**Saint Katharine Drexel Region**

**Monthly Regional Spiritual Assistant Reflections**

**September 2023**

**Fr. Francis Sariego, OFM Cap.**

***Let us desire nothing else, let us wish for nothing else,***

***let nothing else please us and cause us delight, except our Creator and redeemer and Savior,***

***the one true God, Who is fullness of Good, all Good, every Good, the true and Supreme Good,***

***Who alone is merciful and gentle, delectable and sweet,***

***Who alone is holy, just and true, holy and right,***

***Who alone is kind, innocent, pure, from Whom***

***and through Whom and in Whom***

***is all pardon, all grace, all glory ...***

***Therefore, let nothing hinder us, nothing separate us or come between us.***

***Let us all, wherever we are ...***

***Glorify and exalt, magnify and give thanks to the Most High and supreme eternal God.***

***Amen.***

**(Saint Francis of Assisi)**

Monthly daily excerpts are from the Franciscan Sources and the thought for the day from various writers.

**Excerpts continue from *the Tribulations***

**1 -** In his presence then, Blessed Francis said to the brothers: “Christ called me, an unlearned and simple man, to follow the foolishness of His cross. He said to me: ‘I want you to be a new fool in the world and in word and deed to preach the foolishness of my cross; to look to me, both you and all your brothers, and to be joined to me, without any examples from the Rules of Augustine or Benedict or Bernard.’ But you! You wish to follow your own ideas and your learning and drag me along: in the end your learning will put you to shame.” – **Joy is the infallible sign of the presence of God**.

**2 -** And turning to the Lord Cardinal he said: “These wise brothers of mine, whom you praise, think that with their human prudence they can deceive God, you, and me as they deceive and mislead themselves. They invalidate and trample under foot what Christ is saying and has said to them through me for the salvation of their souls and the good of the whole religion. I do not say and have never said anything of myself, but only what I have received from Him, with conviction of spirit, through His grace and goodness alone. – **We are all strings in the concert of God’s joy**.

**3 -** But they, to the great peril of their souls, prefer their own mind to the mind of Christ and their own will to the will of God. They govern themselves badly and they govern the others who believe them badly as well. They do not build: they try to overturn and destroy what Christ out of sheer goodness and charity has determined to plant and to build in me and in them for the sure salvation of our souls and the building up of the whole Church.” – **Those who bring sunshine to the lives of others cannot keep it from themselves.**

**4 -** The force and power of his words changed the mind of the Lord Cardinal, and he recognized that what he was saying was absolutely true. He called together the brothers who had persuaded him to present their proposals to Saint Francis. He said to them: “Brothers, listen to me. Watch yourselves. Do not deceive yourselves. Do not be ungrateful for the gift of God. God really is in this man, and Christ and His Spirit speak in him. Whoever hears him does not hear a man, but God. Whoever rejects him rejects God, not man. Humble your hearts and obey him if you wish to please God. If you offend him, thinking and acting contrary to his commands and counsels, you will deprive yourselves of the fruit of salvation and of your vocation. – **Following after God is the desire of happiness**.

**5 -** You will lessen the state of your religion. You will darken your hearts, wrapped in darkness in your many offenses and faults. The living word of God comes from his mouth and, as the Apostle says, it is more penetrating than a two-edged sword. He is not ignorant of the cunning of Satan. No, he reaches even the secret intentions and thoughts, satanic and human. He cannot be deceived by human tricks because he has in him the Spirit of God who searches minds and hearts and even the depths of God.” – **To reach God is happiness itself**.

**6 -** Before leaving, the Lord Cardinal preached the word of God to all there, both the brothers who had gathered in a great multitude for the chapter, to the devout persons there, and the people of the city of Assisi. He was a wise man and led a good and upright life. After wisely, eloquently, and effectively preaching for the edification of souls and the correction of conduct, at the end of his sermon he turned to complimenting, commending, and praising the brothers. – **Joy is prayer. Joy is strength. Joy is love**.

7 - He extolled their life and perfection with repeated praise, in an effort to attract and inflame all the people present to reverence and respect for the brothers and their holy religion. When the sermon was finished, Francis knelt before the Lord Cardinal and asked both for his blessing and his permission to say a few words to the brothers and the people in his presence. – **Joy is a net of love by which you can catch souls**.

**8 -** Having received the blessing, he spoke to all of them: “Out of the great good will and charity he shows to everyone, especially toward my brothers and religion, our revered Father the Lord Cardinal has been greatly deceived. He supposes and believes that there is great holiness in us, unique virtue, and love of perfection. But it would not be right for us to provide the occasion for falsehood and lies. – **Religion can be defined as the power which makes us joyful about the things that matter**.

