

ST. ANTHONY'S BREAD

THE FRANCISCANS' NEWSLETTER KEEPING OUR
FRIENDS, BENEFACTORS AND FAMILIES UP TO DATE



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“Death, where is your sting? Death, where is your victory?”

St Paul almost seems to be taunting death with these two questions in his first letter to the Corinthians. And I am wondering how many of us have the audacity to do that.

The culture of death seems to be around us where the voiceless have no right to life and the pain-filled have the right to end life. Diseases and disasters, pride and profit become tentacles of death – an end from which no living person can escape. Majestic royalty or meagre rogue, all fall within the clutches of death. Doesn't death appear to win eventually?

No, and never with Christ. St Paul follows his questions with a confident

affirmation, “so let us thank God for giving us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”. Victory does not belong to death. Instead, death has been destroyed by God. How? By the willingness of Jesus Christ to enter into his Passion where he embraced death (death which cannot contain life itself), and then, burst forth from the tomb having been raised to new life in the resurrection. That is what we celebrate at the Triduum, particularly in Easter! Death gives way to Life!

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St Francis of Assisi embraces Sister Death

Dear family members and friends,

In November, the Church remembers all the dead. By remembering all the faithful departed, the Church takes care of her children by interceding with God for the souls of all those who preceded us in faith and fell asleep in the hope of resurrection.

The death of St Francis gives us a model to follow in reflecting on death—our own and that of our loved ones—as we commemorate the month of all souls in November. One part of our annual observance is a service held on the evening of 3 October, known as the “Transitus” or “passing” of St Francis. It is a simple time of storytelling and prayers that recalls how, at the moment of his death, Francis called out “Welcome, Sister Death!”

One version of Francis’ passing, which we read at the “Transitus,” was written by Francis’ first biographer, Thomas of Celano. Thomas tells us that when Francis knew he was dying, he “exhorted death, terrible and hateful to all, to praise God”.

I have always thought the phrase “terrible and hateful” captures eloquently how most of us feel about death. Death is terrible and hateful. Death ends, in one way at least, our day-to-day relationships. Having lost my father two years ago, I have experienced this many times. It is truly terrible and hateful not to be able to visit with my dad, watch football on TV with him, share a meal, take him out for a drive, and just talk. I still miss him very much. But at the same time, with Francis, I strive to praise God that my father’s death was his passage to a new life with God. His suffering has ended. I trust in the joy of knowing God’s love fully. I have to thank my spiritual father, St Francis, for the gift of a different way of looking at death, and finding a way to praise God as we welcome “Sister Death”.

Reflection on death is just one part of being a Christian, baptised into Jesus’ resurrection. In the feature article, our new Custos, Brother Derrick Yap, elaborates on how St Francis embraced Sister Death. We hope your spiritual journey will find support here.

I would like to take this opportunity to say that this is my last issue as editor. It has been an honour to work on this newsletter for you, our friends and family. I leave St Anthony’s Bread in the hands of the new editor, Brother Aiden Peter.

Peace and all good.



Brother Martin Low OFM





I say that Jesus embraced death because it was a sacred and free act of his. Consummatum est, we read in John 19:30; it is consummated or accomplished or finished, depending on the English translation. What is accomplished? The saving act of Christ which culminated on the cross, where the cross of shame becomes the throne of glory. In obedience to God, Jesus countered the disobedience of Satan. In the utter humility of dying naked on the cross, Jesus shamed the pride of the evil one.

We continue to read in John 19 that Jesus gave up the spirit. Jesus is in control. He is not a passive victim of an unjust trial, but a director in bringing forth justice and salvation for all. And perhaps, even psychologically, the example of Jesus can help us face death and face the process of dying: to “take charge” of our own life and death, and how we die.

I sometimes see people who, having been diagnosed with cancer, live as if they have already lost

the fight, but I have also seen others battle on and live fully until the very last minute. I would like to mention Venerable Antonietta Meo, an Italian girl who died from aggressive bone cancer just before she turned seven. Despite her young age, she serenely embraced her illness and united her tremendous sufferings with that of Jesus’ Passion. Today, her remains are held in the Church of the Holy Cross in Rome, very near the relics of the true cross, and the process towards her sainthood is underway because she could see her suffering in the light of Christ’s.

Similarly for St Francis; as he neared his end, he called out to Sister Death and welcomed her. He even composed a stanza on Sister Death within the Canticle of Brother Sun.

