

40 Anniversary of Pauline Rule Presentation by Fr. Peter Knaapen to the National Chapter

This year we celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Pauline Rule. In 1982, Saint Pope John Paul II, at a meeting with the International Chapter members, exhorted them and all Secular Franciscans to: “Love, study, live your rule, it is a treasure. As one commentator on the rule said: ‘first, we must love its excellence: It is a grace and a precious gift. Second, we must continue to study it with care for it is our way of life. Finally, we must live it. We must practice what we love and study.

Our present Rule, the Pauline Rule is the Fourth Rule. We have the primitive rule of St Francis, the Rule of 1221, the rule of 1289 approved by Pope Nicholas IV, the Leonine Rule of 1889 and the present rule of 1978. The biographer Celano, in his First Life of St. Francis, speaks of men and women from every walk of life running to St. Francis to see and hear this holy man. They all wanted to imitate him. Celano tells us “to all he (Francis) gave a norm of life, and he showed in truth the way to salvation in every walk of life”.

The rule St. Francis wrote for the brothers and sisters of penance probably consisted of passages from the scripture and some rules about penance and fasting. Popular tradition tells us that a merchant named Luchesio and his wife were the first members of the Third Order. They supposedly asked Francis to write a rule of life for them that they could live in their home. However there is no record of this rule. Yet we do have some insight into what this norm of life may have looked like.

In the early 1900’s Sabatier would be the first Historian to recognize “the Letter to all the faithful” as the spiritual testament of St. Francis to his spiritual children living in the world. He also firmly states: “If Saint Francis had ever written a rule for the Third Order, it would be similar to this letter...it indicates what the associations of brothers and sisters of penance were in their origin. (Paul Sabatier, Vie de Saint Francois d’Assise pp. 442-445). Esser, a Franciscan historian, states “the first version of the Letter to all the faithful represents the primitive nucleus of the way of life for the penitents”.

This letter to all the faithful, which is the prologue to our present Rule, is an exhortation by St. Francis for all to lead a holy life. This is accomplished by observing the two great commandment, loving God and neighbour, by the rejection of sin, by receiving the Eucharist (the Body and Blood of our Lord), by acts of mercy – what Francis calls worthy acts of penance.

Concerning Those Who Do Penance

All who love the Lord with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind, with all their strength (cf. *Mk.* 12,30), and love their neighbors as themselves (cf. *Mt.* 22,39) and hate their bodies with their vices and sins, and receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and produce worthy fruits of penance.

Oh, how happy and blessed are these men and women when they do these things and persevere in doing them, because “the spirit of the Lord will rest upon them” (cf. *Is.* 11,2) and he will make “his home and dwelling among them” (cf. *Jn.* 14,23),

The earliest copy of a Rule for the Third Order is the Rule of 1221, the *Memoriale Proposite*. Cardinal Hugolino, the future Pope Gregory IX wrote it. He was a friend and admirer of St. Francis. He was also the Protector of the Friars Minor. This rule was made up of eight chapters. Chapter one concerned daily life. The penitents were to wear simple and humble clothing and were not to take part in public entertainment. Chapters two and three contained rules about fast and abstinence. Chapter 4 was about prayer. The penitents were to pray the Canonical Hours, what we know now as the Liturgy of the Hours. Those who could not read could substitute the Our Fathers. 12 Our Fathers for Matins (Morning Prayer) and seven Our Fathers for each of the other hours. Chapter 5 deals with the sacraments. A person was expected to confess one’s sins three times a year and to receive communion three times a year – at Christmas, Easter and Pentecost. Chapter 5 also contained a prohibition to take up lethal weapons and to refrain from taking oaths. Chapter six declared the necessity of attending the month meeting and giving to the treasurer one ordinary denar which was to be used for the poor, the sick, and to pay for the burial of people. Chapter 7 specified the apostolic ministries. They were to visit the sick, bury and pray for the dead, and make a will. The last chapter concerned the Visitor, corrections and officers.

This first rule was built upon the notion of simply living and fraternal love. The brothers and sisters were bound together by mutual charity. The prohibition to carry lethal arms was a courageous witness of evangelical peace in a quarrelsome society. Of course with so many people belonging to this order of penitents the cities could no longer recruit enough people willing to be foot soldiers or knights. The rule called for specific apostolic works, namely to visit the sick, and to bury the dead and to pray for them. This was aimed at eradicating poverty and misery. The obligation to make a will was to stop relatives or even family members fighting over a person estate.

