



September 2008

# The Franciscan Legionnaire

Newsletter of the Friars Legion of St. Peter's Church in the Loop  
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## HAIL O CROSS, OUR ONLY HOPE!

*Every year on September 14 the Church celebrates the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. Most years the feast passes unnoticed except by those who attend daily mass, but this year it falls on a Sunday and so many more of us than usual will be able to keep the feast and be led by it into a deeper contemplation of the facts of our redemption. For all Carmelites this is the day that they make their annual renewal of their vows, and on this day in 1939, as a part of that renewal celebration, Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross gave a conference to her sisters in the Carmelite monastery at Echt in the Netherlands. She had been in Holland less than a year, forced to flee her native Germany for fear of the Nazi persecution of the Jews, for she had been born Jewish and her name was Edith Stein prior to her entering Carmel. Just two weeks before she gave this conference, Germany had invaded Poland and World War II was underway; in 1940 the Nazis marched into the Netherlands, and two years later Sister Teresa Benedicta was sent to the extermination camp of Auschwitz, where she was killed on August 9. Here are excerpts from that 1939 conference.*

**H**ail O Cross, our only hope! Thus the Church invites us, implores us, in the season consecrated to the contemplation of the bitter sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ. The jubilant Alleluia of Easter silenced the solemn hymn of the cross, but the sign of our salvation blessed us in the season of Easter joy as we recalled the discovery of the Disappeared. And now that the liturgical year is coming to an end, the cross rises before us and holds our gaze captive until once again the Easter Alleluia will invite us to forget for a while the things of earth and to rejoice in the wedding feast of the Lamb.

The Crucified looks at us and asks us if we still wish to remain faithful to what we promised him in an hour of grace. And not without reason does he ask us this question. Today more than ever the Cross shows itself to be a sign of contradiction. The followers of the Antichrist commit outrages against it much worse than did the Persians when they stole the true cross so long ago. They dishonor the image of the Cross and do all that they can to uproot the cross from all

Christian hearts. And frequently they succeed, even among those who, like us, once made a vow to follow Christ and to carry his cross. Therefore today the Savior looks at us, examines us, and asks each one of us: Do you wish to remain faithful to the Crucified?

Consider your answer carefully! The world is in flames, and the combat between Christ and Antichrist has openly broken out. If you decide for Christ, it can cost you your life. Think also on what you promise. To make profession and to renew that profession is a terribly serious matter. You make a promise to the Lord of heaven and earth. If this does not produce in you a holily serious result, so that you force your will to its fulfillment, then you will fall into the hands of the living God.

The Savior hangs on the cross before you because he has become obedient even to death on the cross. He came into the world not to do his will, but the will of the Father. If you wish to be the spouse of the Crucified, you must renounce your own will unconditionally and have no de-

sire other than that of fulfilling the will of the Father. He speaks to you through the Rule and the Constitutions of your Order. He speaks to you through the mouth of your superiors. He speaks to you in the most intimate recesses of your heart through the gentle breath of the Holy Spirit. Do you want to be faithful to your vow of obedience? Then you must listen to this voice day and night and follow its command. In other words, every day, every hour, you must crucify your own will and your love of self.

Your Savior hangs before you on the cross, naked and alone, because he has chosen poverty. Whoever wishes to follow him must renounce all his earthly goods. It is not enough to have left everything behind once upon a time and to have come to the convent. You must also do it now, and do it seriously. Accept gratefully whatever Providence sends you; let go joyfully whatever you must do without; and do not worry about your own body, neither for its needs nor its appetites, but dedicate yourself to the tasks given you; do not worry about tomorrow, nor about your next meal.

Your Savior hangs before you with an open heart. He has poured out his heart's blood in order to win your heart. Do you want to follow him in holy purity? Then your heart must be free of every earthly desire; Jesus, the Crucified, will be the only object of your longings, of your desires, of your thoughts.

Are you dismayed at the greatness of what the holy vows demand of you? You have no cause for fear. Certainly, what you promised is beyond your weak powers, but it is not beyond the power of the Almighty, and his power will be yours if you entrust yourself to him when he receives your vow of fidelity. He did this on the day of your holy profession and he wants to do

it again today. It is the loving heart of your Redeemer that invites you to follow him. He demands your obedience, for the human will is blind and weak. The human will will not find the way until it abandons itself completely to the divine will. He demands poverty, because your hands must be empty of earthly goods in order to be able to receive heavenly goods. He demands chastity, because only the detachment of the heart from every earthly love frees the heart for the love of God. The arms of the Crucified

reach out to draw you to his heart. He wants your life so that he can give you his.

Hail O Cross, our only hope!

The world is in flames. The fire can reach even to our house. But there on high, above all the flames, the cross is raised. The fire cannot consume it. The cross is the road from earth to heaven. Whoever embraces the cross with faith, with love and hope, is taken up

even to the bosom of the Trinity.

The world is in flames. Do you want to extinguish them? Look to the cross. From his open heart flows the blood of the Redeemer, blood that can extinguish even the flames of Hell. Make your heart free by the faithful fulfillment of your profession, and then the flood of the divine love will be poured into your heart until it inundates and renders fruitful all the ends of the earth. Do you hear the cries of the wounded in the battlefields of the East and West? You are neither a doctor nor a nurse, and you cannot bind up their wounds; you are cloistered in your cell and you cannot reach them. Do you hear the cry of the dying? You wish to be a priest and be at their side. Does the weeping of the widows and orphans overwhelm you? You want to be an angel of consolation and help them. Look at the Crucified. If you are spousally united to him by



the genuine fulfillment of your holy vows, then his precious blood is your blood. United with him, you are everywhere just as he is. No, you cannot help, here or there, like the doctor, the nurse or the priest. However, in the power of the cross you can be at every front, in all the places of suffering; you will be taken everywhere in the world by your merciful love, the love of the divine heart which pours out its most precious

blood everywhere, the blood which eases pain, sanctifies and saves.

