

Feast of the Stigmata of St Francis of Assisi: 17 September 2018

Homily by Sister Jane Bertelsen during Mass



When we learned our catechism we learned that a sacrament was an outward sign of inward grace. I think we could say the same of today's feast. So often we can look at externals – often much easier. The Stigmata of St Francis is no exception – what we see in the numerous murals paintings etcetera – as here in our side altar is Francis' external encounter with a seraph after

which he found 'the marks of Jesus' on his body as St Paul describes it. Yes, observable bleeding wounds in his hands feet and side.

But it is the first line of today's first reading which draws us to the inward grace:

The **only thing I can boast about** is the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.....

Can I really say that? Not very often!!

In the Considerations of the Holy Stigmata recorded in the early biographies and apocryphal writings about St Francis we read that as he kept vigil on Mount La Verna he prayed this prayer:

"My Lord Jesus Christ,
I pray you to grant me two graces before I die:
the **first** is that during my life I may feel in my soul and in my body,
that pain which You, dear Jesus,
sustained in the hour of Your most bitter Passion.
The **second** is that I may feel in my heart,
that excessive love with which You, O Son of God,
were inflamed in willingly enduring such suffering for us sinners."

The stigmata was God's response to Francis prayer from that place of deep contemplative love, surrender and a total desire to 'Put on Christ' or as we have chosen for our 2019

Chapter Theme: **BECOME WHAT YOU LOVE**

After this experience Francis spoke to his trusted companions as to how he was to live with the reality of this experience. One wise brother replied: "Brother Francis, you must know that God sometimes shows you His divine mysteries **not only for yourself** but also **for the sake of others**. So it would seem that you may be judged guilty of hiding your gift if you keep hidden something which God has shown you for the good of many other persons."

.....surely this captures the other half of our Chapter Theme **BECOME WHAT YOU LOVE**

CHRIST CRUCIFIED FOR THE WORLD

Our inward and outward experience of God whatever it may be **is never just for ourselves**

It is our choice, as it was with St Francis, to Become what we Love, Christ Crucified for the world. God will not force us.....as the Gospel says.....and the Spirit is really trying to get a message across as today's Gospel is Luke's version of the same Gospel we heard at Eucharist yesterday - yes crosses and suffering will come as we all know but our choice is how we embrace, surrender and **love through** them. Yesterday and today Jesus said **IF** you want to follow me then we must take up our cross and we can **CHOOSE** to allow our lives to be lost in Christ.

I feel so blessed to live amongst so many of my sisters here in La Verna who **live what Francis experienced** on La Verna and who daily remind me by the example of their lives of their loving surrender to all that God asks of them. You too carry in your body the marks of Jesus and show me what it means to embrace the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As we celebrate this great Franciscan Feast we also give thanks for the many places we have lived and ministered who were named after this holy mountain Mount Alvernia – and we remember those where we still serve in Singapore, Ireland and our La Verna novitiate community in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe.

St Francis, St Clare and Mary our Mother intercede for us that we too, in our day, may **Become what we love, Christ Crucified for the World.**