The second Rule was the Rule of Pope Nicholas IV in the year 1289. This rule did not add any new material to the Rule of 1221 but gave it a more legislative style.. Only one item was changed; the prohibition to carry lethal weapons. Now it reads one is not to carry offensive weapons, unless in defence of the Roman Church, the Christian faith, one's country or with the permission of the minister. This rule with some modifications lasted 600 years.

The third Rule was in 1883 by Pope Leo XIII. He was the Pope who wrote the famous Letter *Rerum Novarum*. He wanted the Third Order to be the heart and driving force for his Social Reform. And of course the Franciscans generously responded to his call. In his introduction to the Law of the Sodality of the Franciscan Third Order, Pope Leo explain what he hoped would occur. "We issue this Rule with this will and this unique purpose, that as many as possible be called back to the praise of Christian sanctity by our timely invitation." This rule emphasised Christian Virtue and piety. Pope Leo hoped many people would be attracted to the renewed third Order and that through the witness of their lives a radical change would occur in the world.

This rule contains three chapters. The first chapter is about admission, the novitiate and profession. The Second chapter is about the Discipline of living. Like the earlier rule this rule of Pope Leo has regulation concerning simple apparel, simple living, avoiding dances and public spectacles, fast and abstinence, prayer and charity. The third Chapter deals with offices, visitation and the law itself. Included with this rule is an index of indulgences and privileges. In fact a third of this document deals with indulgences and privileges.

Over the years many people accomplished great things under this rule. However some have felt that this rule led the Secular Franciscans away from the original intention of St. Francis, and led to an over emphasise on personal virtue and personal spirituality. Others felt that this Rule and a subsequent letter by Pope Pius X made the third order excessively dependent on the First Order.

The fourth Rule is our present Rule, that of Paul VI. In order for us to realize what a true gift it is we must understand what lead up to its creation. Around 1950 Franciscans, both lay and religious, began voicing the need for an updating of the Rule of Leo XIII. In 1957 the Third Order was given a new constitution with the aim of renewing the contents of the Rule and giving the order a spiritual, social and apostolic orientation.

The 2nd Vatican Council was the turning point for a radical reform of the Order. The 2Nd Vatican Council called for a renewal of all consecrated religious

life. This renewal was to be centred on the “Constant return to the sources of the whole of Christian Life and the primitive inspiration of the institute, and their adaptation to the changing conditions of our times” (decree on Renewal of Religious Life).

All religious communities, institutions and third orders were to revise their Rule and Constitutions. This revision was to be centred on three key elements. First, it must be centred on Christ and the Gospels. Second, it must be grounded in the inspiration of the Founder. In other words it must highlight the community’s proper and distinct charism. Third, it must be relevant to the Modern world and must take into count the “signs of the times”. This must be accomplished by spiritual renewal and by sharing in the life and mission of the Church and the world.

Amazingly, the Pauline Rule does all this. It is beautifully centred on Christ and his Gospel. Article 4 emphatically points that out. “The Rule and life of the Secular Franciscan is this: to observe the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of St. Francis of Assisi, who made Christ the inspiration and the centre of his life with God and man”.

It goes back to the style of our Founder, St. Francis. It includes Francis’ letter to the brothers and sisters of penance as a prologue. In 1979, Fr. Vitale Bonmarco, in his letter on behalf of the Ministers General of the Friars stated: “the practical and mystical program presented by Francis in the First and Second Letters (to all the Faithful) is higher and more profound than a Rule and can be accepted as an authentic foundation and renewal of life for the Third Order even in our times. And it is for this reason that, in proposing for the approval of the Pope the new Rule of the Third Order, the Franciscans Ministers General believed it necessary to place as a Prologue to the Rule the First Letter of St. Francis.

The Pauline Rule also meets the needs and expectations of the Church. Look at article three. It states: “The present Rule adopts the SFO to the needs and expectations of the Holy Church in the conditions of changing times. Look also at article 6: “They have been united more intimately with the Church by profession. Therefore, they should go forth as witnesses and instruments of her mission among all people, proclaiming Christ by their life and words.”

It gives a “Way of Life”, and a means for spiritual renewal of the individual, Church and Society. This new rule emphasises formation especially what we have come to call initial formation. Article 23 states: “Admission into the Order is gradually attained through a time of initiation, a period of formation of at least one

year, and profession of the rule.” Though the rule does not explicitly mention ongoing formation it is implied. Look at Article 24. It (The Council) should adopt appropriate means of growth in Franciscan and ecclesial life and encourage everyone to a life of fraternity.