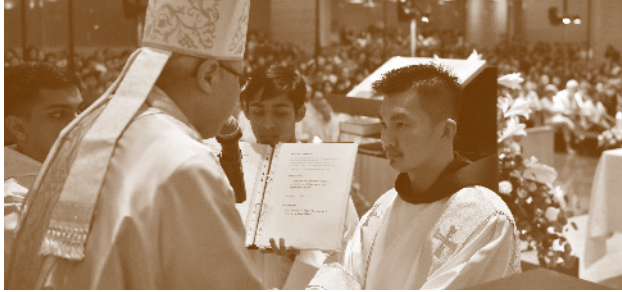
*Praised be You, my Lord,
through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whom no one living can escape.
Woe to those to die in mortal sin.
Blessed are those whom death will find
in Your most holy will,
for the second death shall do them no harm.*

We are told that St Francis could embrace Sister Death so readily because he was already assured by the Lord of his salvation. This was the message Francis received when moved to self-pity one day: “Then brother, be glad and rejoice in your illnesses and troubles, because as of now, you are as secure as if you were already in my kingdom.”

It is really easy for those of us who are healthy to talk about sickness and suffering, and have lofty spiritual ideas about it. But I think we need to already begin to confront our own mortality and creatureliness. Sickness and death are part of human living, and it is pertinent to begin confronting these conditions when our health is still holding up and our faith is still unshaken. In fact, it would be wise for us to keep deepening and strengthening our faith in the Lord and in his providence, so that when anything untoward besets us, we have a firm foundation that will not crumble.

I find it beautiful that All Souls Day follows All Saints Day, where our celebration of the latter gives hope to the celebration of the former. Hope that carries us on our journey of faith whilst on earth; hope that breathes light and refreshment in our darkness and tiredness; hope that the ultimate victory is God’s and we just need to claim and participate in this gift.

Brother Derrick Yap OFM



Franciscans rejoice over two priestly ordinations

In John 15:16, Jesus says “You did not choose me, but I chose you.” Indeed, that was true during the final week of October 2019, when the Custody of St Anthony Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei saw the ordinations of Friars Cruzender Alex and Aiden Peter Jr to the priesthood, amidst great thanksgiving and joy.

The two Sabahan friars entered the novitiate together in 2011, and after journeying for nine years, became friar-priests in the same month. Friar Cruzender made his way back to his hometown of Tuaran, Sabah for his ordination by Archbishop John Wong of Kota Kinabalu on 22 October. Friar Aiden Peter received the sacrament through the hands of Singapore Archbishop William Goh at the Church of St Mary of the Angels, Singapore on 27 October.

Present at the ceremonies were the Friar Phillip Miscamble, Provincial Minister of the Province of the Holy Spirit to which our Custody belongs, Custos Friar Derrick Yap and many guests who came from far and near to be with the newly ordained. The journey of any Religious entails the support and sacrifice of those around him, particularly his loved ones, and Friar Phillip thanked Cruzender and Aiden’s families for the gift of their sons to the Franciscan Order and the Church. Friar Phillip also made special mention of the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, who have been instrumental in promoting Franciscan spirituality and vocations among the youth in Sabah, to the point that our Custody is now blessed with enough young friars to consider establishing a presence in Sabah in the not too distant future.

In his thanksgiving remarks, Friar Cruzender admitted to having gone through many struggles on his journey towards priesthood, but added that the Lord continues to grant him hope and assure him of His divine assistance. Friar Aiden thanked his pillar of support – all those who supported him through prayers or mentorship – and urged the young people gathered to consider the challenging but rewarding life of a Religious.

Truly the week was yet more proof of God’s unfailing providence in the growth of His kingdom in this region.

My Gift in Honour of St Anthony

I enclose a gift of \$ _____ :

- ☐ For the Formation and Education Fund
☐ To be used as you see fit

Kindly make cheques payable to
The Order of Friars Minor (S) Ltd

Malaysian Cheques may be made out to
Franciscan Friars

Return this tear-out in an envelope to:
Franciscan Development Office
5 Bukit Batok East Ave 2, Singapore 659918

Please send a receipt to:

Name: _____

Address: _____

My Petition

Dear Franciscan Friars,

Please pray with me for the following intentions:

New leadership for our Custody

On 10 October, the newly-elected leadership team of the Custody of St Anthony Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei began its three-year term. Friar Derrick Yap is Custos, and his Council members are Friar Michael D'Cruz, Friar Julian Mariaratnam, Friar Martin Low and Friar David Au.