**9 -** Both you and he would be deceived if you believed in that perfection and excellence that he preached to you about us: it would be an occasion of harm and great danger, both to you and to us. We are ungrateful to God for our vocation; we do not have the works and accomplishments of real poor and humble men, or real lesser Brothers, and we are not striving to have them as we promised. I have only one wish: that the Lord Cardinal and all of you may know the works, words, and desires which Lesser Brothers ought to have and demonstrate, so that you are not deceived about them, and they may not deceive and mislead themselves and you as well. – **God never ruffles the joy of his children, except to prepare them for a certain, far greater joy.**

**[Future Failings]**

**10 -** “You will see that the Lesser Brothers do not persuade the novices whom they receive to give all they have to the poor according to form of the Gospel as they promised, but rather suggest to them that they save something for books, for the church, or some reason or other, for themselves, or for the needs of the brothers. You will see brothers acquiring material goods beyond their daily bodily needs. – **One of Satan’s biggest lies is that sin adds to human happiness**.

**11 -** You will see them begging money or coins for themselves and their places or for building churches, and accepting legacies and inheritances from you for whatever reason or pretense. Then you will know they are deceived and misled, because the Lesser Brothers have been sent by Christ to demonstrate His poverty and humility more by their deeds than by words. – **When we commit ourselves, easily and readily, to God’s way, and live in His will, we will find our peace**.

**12 -** “You will see them abandon poor little places, worthless and small, located far from the world, and exchange them and buy beautiful and luxurious places inside villages and towns, under the pretext that these are for preaching and for your benefit. You will see them dismiss holy prayer and devotion to apply themselves to study and the acquisition of books, the gaining of burial rights, wishing for and getting abundantly the use of all things. To get and hold onto all these things they will seek privileges from the Roman Curia and bring lawsuits based on the rights of such privileges. – **The greatest honor you can give to God is to live gladly because of the knowledge of his love**.

**13 -** At that time, open your eyes and watch yourselves. Do not follow them or listen to them. Such men will be Lesser Brothers in name only. By word and deed they attack and destroy, in themselves and others, the poverty and humility which they promised to the Lord. Through them much evil will happen in the religion and in the Church. – **If our joy gives honor to God, then it is our duty to be joyful**.

**14 -** “I tell you these things before they happen so that both you and they may be on guard against the snares of demons and the wickedness of evil men and may avoid future evils, for times of many tribulations and deceptions are approaching. The first sign of all these things, which will soon appear, is that the brothers will turn from love and observance of the life and Gospel of Christ. For neither learning nor wisdom nor eloquence will draw the world to Christ, but only a pure and holy way of living and perfect observance of the commands and counsels of Christ.” – **Those who have much are often greedy while those who have little usually share**.

**15 -** Then the Lord Cardinal said to him: “Brother Francis! Why have you nullified my sermon? Why are you predicting such great imperfections about your brothers, in your religion?” Saint Francis said to him: “I have honored your preaching by telling the truth about me and my brothers with restraint. I have also spared myself and them, by setting the word of truth as an obstacle against ruin and wishing, on this occasion, to contrast your public praise with a healthy and necessary admonition to my brothers who are not yet fully formed in humility.” – **Let temporal things serve you, but the eternal ones be the object of your desire**.

**16 -** Those words that Saint Francis proclaimed to the brothers, words given to him by Christ, seemed generally heavy and unbearable to those who were wise according to the flesh. And the ministers had that chapter of the first rule removed, the one about the prohibitions of the Holy Gospel, as Brother Leo writes. – **It is easier to renounce worldly possessions than it is to renounce the love of them**.

**17 -** Although Saint Francis was fervently proclaiming to the brothers what the Lord revealed to him, and perfectly demonstrated in himself by the example of his deeds the things that he preached, the brothers closed their ears to his holy words and turned their eyes away from his deeds. Rather they wanted to draw him to their own way against his will, instead of submitting to his health-giving divine counsels and commands, and being conformed in a healthy way to the examples of perfection in his deeds. – **Give all you can; heaven rejects the nicely calculated great or less giving**.

**18 -** For when he had returned from regions overseas, a minister was speaking with him, as Brother Leo reports, about the chapter on poverty, to understand fully the will of Blessed Francis and his understanding of it. Blessed Francis said to him: “I understand the chapter on poverty just as the words of the Holy Gospel and the Rule sound literally. The brothers may have nothing and ought to have nothing except a garment with a cord, trousers, and shoes, if forced by necessity.” – **God takes life’s pieces and gives us unbroken peace**.