This rule answers the Vatican Council’s call for spiritual renewal through two key components, namely the Gospels and conversion. Article 4 states “Secular Franciscans should devote themselves especially to careful reading of the gospel, going from gospel to life and life to gospel. Article 7 continues this point. “United by their vocation as ‘brothers and sisters of penance’, and motivated by the dynamic power of the gospel, let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the Gospel itself calls ‘conversion.’ Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily.”

The Pauline Rule takes all the elements of the earlier rules and adapts them to modern world. I like to indicate this by taking elements of the rule of 1221 and show how they are incorporated in the new rule.

But first I want to point out that the Pauline Rule gives you a new name. You are the Secular Franciscan Order. This was to clarify your identity. Was the order a confraternity, a sodality as Pope Leo calls it, a pious society, or an institute? Where you lay people or religious or something in-between. The first two articles clearly points out that it is secular, part of the Franciscan Family and that it is an Order. “In various ways and forms but in life-giving union with each other, they intend to make present the charism of their common Seraphic Father in the life and mission of the Church. The Secular Franciscan Order holds a special place in this family circle... In these fraternities the brothers and sisters, led by the Spirit, strive for perfect charity in their own secular state”.

All the former Rules called for simple living. One was expected to wear humble clothes and not to attend immodest public entertainment. Article 11 covers this. “Trusting in the Father, Christ chose for himself and his mother a poor and humble life...let the Secular Franciscans seek a proper spirit of detachment from the temporal goods by simplifying their own needs...they should strive to purify their hearts from every tendency and yearning for possession and power.”

The present rule has no regulations on fast and abstinence. Instead it challenges people to live the Gospel call to repentance. Article 7 reads: “United by their vocation as ‘brothers and sisters of penance,’ and motivated by the dynamic power of the gospel, let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ

by means of that radical interior change which the Gospel itself calls ‘conversion’. Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily.”

The Pauline rule brings us back to praying the Canonical Hours – the Liturgy of the Hours. Article 8 - Let them join in liturgical prayer in one of the forms proposed by the Church.

You are again called to make the Sacraments of Penance and Eucharist an important part of our lives. You are no longer told how often you must receive these sacraments. Article 7 - On this road to renewal the sacrament of reconciliation is the privileged sign of the Father’s mercy and the source of grace. Article 8 - Let them participate in the sacramental life of the Church, above all the Eucharist.

The Rule of 1221 commanded the members not to take up lethal weapons, or bear them against anybody. The present Rule covers this in a different manner. It calls us to be peacemakers by imitating Francis’ way of being a reconciler. Francis was always trying to reconcile opposing sides. Francis even went to the Sultan to try to end the fighting in the holy land. It is in this spirit that the present rule states in article 19: Mindful that they are bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly, they should seek ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon.

The rule of 1221 called for specific apostolate to visit the sick, to bury the dead and to pray for the deceased. These were to aid in eradicate poverty and misery. The Pauline Rule has the same intention but it states it in a new way. First of all in Article 13 - you are to accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ. Article 14 – you are to build a more fraternal and evangelical world. Article 15 – to be in the forefront in promoting justice. Article 17 – In your families you are to cultivate the Franciscan spirit of peace, fidelity and respect for life. In your marriages you are to witness to the love of Christ for his Church. Article 18 - you are to respect all creation and in Article 19 to be messengers of joy - bringing joy and hope to others.

The rule of 1221 asked that all attend the monthly meeting. The present rule does the same. Article. 24 - to foster communion among the members, the council should organize regular and frequent meetings of the community ...it should adopt appropriate means for growth in Franciscan and ecclesial life and encourage everyone to a life in fraternity.

The rule of 1221 had regulations concerning the Visitor, corrections and dispensation. Article 26 covers this – to promote fidelity to the charism as well as observance of the rule and to receive greater support in the life of the fraternity, the minister should ask for a pastoral and fraternal visit.

In the words of St. Francis: “Oh, how happy and blessed are these men and women when they do these things and persevere in doing them, because ‘the spirit of the Lord will rest upon them.’” “May whoever observes all this be filled in heaven with the blessing of the most high Father, and on earth with that of his beloved Son, together with the Holy Spirit, the Comforter.”

