



"To gather priests to Christ and to one another to proclaim..."

THE VISITATION

A monthly publication of the Fraternity of Priests, Inc.

Fraternity, a Sign of God's Providence

By Fr. Vlado Bizjak

This following article is the first one to be submitted by a member of the Slovenian Fraternity that so graciously hosted our Annual Conference this past summer. This article was written by Fr. Vlado Bizjak who is the leader of that local Fraternity and was the man principally responsible for organizing and coordinating the formidable task of gathering over forty priests from four continents. For those of us who had the good fortune of taking part in this gathering the insight and deeper understanding gained from the conferences, experiences of prayer and the deep bonds of brotherhood will be cherished for a lifetime. All of this was due to the strong but gentle leadership shown by Fr. Vlado Bizjak who was during this meeting was elected to the Board of Directors. His command of the English language is good as you can see in this article.

The Fraternity of Priests surely came into existence and has developed by the Providence of God. I know that no one opposes this, but I would like to explain this in more detail.

Our personal experience tells us that people are basically individualistic. We especially experience this in the Western world. If we don't need other people, we won't search them out. This is certainly part of our fallen

nature which we find it difficult to oppose. And we priests are no exception to this as we well know and experience. Priestly celibacy is a great gift. But all gifts also bring with themselves temptations and the possibility that we will misuse them.

Seminarians sometimes think, maybe even we ourselves, that priestly ordination takes away all temptations and makes us automatically more holy men. Unfortunately we all know that it is only after ordination that the real struggle begins. Our years in the seminary are often beautiful years of community life; a time when the everyday demands of ministry are not pulling us in many directions.

Theology teaches us that after ordination priests are sacramentally "joined" in one priestly "assembly" together with the bishop. This sacramental connection with the bishop and other priests is mysteriously deeper and more real than even the blood relationships we have with our earthly family. But the question is: "Is this mystery actually lived and made visible in the everyday life of the priest in the way it is theologically understood and proclaimed?"

As I watch some new church movements, for example the Focolare Movement, I am really

happy to see the help these movements give to priests. They help us to live priestly commitments and provide the necessary support we need to maintain this version of communal living. The witness of their commitment, at least in my country, offers a real challenge to our Fraternity and good testimony to all diocesan priests.

I first came to know about charismatic spirituality during my studies in the major seminary. During the last 20 years I have become very familiar with the charismatic scene for both priests and lay people here in Slovenia. Mine is a small country, comprising two million inhabitants' altogether. There are about 850 priests in the entire country and so for the most part we know one another, at least we can recognize one another by face. I would say that there are about 50 priests who are inspired by or at least interested in charismatic spirituality.

I discovered very quickly that the priests and people involved in the charismatic movement are very diverse, a colorful phenomenon. Almost every prayer group, every leader and every priest have their own style and special way of doing things. There is definitely no formal uniformity. At least here in Slovenia many of the charismatic priests

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The season of Advent takes its name from the Latin word *adventus* which is translated “Coming”. It began in the fourth century and commenced the day after the feast of St. Martin, November 11. The focus of this season is **preparation**. The Lord is coming! All people are to live in expectant preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ.

This preparation has a two fold character. First, we are to prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ on December 25. I think of this kind of preparation as *cleaning house*. We are to prepare our lives to welcome the New Born King. We do this by acknowledging our sins, receiving absolution in the sacrament of Penance and then living a more devout life. House cleaning can also be taken in a literal manner. We need to straighten up our homes, as well as make holiday plans, send out invitations, purchase gifts, send out cards, plan meals, arrange travel, et cetera.

The second aspect of Advent points us to the bigger picture. We are to ready our lives for the coming of the Lord Jesus in glory on the Last Day. The readings on the First Sunday of Advent highlight this reality. The Lord will come in glory on the last day to be our judge. And even if we do not live to see the day of his coming in glory, we must yet be prepared. If He does not come, *we will go to Him!*

I find a good phrase that assists in my Advent preparation comes from Steven Covey’s Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. The second habit reads *Begin with the end in mind*. If the ultimate end of our lives is union with God, we ought to ready our lives for this end. If God is pure, self-forgetful, sacrificial love, I need to learn to live in harmony with such love.

“Begin with the end in mind” is how God operates. All that God has created, every intervention of the Lord in history, and in a most pointed way, the Word becoming Flesh in Jesus Christ—all has a purpose. God’s works proclaim his glory and lead us to salvation.

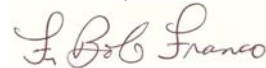
When God created each of us, He began with the end in mind.

He chose us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world

to be holy and without blemish before him. *In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ, in accord with the favor of his will, for the praise of the glory of his grace that he granted us in the beloved.* (Ephesians 1:4-6)

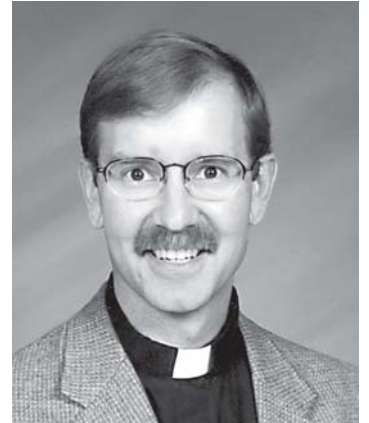
As we enter the season of Advent, with all its Christmas preparation, let us keep the ultimate end in mind. We will be better prepared for final coming: Christ’s final coming, or our coming to Him!

