Wednesday Morning at Chapter

Before the Historic Vote

Our chapters are to be foremost and always a time of prayer, something sometimes forgotten, but this year especially focused because we have entered this Chapter with no elections and with only one great issue before us.

In a few minutes we will vote to decide that issue for Our Lady of Guadalupe Province. This year, we are especially aware as well that though we often fail to recognize it, our decisions are not finally dispositive, but our decisions are always only a small part of what God has in mind.

But we do have an important question before us, perhaps the most important question since the 27 of us, who are still around, with about seventy others at the time, made the decision 33 years ago to step out in faith and attempt something new. Twenty or so of us in this room founded the Province, while 16 voters do not share our memories of January 3rd, 1985.

But all of us know the importance of making big decisions in the context of prayer. Here is some of what our Constitutions say about prayer: Following in the footsteps of Saint Francis, who “did not just pray but became totally a prayer,” removing every impediment and setting aside every care and anxiety, the friars are to serve, love, honour and adore the Lord God with a clean heart and a pure mind”, since they must pray continually and never lose heart”, for “that is the kind of worshipper the Father wants”. (GC 19.2)
So Article 19 of our General Constitutions tells us that we are to pray continually, and in that prayer and with our lives we are to serve, love, honor, and adore the Lord God with a clean heart and a pure mind. We are “to remove every impediment” – that means to get rid of the “me” stuff. What are the things that are most in the way in my life of serving, loving, honoring and adoring God? Whatever they are, we need to work at getting rid of them.

We will not do that all at once, but we need to do what we can at this time and every moment to put aside our egos, our desires, our longing for the illusion of control, the “me” stuff, in order to let God into the things that guide our hearts, direct our thoughts and govern our actions. We are to remove every impediment. We are to “set aside every care and anxiety” – that means to get rid of the “fear” stuff. The “fear” stuff is for most of us the biggest impediment of all. We are so prone to ask first and foremost what will any changes contemplated mean for me?

How will I be changed by these changes? What will I have to do that I fear to do? What will I have to give up that I hope to hold on to? What act of courage will be required of me? Those things are all the fear stuff, that paralyzing wet blanket thrown over the possibility of change, blocking out the light and warmth of the Holy Spirit at work. We are to set aside every care and anxiety. We are to have clean hearts and pure minds – that means to get rid of the “temptation” stuff, whether it is the temptation to power or security or control. Our vows are about the temptations that we face in this life. Power is to have the ability to do things, which in our society usually means to have the money or the credit card that allows me to get things done. Whether it is a new sandals, a new computer, all the food in all the restaurants, or all the coins that I want to put in a slot machine, to have the wherewithal to obtain these things, to have those things in my possession, and to think that somehow having those things is more important than sharing those things, is the great sin against poverty.

Our need for security traces all the way back to infancy. To be held in the arms of a loving parent, to have someone who was looking out for us, who always put us first. Those gifts were the gift of nurturing security in our human relationships, and some would say if we did not get what we needed of them then, we will spend our whole lives looking for them. Chastity is all about not letting a garbled echo, a faint shadow and a fleeting touch of security from exclusivity or physical pleasure come between us and the real security which is found in our loving relationship with God. Our longing for control is connected to our real human need for autonomy. Most every parent has heard a two-year old proclaim, “I can do it myself.” And if we don’t say it at two, we will at twelve or twenty-two or eighty-two. The achievement of autonomy, of being able to think and do for myself as the circumstances warrant is a good thing. But the temptation lies in thinking that I will always know what is best, that I can always do things on my own.