In my first presentation I gave more of a history of the various Rules of the Secular Franciscans. I like to go in a different direction in this presentation. I like to show how the Pauline Rule is helping us to rebuild God’s house in our day. I like you for a moment to think back 40 years to 1978! Where were you? Were you a Tertiary, a member of the Third Order of St. Francis? It was a very different time. As a church we were still getting use to all the changes from the Second Vatican Council. We were celebrating the Mass in our own languages. We took up the challenge of adapting the Church to the Modern World. We opened the windows wide and let the Holy Spirit in to guide us to adapt the Gospel message to the Modern world. Forty years ago the churches were full. There were 2 or 3 priests in every parish. There were three or four masses celebrated in every church. There were many fraternities across Quebec and the rest of Canada. Probably there were 13,000 members.

Today church attendance has diminished all across Canada. Many priests serve 2 or 3 parishes. We have fewer fraternities and fewer members, perhaps around 2,500 to 3,000 and those numbers are aging. It is a lean time for the Church not just in Canada but across North America and Europe. I believe this lean time was seen by many 40 years ago. Lay and religious Franciscan in response to the Spirit wrote a rule that can take the Secular Franciscan through this lean time and bring about a renewal and regrowth of the Church and the Franciscan Orders in the next 100 - 200 years and more.

Cardinal Roger Ettegay wrote these words as we approached the year 2000.

And now, at the dawn of a new millennium, does the Franciscan adventure still have meaning? Does it still have any chance of success? Never has true fraternity, never has the Franciscan Charism been more needed than today.

I believe the Rule of Pope Paul VI will help us through this time of diminishing and will help us to rebuild the church of our time just as St Francis and his followers revitalized the Church in his day. Benet A. Fonck, OFM, in *Called to Follow Christ* said the following:

For those who are “called to follow Christ in the footsteps of Saint Francis of Assisi” (Article #1), particularly through the Secular Franciscan Order, the rule of life becomes the central focus and basic font for setting forth the evangelical goals of life, for unraveling the meaning of the gospel commitment, and for detailing the means to be evangelized and to evangelize others with the supportive context of life in fraternity. For this reason, the rule needs to be read, understood, digested, and absorbed into the personal and communal existence of every Secular Franciscan.

The Rule made the Gospel the center of your life. Article 4, which we know so well, states: “The rule and life of the Secular Franciscans is this: to observe the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of Saint Francis of Assisi, who made Christ the inspiration and the center of his life with God and people”. But I sometimes think we forget what comes after. Article 6 defines this gospel living.

They have been made living members of the Church by being buried and raised with Christ in baptism; they have been united more intimately with the Church by profession. Therefore, they should go forth as witnesses and instruments of her (the Church’s) mission among all people, proclaiming Christ by their life and words.

Pope John Paul II in his address to the OFS in 2002 said “[...] You must now look to the **future** and put out into the deep: *Duc in altum!* (Lk 5:4) The Church expects from the unique Secular Franciscan Order a great service to the cause of the Kingdom of God in the world today. Referring to article 6 of the Rule, Pope John Paul II encouraged all seculars

From you, Secular Franciscans, the Church awaits a courageous and consistent witness of Christian and Franciscan life that aims at building a more fraternal and evangelical world for the realization of the Kingdom of God.

“Secular Franciscans, you live your vocation by belonging to the Church and to society as inseparable realities. For this reason, you are asked first of all to bear a personal witness in the place where you live: "before all: in [your] family life; in

[your] work; in [your] joys and sufferings; in [your] associations with all men and women, brothers and sisters of the same Father; in [your] presence and participation in the life of society; in [your] fraternal relationship with all creatures" (SFO, *General Constitutions*, art. 12.1). Perhaps, you will not be required to pour out your blood as a martyr, but you will certainly be asked to give a coherent and steadfast witness in fulfilling the promises made at your Baptism and Confirmation, which you renewed and confirmed with your profession in the Franciscan Secular Order. By virtue of this profession, the Rule and the General Constitutions must represent for each of you the point of reference for daily living, based on your explicit vocation and special identity (cf. *Promulgation of the General Constitutions of the SFO*). If you are truly driven by the Spirit to reach the perfection of charity in your secular state, "it would be a contradiction to settle for a life of mediocrity, marked by a minimalist ethic and a shallow religiosity" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 31). You must be sincerely dedicated to that "high standard of ordinary Christian living" (*ibid.*), to which I invited all the faithful at the end of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.

Article 17 of the General Constitution gives flesh to this mission of active presence in the church and in the world.

