

## **CIRCULAR LETTER 5**

### **LET PEACE PREVAIL ON EARTH**

Dear brothers and sisters,

On 19 April 1995, a bomb exploded in the heart of Oklahoma City, in the United States of America, killing scores and wounding hundreds. "The truck bomb ... brought the terrible realization that America has bred its own sort of new political monster, one afflicted with hatred so malignant that only murder on a grand scale can satisfy it" (Time International, 1 May 1995). The richest and most powerful nation on earth experienced helplessness and rage in the presence of mindless violence against its citizens. What other nations have endured for decades has now been visited on American society. No one is immune.

*Who can deliver us?*

1.1 The terrible fear that grips our modern cities is based on the fact that with all of the modern techniques of police surveillance, with all the military might and nuclear power available, our modern cities cannot defend themselves against the irrational hatred of an individual or group. Whether it is a bomb in Oklahoma City or poison gas in a Tokyo subway, we feel helpless and vulnerable. We react: fearful withdrawal, protective barricades, angry calls for vengeance. But these are not solutions. They merely prove that we are hostages of fear.

1.2 It was such fear that Brother Francis encountered at Gubbio: "The citizens all lived in great fear ..., and they went about armed when they left the city, as though going forth to war" (Fioretti XXI).

1.3 With great simplicity the Fioretti announce the deliverance of Gubbio: "Placing all his confidence in God, [Francis] made the sign of the most holy cross and went forth from the city together with his companions." Francis' trust in God was based on the cross and brotherhood; these would be the instruments of deliverance.

### **CROSS AND BROTHERHOOD**

2.1 The gospels contain many striking accounts of Jesus confronting and expelling the demon of violence from people's lives. One of the most dramatic takes place in the region of the Gerasenes. Jesus overcomes the alienation and pain that keeps the afflicted person chained to the demon violence, restoring him to calm self-possession. Interestingly, the local people had mixed feelings about what they had witnessed. They were afraid of the power of Jesus. Perhaps they feared that their own demons might be challenged.

2.2 Only once did Jesus resort to violent action, when he overturned the tables of the money changers and chased them out of the temple precincts. It was not a typical action of Jesus. What does he teach through this event? Did he want to reveal his deep indignation with injustice, particularly when perpetuated in the name of religion? It is important to note, however, that he chose to turn away from it and he followed the road that led to Calvary. Jesus makes peace by the blood of his cross. His "strategy" for peace is not pacifism, but the practice of a love that is "stronger than death." It is with this power of the cross that Brother Francis went forth to meet the wolf, the sum of all the fears of Gubbio.

2.3 Long before he went invested with the cross to encounter the wolf of Gubbio, Francis had already raised the same cross high above the heads of his own brothers at the Portiuncula. The sacred scriptures describe the messianic age as an era of exceptional peace. Francis set about creating just such a "new Jerusalem" at St. Mary of the Angels. He called his brothers to intense prayer, sincere communion in brotherhood and the mutual bearing of burdens. We notice that respect for one another, especially in speech, was very high on the agenda of their lives. A brother guilty of detraction was made to beg pardon for his fault and recite the Praises of God aloud, so that everyone could hear him! (see *Mirror of Perfection*, 82) This effort to build gospel peace meant that Francis himself had to embrace the cross. Could not this effort help to explain his discourse on "perfect joy?" It was worth the price! Francis was able to carry the power of brotherly unity and evangelical peace when he went "together with his companions" to encounter the wolf of Gubbio.

## **DISPELLIN FEAR**

3.1 The cross and brotherhood determine the outcome: "Come to me, Brother Wolf, I command you, in the name of Christ, not to hurt me or anyone!"

3.2 Francis was able to speak the truth with love to the wolf, telling him that his great anger and violence "destroys the creatures of God" and "human beings made in the image of God." Francis made no attempt to minimize the crimes of the wolf against the people of the town.

3.3 Francis was able to speak the truth with love to the people of Gubbio. He asked them to reflect upon how the social climate of Gubbio had contributed to the violent reaction of the wolf: "... such calamities were permitted by God because of their sins."