On that road, there is no room for obedience. So there is a way to have clean hearts and pure minds. We must be as faithful as possible to our vows. None of us will do that perfectly, but the more we try, and let God go to work within us as we try, the cleaner and purer we will become. We are to pray continually and never lose heart – that means that we are to embrace the “freedom” stuff at all times, for fear is the one thing that can imprison our spirits and keep us from doing the things that God is ready to help us do. I wish that I knew how today’s vote will go. I have wished that for a long, long time. I wish that I knew what the results of all of the efforts that so many friars have put into getting us to this point will mean. For six years now, I have poured much of my heart and soul, my time, talent, life and energy into getting us here in the hopes of helping us the Friars of the United States realize that we are one brotherhood, one band of brothers, who are ready to give their lives for the Gospel, we can come together and proclaim the Gospel with renewed energy, revitalized commitment to each other, and with a clearer voice than we have at the moment. But I do not know how the vote will go. If it goes as I hope, that is a frightening proposition, because all of the work of the past six years will pale in comparison to all of the work that will come in the next five years as we pull things together, and then for years to come as we continue to revitalize Franciscan life.
If the vote is not to join together, then I fear that Benjamin Franklin’s quip at the signing of the Declaration of Independence may once again be apropos: “If we do not hang together, then I fear that we shall surely hang separately.” We will still need revitalization. We will still need to work very hard, and we will have far fewer resources with which to do these things. Let us remove every impediment, and get whatever “me” stuff might be in our way out of our way. Let us set aside every care and anxiety, and not be kept from doing the things that God has waiting for us to do. Let us strive for clean hearts and pure minds, and not let temptations keep us from the greatness and grandeur of God’s designs. Let us pray continually and never lose heart, so that we can step forward into the future set free from the prison of doubt and the chains of fear.

And So We Began . . .

*In Prayer, In Blessing, In Discussion, In Socials, and Finally In Discernment.*
For the statisticians among you, we have a 74.4% approval vote from our collective membership.

And the Results Are . . .

Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Province: Eligible friars to vote: 54; In favor of the Resolution: 48; Friars opposed: 6; Resolution PASSED with 88.9% approval.

Holy Name Province: Eligible friars to vote: 182; In favor of the Resolution: 128; Friars opposed: 54; Resolution PASSED with 70.0% approval.

Sacred Heart Province: Eligible friars to vote: 108; In favor of the Resolution: 64; Friars opposed: 44; Resolution PASSED with 59.0% approval.

Saint Barbara Province: Eligible friars to vote: 99; In favor of the Resolution: 58; Friars opposed: 41; Resolution PASSED with 58.5% approval.

Saint John the Baptist Province: Eligible friars to vote: 95; In favor of the Resolution: 86; Friars opposed: 9; Resolution PASSED with 90.0% approval.

Our Lady of Guadalupe Province: Eligible friars to vote: 40; In favor of the Resolution: 32; Friars opposed: 8; Resolution PASSED with 80.0% approval.

What’s Next? . . .

— Jack Clark Robinson’s Closing Homily —

There are great things to come! I know it. I just know it. That must have been a thought shared by Mary and Elizabeth in the Gospel today. (Feast of the Visitation — 31 May 2018)

There are great things to come. Of course, there was also a lot of hard work to come. I have always wondered at the thought that Mary headed off to see Elizabeth when Elizabeth was six months pregnant then “after three months” left and returned home. Six months plus three months is nine months, and unless I have some basic biology wrong, Elizabeth was about to really need help! And Mary left!

Though the scholars tell us, Luke is actually being very careful about who is on stage and where the stage is in each scene of his story. First Zechariah and Gabriel are in the Temple in Jerusalem. Next Elizabeth and Zechariah are in their home. Then Mary and Gabriel are in Nazareth. Mary goes to the hill country to see Elizabeth for the Visitation, before Elizabeth, Zechariah and John take center stage again. Finally, after Mary and Joseph get to Bethlehem, the stage gets set for Jesus, then crowded with angels and shepherds, before coming full circle back to the Temple in Jerusalem. Only this time, Mary, Joseph, and Jesus are there, with those great signs of the faithful remnant of Israel: Simeon and Anna. Luke hardly so much tells the story as he weaves it together, with people and places, some going in, some
going out and all finally forming an intricate and beautiful pattern, intended to show off Jesus and give proper due to John, who will proclaim his presence.

A
nd John does proclaim the presence of Jesus, the presence of the wonder of the reality of God and God’s love, from that first encounter when both infants were still in the womb, all the way to John’s dying day. And John’s proclamation, if I may borrow a phrase from Pope Francis, John’s proclamation, was of the Joy of the Gospel! John leaped for joy, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit! All to show off Jesus, and the great things to come. If I had to describe our time together this week, I would say that it comes down to that: we are called to leap for joy, be filled with the Holy Spirit and show off Jesus, confident that there are great things to come.