The eyes of the Crucified are watching you, asking you, and putting you to the test. Do you want to seal anew and in all seriousness your covenant with the Crucified? What will be your answer? "Lord, where will we go? You alone have the words of eternal life."

Hail O Cross, our only hope!

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## AND THE DAYS AFTER...

Some feasts sound a note so strong and clear that they have an echo. The Exaltation of the Holy Cross is just such a feast, and so it is followed, on September 15, by the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, which prior to 1970 was called the feast of the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary. And in that old calendar, the echo was a double one, for just two days thereafter was the commemoration of the Stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi. Thus, the middle of September had its three days of the cross: the exaltation of the cross, Mary at the foot of the cross, and Francis seared in his flesh with the brand marks of Jesus' crucifixion. The calendar has changed. The feast of Mary at the cross is still there, even if under a different title, but the commemoration of Francis' stigmata has disappeared from the Roman calendar, the one that most parishes use. Franciscans and Franciscan parishes, like St. Peter's, still observe the Stigmata of St. Francis. Inevitably, the removal of the Stigmata from the general calendar and its retention by the Franciscans gives the impression that what happened to Francis on Mt. Alverno two years before his death is of interest only to those who belong to one of the three religious orders he founded, and its celebration never really meant much or said anything to those outside the Franciscan family.

Given what was done in 1970, this impression may be inevitable, but it is an error. St. Paul, throughout his letters, makes it very clear that the cross of Christ is never simply the cross of Christ, but it is also and always the cross of

all of those who are baptized into Christ. In this, Paul repeats the teaching of Jesus, whose prediction of his own passion is coupled with the statement that whoever would be his disciple must take up his cross and follow him.

Hence, we both want and need the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross to be followed by days that bring home to us our sharing in the cross of Christ. The feast of the Sorrowful Mother, coming the day after the feast of the Cross, certainly does that, for Mary is always both herself and the most perfect symbol of the Church. Seeing and celebrating her at the foot of the cross is a most powerful reminder that her place is also ours, that our discipleship must walk the way to Calvary and not turn back.

And the commemoration of Francis' stigmata does the exact same thing, in a most personal key. All of the accounts of Francis' receiving in his body the nail and spear marks of Jesus' crucifixion emphasize that this event was the appearance in his flesh of what had long since been imprinted on his soul. He truly carried in his heart the dying of Jesus long before the signs of that dying became visible in his body. Here, as in so much else, Francis received an extraordinary gift that highlighted a common feature of the life of every Christian. This, I would suggest, is of interest to all Roman Catholics and not just those who wear Franciscan habits. Perhaps a future reform of the calendar will restore the unity and beauty of the September trio of Cross days. In the meantime, we all do what we can.

—Fr. Bob Sprott, O.F.M.



### MEMORIAL VOTIVE LIGHTS

The action of prayer is often accompanied by the gesture of lighting a candle. The candle becomes an offering to the Lord, a sign of the offering of ourselves that we make to God whenever we come before him with a special intention or petition. After a while, we must leave the church to be about other business, but the candle stays, burning constantly in the church even as our prayer remains in the presence of the Lord.

Your gift to Saint Peter's for the year-long memorial votive light helps to support all of our ministry and works. And on our part, you and your intentions are remembered daily in our prayers for our helpers and benefactors.

#### APPLICATION FOR YEAR-LONG MEMORIAL CANDLE

*(Please print, leaving a space between each word.)*

To be lit in honor of: \_\_\_\_\_  
Living \_\_\_\_\_ Deceased \_\_\_\_\_

Requested by: \_\_\_\_\_

Date candle is to be lit: Immediately \_\_\_\_\_ Specific Date \_\_\_\_\_

The offering for the Memorial Candle is \$150.00. Please enclose a check for the full amount with this form.



#### MEMBERSHIP IN THE FRIARS LEGION *brings with it...*

- A sharing in all of the more than 40 masses offered at Saint Peter's each week
- A sharing in the daily Lauds and Vespers prayed by the Franciscans of Saint Peter's Friary
- A sharing in the Eucharistic Novena of nine Tuesdays before the Feast of Saint Anthony of Padua on June 13
- A special Eucharist offered for the living members on the Feast of Saint Anthony on June 13 and on the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul on June 29
- A special Eucharist offered for the deceased members on All Souls Day on November 2 and on the Commemoration of All the Deceased of the Franciscan Order on November 5
- A sharing in all the ministry and good works done by the Franciscan Friars at Saint Peter's, whom you support by your generosity



#### APPLICATION FOR PERPETUAL ENROLLMENT IN THE FRIARS LEGION

*(Please print, leaving a space between each word.)*

Please Enroll: \_\_\_\_\_  
as a Perpetual Member of the Saint Peter's Friars Legion.  
Living \_\_\_\_\_ Deceased \_\_\_\_\_

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

OFFERING: Individual, \$25.00 \_\_\_\_\_ Family, \$100.00 \_\_\_\_\_ *(Immediate family, parents and children)*