bookmark not defined.

- What defines your life of penance?
- Do you *do* penance, or *do you live* penance?
- How malleable are you in the hands of God?
- What holds you back?

<sup>3</sup> *Catholic Encyclopedia*, (1991). Published by *Our Sunday Visitor*. Stravinskis, Rev. Peter M. J., editor, p740.

<sup>4</sup> St. Francis of Assisi (~1210-1215). *Prologue: Exhortation of St. Francis to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance*, para 1.