O
ur time together has been woven together with people and places as intricately as Luke wove together that first part of the Gospel. On Monday, we were at Casa Guadalupe where the stage was set, thanks to a lot of hard work by Efren, Noe, Juan Pablo and Jesus, with tents and tables and flowers in the fountain, a special gift of Jose-Luis. We heard words of wisdom from Charlie and Richard.

T
uesday, threads from the Cross were woven together to form a brilliant and compelling band that indeed pulled us together, that showed off Jesus, in such a way as to make all of us part of the story Abbot Joel told. And Tuesday we were so graciously welcomed by Michael and the community here at San Juan Diego Friary and A Becoming Place. Also Tuesday, Edgardo, our youngest ordained, reminded us of how much we must thank our elders and those who have gone before us in Guadalupe Province. Then we traveled to Holy Family, to be welcomed and feasted as one family, though maybe not a totally Holy Family yet, but we are on our way.

L
uke used six different stages to tell the Gospel story: the Temple, the home of Mary in Nazareth, Elizabeth and Zechariah’s home in Judea, the stable in Bethlehem, the fields outside that town, and finally, the Temple in Jerusalem again. Yesterday we used six stages, too, thanks to the electronic wizardry of Andres. All to proclaim that we are one brotherhood, which must be about proclaiming the Gospel. And as you probably saw all too clearly, that Good News left me personally all but speechless, so the only thing left to do was pray in thanksgiving, to pray the Eucharist. There, Paul shared with us a reminder of the meaning of the day - Memorial: to remember and shine forth, to be about resurrection, while Jorge and Andres and Jose-Luis and Efren and with incredible voice, Miguel sang, all to remind us, as they have all week, of the joy of the Gospel.

J
ust as with the Gospel story Luke told around the events of the Visitation, so many people and places have come together in these days. But also just as with Luke’s verses of prologue, we know that there is much more to come. That there are great things to come, and there are also difficult things too, hard work, hard decisions, rough moments and days and months, but like all of those people Luke put on all of the stages of his story, now we know, where we are going. Now we know, that we are going together, that indeed we are to be woven together, that we must be woven together, to show off Jesus, to be filled with the Spirit of God.

W
e have been called once again, as surely as on the day of our first professions, as surely as on the day when we first said yes to God’s call, we have been called once again. We are to be threads to be woven together to tell the most beautiful story of all, the Gospel of God’s Love.

I
cannot end without one last mention of two more weavers of our week. Thank you, Ron, for helping us keep canonical warp and woof together, for being a living memory of how things were done and might be done anew. And thank you, Gino, for coming up with such imaginative overall patterns and designs for our tapestry. One last thing to remember on this Feast of the Visitation, every time that someone came together in the Visitation story, they stayed for a while, encouraging, challenging, loving one another, and then they moved on to the next stage. We must do the same. We are threads that God is using to weave the great design of the proclamation of the Gospel in our time and place. Let us rejoice to share the joy of the Gospel, for there are great things to come! I know it! I just know it!
Migration Conference 2018 in Guadalajara, Mexico

— Gerry Steinmetz, OFM —

Over 57 Franciscans gathered from many countries to study and dialogue on migration and related topics. Presentations were given each day with time to learn of the impact of migration and refugees that affects all countries and families. We also heard from 2 Casas de Migrants with first-hand information of the great sufferings of children and parents trying to protect their families and find a place of security. Of course the strategy of the U S government and its financial interests were highlighted. I hope to continue this journey and am willing to give the papers of the presentations to anyone interested.

After a Good Lunch at the Little Sisters in Gallup . . .

Dale Jamison and Jack Clark with Bart Wolf at the Little Sisters Home in Gallup NM. Bart would enjoy any and all visitors.
Good Luck and God Bless You . . .

Gilbert Schneider retires from Ft Defiance AZ and Navajo NM

After seventeen years of ministry at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Church at Ft Defiance and St Berard Church at Sawmill, the esteemed Pastor has retired. The Parishioners at Navajo and the Sawmill mission hosted a Farewell Party on May 12 at the Sawmill church and a second Farewell Party was hosted by the parishioners of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Church at Ft Defiance on May 20. Over two hundred friends and parishioners came to the Sunday evening event to offer their best wishes and prayers for Gilbert as he begins his new ministry as a retired friar at our San Juan Diego Friary in Albuquerque NM. We wish him many more satisfying years of good health and happiness.