Sincerely in Christ,



Fr. Bob Franco

PS: Dates for next year’s Annual Fraternity Meeting are: July 22-27, 2012 in Marquette, Michigan.



Fraternity Financial Report

One of the objectives for the Fraternity of Priests is to inform our donors about the ongoing financial health and details of the organization. We’re providing this information to help communicate our specific need and to thank those many faithful benefactors who help make our service possible. Thank you!

Monthly Donation Budget: **\$4,750**

Actual Donations: **\$1,786**

Budget Surplus (shortage): **(\$2,964)**

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Editor’s Box:

Please send articles, comments, and photos to the FOP Newsletter editor,

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508-943-2213.

Newsletter material from all Fraternity members is gratefully accepted. Any submissions will help make each issue better!

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have their own “fans”. The temptation is to be happy with this following and not feel the need to be connected with other priests. I remember even back in my seminary days how we would notice the lack of spirit of community among priests in the Renewal as compared to those in the Focolare Movement. The Renewal is very strong and successful in evangelization and getting people on fire with their faith, but many times lacking in maintaining this enthusiasm and the support of community.

This fact is why the vision brought to us by four priests from the USA about ten years ago was so providential and a real sign of hope, at least for me personally. They came here to help us establish the Fraternity vision of charismatic priests gathered together in some form of community. While some types of meetings of priests may have existed previously, it was not as structured and committed as the Fraternity. We always felt that this spirituality connected us to each other and we also realized how hard it was to maintain that connection when it is only an option and not a spoken commitment.

Fraternity of Priests simply does not exist without community, without the commitment to meet regularly. Without the meetings everything stays on paper. Even though we may be personally trying to live the Kingdom Disciplines, without the meetings it is only a theory. For sure, one of the biggest ascesis for a Fraternity priest is to simply be faithful in showing up for the meetings. Perhaps the

temptation to miss is so great because the enemy knows what great blessings are waiting for us. I want to stress this as much as I can: regular Fraternity meetings are, should and have to be the great blessing for every priest. Fulfilling the second Kingdom Discipline should not be something we are fulfilling by external force but should be seen as an invitation from the Lord to refresh our love for Him and one another that is fundamentally expressed through our presence at the meetings.

I think we have lost the meaning of simply “being present”. We always have to be actively working at some project and are not aware of how important is presence alone. Don't we love to say of our dear God, He is present, He is here, He is Presence Alone? One of the biggest obstacles for us here in Slovenia is the inconsistent attendance of some members to our meetings. No community can exist long if relationships are only lived at a distance. Here we have a saying “Far away from eyes, far away from heart.” With a lack of presence our fraternal love fades. Our showing up for the meetings is an act of love towards the brothers, and not a small one. We gave up our own worries, selfish wishes and decided to come and commit our time and attention just to them. Missing a meeting is a sign of a lack of fraternal love. How many times we have experienced that just the presence of one brother being there has brought more life and refreshment to the whole meeting.

It seems to me that the main reason for missing meetings is a false arrangement of our priorities. Too often our work and our own worries

and schedules become a higher priority than our availability to God and our brothers. I am very happy that our local bishop is aware of how important good relationships are and how difficult it is for our priests to keep this priority. He has a policy that young priests must be free of all other parish duties when there are fraternity meetings for men newly ordained.

Our Fraternity meets every two weeks. Those who attend the meetings benefit from them. In these years of building community many ties have grown among us. We are really friends and would miss one another if we wouldn't come together. Our Lord blesses us very much. But in spite of this we are not safe from our weaknesses. Many times we have to call one another, to encourage each other to come together, to convince someone that work can wait. We wonder what to do about brothers who only come occasionally. Surely we accept them with open hands and hearts. We would like to see them closer. We have a strategy regarding these “remote” brothers; we will call and ask if we could have our next Fraternity meeting at his place. Usually they agree and are happy to accept us.

As you can see we are still on the way, just as all Fraternities are. The Lord in His Providence cares for us. I write with the hope that all the brothers will be encouraged by this reflection, and that you, our supporters and other readers, will remember to pray for us, for our deepening care and practical love towards each other in our own local Fraternities.

Please send us your prayer intentions: _____

THANK YOU FOR PRAYING FOR A PRIEST EACH DAY!

A PRAYER FOR PRIESTS

O Jesus, Eternal High Priest, live in (name of priest), act in him, speak in and through him. Think your thoughts in his mind, love through his heart. Give him your own disposition and feelings. Teach, lead and guide him always. Correct, enlighten and expand his thoughts and behavior. Possess his soul, take over his entire personality and life. Replace him with yourself. Incline him to constant adoration and thanksgiving; pray in and through him. Let him live in you and keep him in this intimate union always.

O Mary, Immaculate Conception, Mother of Jesus and Mother of priests, pray and intercede for (.....). Amen.

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