

# THE GIFT OF A PRESENCE

>> by Bro FRANCESCO DILEO, OFM Cap.

On the evening of 6 January, at the Mass of the Epiphany of the Lord, I announced that, on 26 April, our Shrine in San Giovanni Rotondo will be privileged to welcome the mantle of Saint Francis of Assisi. This sacred relic, which he gave to Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, is currently preserved at the Capuchin friary in Paris.

I felt it right, immediately afterwards, to explain: "The presence of this relic offers us a precious opportunity to draw more deeply from the spirituality of the Poor Man of Assisi and to renew our commitment to live, as he did, according to the Gospel. By placing ourselves beneath his protective mantle, we may invoke his intercession for an end to wars, which deprive humanity of that "peace" and that "good" which he wished upon every brother and sister in Christ."

This occasion is offered not only to those who follow in the footsteps of the Saint whose entrance into eternal glory we commemorate this year, on the eighth centenary of his death. The call to remain faithful to the one commandment of love — proclaimed anew by Jesus in his words (cf. *Mt 22:37–39*) and, above all, by the witness of his life, culminating in his Passion and death — was addressed by the Seraphic Father not solely to his friars, the Poor Clares and

the lay members of the Secular Order he inspired, but to every believer who seeks to live out sincerely the commitment to Christ they profess.

Each of us, regardless of our role within the Church, is called by Saint Francis to walk the path of harmony, the tangible expression of that love which underpins our duty to regard others as brothers and sisters. The spirit of humility which he practised and taught is, above all, a path of concord: those who make themselves small do not seek dominance or make demands, nor do they seek to impose themselves at any cost; rather, they open new spaces for welcome and dialogue. To welcome one another — through the exchange of ideas, honest discussion and mutual respect — is to recognise each other as a gift from God. It means placing not our own ideas at the centre but the common good; not our own needs, but the needs of all.

Saint Francis's mantle also reminds us of the need to make charity both practical and active, expressed in gestures and behaviour shaped by solidarity. Solidarity is, indeed, one of the hallmarks of a Christian community. We should grow ever more attentive to practising it through simple acts of care: a supportive glance, a quietly offered service, a burden shared, a listening ear that refrains from judgement. This is not only the surest way to cultivate harmony and unity, but also to manifest the love with which God draws

near to humanity.

What we must increasingly come to understand is that solidarity is not only owed to the 'poor' outside our communities — whom we must always assist — but also to the 'poor' among us. We recognise them in those closest to us: a fellow friar or sister, a husband or wife, a parent or child, a neighbour, a colleague at work, or anyone struggling with personal weakness, carrying hidden wounds, or simply in need of greater gentleness and compassion.

Only by shaping our lives according to the Gospel commandment of love will we become true builders of peace, able to approach the Lord — with the credibility that comes from living what we believe — and ask for this precious gift in every place and at every moment in history.

As we prepare to venerate this holy relic, may it inspire us to walk more faithfully in the footsteps of Saint Francis, embracing humility, charity, and solidarity in our daily lives. Let us open our hearts to one another, recognising in every person the face of Christ, and striving always to be builders of peace in our communities and in the world.

At this joyous season of Easter, I extend my heartfelt greetings to all of you. May the Risen Lord fill your hearts with hope, renew your faith, and bless you with His peace and love. ▼

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