1. *Rule 6* Called to work together in building up the Church as the sacrament of salvation for all and, through their baptism and profession, made "witnesses and instruments of her mission," Secular Franciscans proclaim Christ by their life and words. Their preferred apostolate is personal witness¹ in the environment in which they live and service for building up the Kingdom of God within the situations of this world.
2. The preparation of the brothers and sisters for spreading the Gospel message "in the ordinary circumstances of the world" (*Lumen Gentium* 35) and for collaborating in the catechesis within the ecclesial communities should be promoted in the fraternities.
4. Participation in the service of sanctification, which the Church exercises through the liturgy, prayer, and works of penance and charity, is put into practice by the brothers and sisters above all in their own family, then in the fraternity and, finally, through their active presence in the local Church and in society.

¹ See *Rule* 1221, 17,3; *Legend of the Three Companions* 36; *Second Letter to All the Faithful* 53.

As part of the Rite of Profession in the Secular Franciscan Order which is properly called rite of Commitment to the Gospel Life three questions are asked of the candidates. I sometimes think that we focus too much on the words of the profession that we forget these three questions that are asked of you by the Church. The three questions concern embracing the gospel way of life, giving witness to the Kingdom of God and rebuilding the ecclesial community, The three questions are:

Do you wish to embrace the gospel way of life
by following the example and words of St. Francis of Assisi,
which is at the heart of the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order?

You have been called to give witness to the Kingdom of God
and to build a more fraternal world based on the gospel
together with all people of goodwill.
Do you wish to be faithful to this vocation
and to practice the spirit of service proper to Secular Franciscans?

You have been made members of the People of God by your baptism,
and strengthened in confirmation by the new gift of the Spirit,
in order to proclaim Christ by your life and your words.
Do you wish to bind yourself more closely to the Church
and to work intently to rebuild the ecclesial community
and fulfil its mission among all people?

To each question you responded Yes, this is what I want.

In his day Pope Leo wanted the lay Franciscan to be the means for bringing about a new growth in the Church. I believe the Pauline Rule is better equipped to bring about this new growth. The Pauline Rule challenges individuals to make Christ the inspiration and center of their life, it calls them to live the Gospels – to go from Gospel to life and life to Gospel. The rule challenges each person to undergo a profound metanoia – to respond with one’s whole life to the invitation of Jesus to “Repent, change, for the Kingdom of God is at hand”. Once beginning this journey of conforming one’s life to Jesus the Secular Franciscan is called to give witness to Jesus and to go out to go to all nations and proclaiming who Jesus is.

How do we bring about this new growth in Canada and the rest of the developed countries? Well the answer is to live the Pauline Rule? To live our Vocation as

Franciscans, secular and religious. It is as simple as that and as challenging as that.

The church started with 12 disciples and grew and spread all over the world. St Francis started with a few followers wanting to live and preach the Gospel. We must believe and trust in the words of St John in his book of Revelations. "See I make all things new."

So I like to leave you with a Model that can be an inspiration for you. It is a person from the Gospel of John. We don't know his name just the title the Lord gave to him. I am referring to the Disciple whom Jesus Loved, often referred to by the shorten title "the Beloved Disciple".

I have always been fascinated and attracted to this disciple whom Jesus loves. We hear of the Disciple whom Jesus Loved in the Gospel ever Easter Sunday. The Gospel tells of Mary Magdalene telling the disciples that someone has taken the Lord's body out of the Tomb and we do not know where they have laid him. Peter and the Disciple whom Jesus loved run to the Tomb. The Beloved Disciple gets to the tomb first but he waits and allows Peter to enter first. Peter goes in and see the linen clothes but doesn't know what to make of it. Then we are told the beloved disciple entered the tomb "he saw and he believed".

The first time we hear of Disciple whom Jesus loved is at the last supper in chapter 14:21-26. "Jesus was deeply troubled and testified, "Amen, amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me." The disciples looked at one another, at a loss as to whom he meant. One of his disciples, the one whom Jesus loved, was reclining at Jesus' side. So Simon Peter nodded to him to find out whom he meant. He leaned back against Jesus' chest and said to him, "Master, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I hand the morsel after I have dipped it." So he dipped the morsel and (took it and) handed it to Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot".

For many years it was taken for granted that the "Beloved Disciple" who is mentioned in John's Gospel is John, the Gospel writer himself. However recent Scripture scholars have begun to question this. They tell us that the Beloved Disciple, whom we might call the "hero" of this Gospel, was indeed a real person (but not John) who lived out his discipleship in the midst of the early Johannine community.