A few words from the Custos, Brother Derrick:

"Lord, give me a scripture verse to live by as I take on this new role" was the question in my heart after I said "yes" to my Provincial Minister Friar Philip Miscamble on 10 October, when he



asked if I would accept the role of Custos.

That very evening, during Vespers, the scripture reading read thus "you should all agree among yourselves and be sympathetic; love the brothers, have compassion and be self-effacing. Never pay back one wrong with another, or an angry word with another one; instead, pay back with a blessing. That is what you are called to do, so that you inherit a blessing yourself." (1 Pet 3:8-9)

I literally exclaimed that my guiding passage had been revealed to me! To love the brothers, that's my call and my mission as I assume the role of Custos. For those unfamiliar with the term, "Custos" is "Custodian" in English, and for me, it is the service of leadership of the Franciscan Friars in Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei.

St Francis of Assisi, calling himself a "friar minor", wanted his brothers to be minor (or lesser), and hence even the titles given to leaders in our Order reflect this sense of minority. Instead of "Superior" or "Prior", St Francis preferred 'Minister', "Guardian" and "Custodian". Franciscan leaders are meant to serve, guard and look after.

Hence this scripture passage hit the nail on the head for me: to love the brothers in the way the Lord wants me to. Our Custody Statutes state that the task of the Custos is "to visit the brothers regularly, exhort them spiritually, support them and humbly and charitably correct them". I intend to do just that, if the friars allow me to, and to humbly journey with them towards greater authenticity and audacity as we live our Franciscan life and charism, in the service of God and God's beloved people. May the Holy Spirit who inspired St Francis continue to inspire us, the sons of St Francis, today.

my petition to st anthony

"Holy Saint Anthony, you are the consolation of so many people. We come to invoke your help, confident of experiencing your goodness and power. Pray for us to the Father of Mercies, that we may obtain the graces we need for ourselves and for our loved ones. Amen."



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THE FRANCISCANS' NEWSLETTER KEEPING OUR
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Join us at our Devotions to
St Anthony: Tuesdays after the
Masses at 12.15pm and 7pm at the
Church of St Mary of the Angels.

Passing as a pilgrim with St Francis



Caught up in life and its vicissitudes, we can begin to believe the great myth of human ego that this earthly life lasts forever and then, when Sister Death draws near to us, we are lost in panic, lost in pain. We are simply lost, and we hold out against her, not knowing that her gentle purpose is to bring us home. We have forgotten how to die.

St Francis remembered how to die. He knew that when we face the embrace of our sister when it comes, we must do so with love. We must yield to her, and allow ourselves to be ushered by her into the Divine Presence, and for this to happen in such a gentle way, we must practice dying.

We must die, every day, just a little. We must die to our self, die to our false self, die to every part of us that is the accretion of property and wealth for their own sake. We must die to the use of others, die to holding on to power so as to dominate, and even and especially die to the belief that we are at the centre of all things.

Francis himself died to each of these.

He died to the rich home and sumptuous clothes of his youth and to the joy a young man takes in his own vigour and power. He died to the rich young man,

who was the toast of Assisi and the centre of attention, known as “Master of the Revels”. He died to his family’s longing to see him raise their profile and their fortune. He died to the noble knight whose armour was forged from the ambition of his father and the myths that filled the head of a young boy who believed war was noble.

He died to the pride that saw only the sores of the lepers and not their souls. He died to the embarrassment of the poor man who begs for his living from door to door. He died to the rejection of some and the adulation of many. He died to the opinion of bishops and princes, popes and kings.

He died to the fear that the brotherhood would not listen ... and would not follow. He died to the desire to be a martyr. He died to the fear of suffering and pain. He died to his own flesh, to the world, to the devil. He died to his own will. He died upon the Cross with Christ.

And in so doing, he remembered how to die, teaching us how to die so that one might truly live.

FRANCISCAN PRAYER

O God, I pray that I may know You and love You, so as eternally to rejoice in You. And if, in the present life, I cannot do so fully, grant that my love and knowledge may at least grow on earth, that my joy may be fully in heaven: a joy expected here and there fulfilled.

O Lord our Father, You counselled, or rather commanded through Your Son, that we ask for this fullness of joy, and You promised to grant it. I ask of You, O Lord, that which, through Your Wonder-Counsellor, You encouraged us to ask and promised to grant: that our joy may be full! Let my mind meditate on this joy, my tongue speak of it, my heart desire it, my words extol it, my soul hunger for it, my flesh thirst for it, my whole substance yearn for it, until I enter into the joy of my God who is Triune and One, Blessed forever.

Amen.

- Soliloquies of St Bonaventure