**19 -** And the minister said to him: “What am I to do, father? I have so many books worth fifty pounds.” He said this because he wished to keep them as well as his conscience, since he was keeping all those books with remorse of conscience, as he knew that Francis understood literally the chapter on poverty strictly in that way. – **Only still waters give back an undistorted image of the sky**.

**20 -** Blessed Francis said to him: “Brother, I cannot and must not act against my conscience and the profession of the Holy Gospel we have promised because of your books.” On hearing this, the minister became sad. Blessed Francis, seeing that he was upset, spoke to him in great fervor of spirit as standing for all his brothers: “You, Lesser Brothers, wish to seem and to be called observers of the Holy Gospel, but in fact you want to hold the purse.” – **That person is happiest, be they king or peasant, who finds peace in their home.**

**21 -** I myself saw a brother who heard him preaching at Bologna—those who saw this reported it—when he entered the town he wanted to head toward the place of his brothers. There he saw a house had been built that exceeded the limits of poverty. He turned back and went instead to the house of the Preachers, and they received him with great joy. – **If the basis of peace is God, the secret of peace is trust.**

**22 -** There was a Brother Preacher of extraordinary holiness and learning who listened devoutly and humbly to the words of Saint Francis. He knew why Saint Francis refused to stay with his own brothers, and felt compassion for the brothers’ desolation. He tried to persuade him to go to them and pardon them if they had offended him in any way. Blessed Francis said to him: “It would not be kind indulgence to them for me to approve by my action such a notorious transgression against the poverty they promised, and an offense to God if I were to accept their hospitality while they remain in sin.” – **The world rests upon these three things: upon truth, upon justice, and upon peace**.

**23 -** Seeing that he could not convince Blessed Francis to do this, he said: “For the sake of your other brothers, so that they not incur dishonor from the way you turned back, let us go to these brothers: you will rebuke them with charity for their offense, and so you will fulfill your duty. If because of conscience you do not wish to remain in such a house, we will come back. In this way the reputation of the brothers will be preserved and they will make amends for their offense.” - **The enemies of peace are: avarice, ambition, envy, anger and pride**.

**24 -** Blessed Francis agreed to follow the brother’s advice. He found the brothers ready to accept whatever penance he wished to impose on them and he pardoned them. But then he learned of the firm, or rather stubborn attitude of one of his brothers, Brother Pietro Stacia by name, who had been a doctor of law in the world. Through the Spirit he knew that the brother’s conscience, his ways of acting, and his teachings were all contrary to the purity of the Rule, so he cursed him. – **Some of God’s greatest gifts are unanswered prayers**.

**25 -** He had been a great man in the world and was much loved by the ministers because of his learning. The brothers therefore, near the end of Saint Francis’ life, asked him to pardon and to bestow the favor of his blessing on such a great man he had cursed, but he answered: “My sons, I cannot bless anyone whom the Lord has cursed, and he is cursed.” – **One of the great similarities between Christianity and marriage is that, for Christians, they both get better as we get older**.

**26** - What more can be said? After a short time, that brother grew ill and was close to death. Whether he blessed or cursed anyone, he was moved not by any human emotion or opinion. Rather, having been made Christ-like, he revealed the secrets of divine judgments and the divine will, and perceived in the Word the future as if it were the past. – **Christianity, if false, is of no importance and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important**.

**27 -** As Brother Thomas of Celano writes of him, when he once heard of the boundless excesses of some brothers and of the bad example they gave to lay people, he was overcome by grief and turned himself completely to Christ. Then some others arrived unexpectedly and told him about the holy way of living of some other brothers, the edification of lay people, and their conversion to the state of penance. – **The happiest wife (husband) is not the one who marries the best man (woman), but the one who makes the best of the man (woman) she (he) marries**.

**28 -** The lover of the good and of the salvation of souls rejoiced on hearing this. Enlightened by a heavenly revelation he understood the rightness of divine justice which embraces and blesses good people and rejects and curses the evil. – **God never said that the journey would be easy, but He did say that the arrival would be worthwhile**.

**29 -** In great force and strength of spirit, he cursed those who apostatized from the profession of the life they promised and defamed the religion by their perverse deeds. He blessed the ones who kept their promises and edified their neighbors by the example of a holy life and caused the religion to spread the fragrance of a good reputation. – **Wherever law ends, tyranny begins**.

**30 -** All who heard him realized that a blessing or a curse pronounced by Saint Francis on earth came from God and was ratified in heaven. The brothers who were really wise, and truly loved Christ, realized that his words and deeds came from Christ and His Spirit. Those who welcomed him and listened to him, welcomed and listened to Christ speaking in him. The upright and pure of heart listened to him and followed him without hesitation. – **Christ did not die a martyr. He died, infinitely more humbly, a common criminal**.