We should think of the Beloved Disciple as the model of all people who are loved by Jesus and all who "stay" in his love. If he is a model, a prototype, where was He before the Last Supper? If he is to be a model for us then ought he not to have

followed Jesus from the very beginning. So let us look at first chapter of John's Gospel - verses 35-42

The next day John (The Baptist) was there again with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God." The two disciples heard what he said and followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following him and said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come, and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day.

There are two disciples in this passage. One is named – Andrew, the other is not named. This unnamed disciple represents all of us who wish to be the disciple whom Jesus Loves. The first thing that we notice is that John the Baptist says Behold, the Lamb of God. This is an important word in John's Gospel. Behold – look – see – understand that this is the Lamb of God, the one I have been talking about, the one who is greater than I. These two disciples decide to follow.

I think this is important for us as Franciscans. Like John the Baptist we need to point out to people who Jesus is, we need to boldly proclaim: "Behold – look here is the Lamb of God. We do this by the witness of our lives and by the words we speak.

Jesus turns to the two disciple and said: "What are you looking for". These are the first words of Jesus in John's Gospel so they are important words. What are you looking for? What do you want from me? What do you want in life? . That is a question Jesus asked us over and over again in our lives. What are you looking for? He asks this as you began your journey as Franciscans. The disciples answered: "Rabbi where are you staying?" In other words what are you all about? What can you offer us? What can you give us? Now stay is another significant word in John's Gospel. Stay, along with remain, abide, dwell are used quite often by Jesus. We hear them over and over again. Think of the Vine and the branches: "abide in my love."

Jesus answers 'Come and see' come closer, come and stay with me and you will discover what you most deeply desire. Come and see -- come and stay and your joy will be complete. People are attracted to what we have. They see something different in us because of our commitment and living of our Franciscan vocation. So we need to gently ask people that same question "what are you looking for? And to help people to know what Jesus is all about – what St. Francis is all about.

It is interesting to note that Friar Lester Bock called one of his initial formation books for inquirers “Come and See” I am sure he had this Gospel scene in mind. Every inquirer is being asked by Our Lord Jesus: What are you looking for? What do you want? Come closer, come and discover who I am. The heart of the Rule is article 4:

The rule and life of the Secular Franciscans is this: to observe the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of Saint Francis of Assisi, who made Christ the inspiration and the center of his life with God and people.

We must continue to invite people to come and see, come and make Jesus the center of their lives.

So this unnamed disciple becomes the beloved disciple because he accepts this invitation to come and see, to come and stay with the Lord. Just a little note we are told it is the four in the afternoon (that is late in the afternoon) perhaps John says this to tell us, the reader or hearer, that it is never too late to become the beloved disciple.

John's Gospel also gives us a way to make Jesus the center of our lives. Let's go back to that last supper scene. ‘One of his disciples, the one whom Jesus loved, was reclining at Jesus' side. So Simon Peter nodded to him to find out whom he meant. He leaned back against Jesus' chest and said to him "Master, who is it?." Most of us when we imagine or picture the last supper we think of Michelangelo painting of the Last Supper – all the disciples sitting on chairs around a table. But that is not how John describes it – he says: he was reclining. So they were not sitting on chairs but reclining on sort of a low bench or couch. The beloved disciple leans back against Jesus' chest and asks “who is it?” Notice the picture John paints for us: the beloved disciple leans back with his head on Jesus' chest. Picture it in your mind he has his ear on Jesus' chest and looking out at the others. This is a good image of a disciple; it is one who has his ear to Jesus and looks out at the world in the same way as Jesus does. An ear to the ‘sacred heart’- an ear attuned to the compassionate and loving heart of Jesus. An ear that listens to every word and takes them to heart. A beloved disciple is one who first listens to Jesus, one who is attuned to the Lord, one who makes Jesus the center of his life. He isn't just one who listens but also looks at the other as Jesus does with the same mercy, the same compassion and the same love. He sees as Jesus see, loves as Jesus loves, forgives as Jesus forgives

I truly believe that our Rule and way of life has the means to draw others to a deeper relationship with the Lord. Our way of life helps us to become beloved disciples. But we are called to be more than just disciples – a disciple is a follower – we are called to be apostles – one who is sent – we must go out to the whole world and proclaim Christ.

And if necessary use words

So let us help others to find the answer to “what are you looking for” let us invite them to come and see, let us help them to make Christ the center of their lives. Let us help them to attune their hearing to the heart of Jesus and to see others as Jesus sees them.

So I will conclude with the prayer of St Theresa

Christ has no body but yours, No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours, No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.