## **LEARNIN FROM F RANCIS**

4.1 If the victims of the Oklahoma City bomb were anonymous and chosen at random, the bomber himself was not anonymous. If police reports are correct, he has a name: Timothy. His presumed accomplices also have names: Terry and James. The rage that drove them was also known to others, even if the murderous results of that rage were not anticipated. Therefore, if police surveillance could not protect the victims, perhaps the words, "Come to me, brother Timothy! I command you, in the name of Christ ... "could have changed the perpetrator.

4.2 Could not the cross of Christ and true brotherhood give a Capuchin the compassion, the courage and the coherence to utter these words? We will never touch the rage and violence which beset our neighborhoods if we do not begin within our own local and provincial fraternities. All too often we allow the "wolf" to dwell in our very midst: passive aggression, violent denunciation, alcohol and drug abuse, racism, sexual abuse and abusive ridicule. Our own brothers cannot experience healing and learn new ways of dealing with life unless our fraternities provide them with an honest and safe haven in which to open their hearts.

4.3 We often reflect upon and discuss the causes of violence in our world: poverty, alienation, discrimination, psychological and physical abuse. The causes are endless. Such awareness helps us to understand and this gives birth to compassion within us. However, only the cross of Christ and true brotherhood can give us the courage and power to reach out and touch the sources of pain in a Timothy, a James or a Terry (see Constitutions 99, 1-3).

4.4 Our fraternities must become schools of peace (see Constitutions 3, 1) where the rage we share with a wounded world finds the compassion and secure haven which will allow it to dissipate as the rage of the wolf dissipated before the firm but compassionate love of St. Francis. St. Mary of the Angels remains our assurance that such a school of peace will one day be a beacon of messianic peace touching the heart of a wounded brother or sister and allowing peace to flower in our world.

4.5 There is a "peace pole" at the entrance of our friary church, Our Lady of Fatima, in Brasilia. Written in four languages is the phrase: "Let peace prevail on earth!" Brothers, I pray that this peace - first welcomed and then allowed to prevail in our fraternities and provinces - will flow forth to fill the earth. The first saint of the Capuchin reform, Brother Felix of Cantalice, was certainly one who did precisely this as he walked the streets of Rome, speaking peace by his simple and joyful acceptance of every citizen. May his life inspire our efforts to let peace prevail on earth.

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*Brasilia, Brazil, 18 May 1995 - Feast of St. Felix of Cantalice*

## **FAITH SHARIN ON THE UBBIO STORY**

Preparation: Read the story of the wolf of Gubbio (Fioretti XXI) twice. First, with your mind, then with your heart. Ask for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Is there such a story in your life? Is there a "wolf" in your community or province? Is there a "wolf" inside you? Read and reflect upon the following gospel passages: Mt 5:21-26, 43-47; Mk 11:25; Lk 6:27-36, 23-34a.

### **Fraternity Sharing:**

1. A member of the group introduces the shared time with a few words of explanation and some "rules for faith-sharing" (e.g., that we seek to Share in

faith, that we listen to one another without engaging in a discussion of the content of the other's sharing, etc.).

2. Pray together, Veni Creator Spiritus.

3. Read aloud all or part of the Gubbio story (Fioretti, XXI).

4. After sometime for silent reflection, those present are invited to share.

**Questions for Reflection:**

1. Have you (or someone close to you) been touched by violence in a personal way? For example, have you been robbed or attacked? How did this affect you?

2. Is there a "Gubbio story" in your life? Can you share it?

3. Where is the wolf of Gubbio in our particular situation? How can we make peace with it?

**Concluding Prayer:**

Individuals are invited to pray spontaneously.

All recite the Our Father together.

Leader: Father in heaven, form in us the likeness of your Son, and deepen his life within us. Send us as witnesses of gospel joy into a world of fragile peace and broken promises. Touch the hearts of all with your love that they in turn may learn to love and forgive one another and find true peace. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.