



THE CORD

A Newsletter From St. Anthony's Guild

Dear Friend of St. Anthony,

The Fall is always one of my favorite times of the year; with the beautiful colors changing on the leaves and cooler temperatures making outdoor activities more comfortable, it's a time to reflect on the impact the past year has had and look forward to the holidays that are approaching.

There are still many uncertainties surrounding the holiday season since we are not out of this pandemic yet. A festive bash might be completely acceptable in some places and off the table in others. You may need to alter your holiday plans as COVID-19 evolves, but it's not too early to think about how to celebrate safely around Thanksgiving and the December holidays. Be creative and focus on the positive impact you can have and make the most of the end-of-year celebrations however they may unfold. Don't allow yourself to get bogged down with what you can't manage or control right now. Appreciate the little things - time with family and friends over the holidays, virtual or otherwise, will always be cherished and special.

Faithfully,

Fr. David Convertino, OFM

Executive Director of St. Anthony's Guild

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In Transitus



John Ullrich, OFM, 73, a professed Franciscan friar for 48 years and a priest for 45, died on August 13 at St. Anthony's Hospital. He spent his religious life in various roles, mainly pastoral work and positions related to Franciscan formation and education.

On April 9, 1948, John was born in Buffalo, New York, to Robert and Colette (née Guenther) Ullrich. He graduated in 1970 from Siena College near Albany, New York, where he studied philosophy and earned a bachelor's degree in accounting. In 1971, he earned a master's degree in counseling and development from the State University of New York at Albany.

John spent his Franciscan life in vocation and formation work and leadership roles at parishes, with ministry assignments throughout the East Coast and Midwest. From 2016 until 2020, he was stationed at St. Joseph Friary in Chicago, serving as treasurer of the interprovincial post-novitiate formation house. He retired in June 2020 to St. Anthony Friary in St. Petersburg. John is survived by a niece, Gwen Rosenthal of Washington, Michigan, and several cousins.

Francis and the Crusades Part 2

By Fr. George Corrigan, OFM

In my previous article, I shared the background for Francis of Assisi's mission during the Fifth Crusade. I introduced two key ideas that seemed to be part of a solid spiritual movement in Francis' time: peregrination pro-Christo ("wandering for the sake of Christ"), which we would now call "pilgrimage," and the long-established idea of Christian martyrdom. We have already seen the friars "wandering for Christ" in their trips throughout central Italy.

Martyrdom had its own context in Francis' life. The eleventh-century revival of the cult of St. Rufino shaped the ecclesial and communal landscape of Assisi. The age's enthusiasm resulted in the construction of a large church that became the focus of civic pride and identity. By Francis' time, the devotion to the Assisi Martyrs was public and prominent, as Francis' biographers mentioned. It is also evident in Francis' own writing: the Sixth Admonition: "Therefore, it is a great shame for us, the servants of God, that the saints have accomplished great things, and we want only to receive glory and honor by recounting them."

It is also essential to understand that Italy had seen the on-and-off-again threat from Islamic armies and sea raiders since the 9th century. At one point, most of southern Italy and Sicily were under Islamic rule; in Francis' time, the Islamic raiders plagued Venice, its merchant fleet, and the coastal cities of the Adriatic. And this is all background to the general sense of the threat from Muslim armies. It was more than just the Holy Lands; Italians were aware of the Islamic power across the breadth of North Africa and the southern Spanish peninsula. Francis quite probably shared the prejudices of Christians of his time against Islam. He probably knew only Muslims from the chansons de geste, who were presented as idolaters—adoring statues of Muhammad and a mysterious god called Termagant, lustful and fanatical.



The fusion of pilgrimage, martyrdom, and the fundamental Christian mission to evangelize stirred a deep passion within Francis. In 1212, consumed by a “burning desire for holy martyrdom,” Francis sought to go to the East, to Syria, to “preach the Christian faith and repentance to the Saracens and other unbelievers.” (The First Life, Thomas of Celano) But the weather did not cooperate; in fact, it stopped Francis dead in his tracks. For a season, he returned to preaching in and near Assisi. In 1213, Francis felt the impulse to go on a mission to Morocco to preach the Gospel to the Muslim Caliph. On this journey, while in Spain, Francis fell sick and was unable to continue. Again, he returned home. But in 1219, as other friars were heading to Germany, Hungary, Morocco, and Tunis, Francis took up the mission to Syria, traveling first to Egypt, where he arrived in August in the middle of the crusaders’ siege of the key port city of Damietta.

Egypt is not exactly on the way to Syria, yet Francis seems to have specially intended his mission there. Just as Francis had planned to reach the Caliph in Morocco six years earlier, now it seems likely that his destination was to get to the Sultan of Egypt, Al-Malik al-Kamil, the virtual leader of the Islamic world in his day. But what was Francis’ missionary intention? Bishop Jacques de Vitry – not a Franciscan and an eyewitness to Damietta’s events – wrote that “Francis came with a burning zeal for the Christian faith.” By then, even the friars already knew that a likely consequence of such zeal was martyrdom.

When it became clear that Francis intended to cross the battle lines to visit Malik al-Kamil to proclaim the Gospel, was this an indication that Francis went to the sultan planning to suffer martyrdom there, as all the Franciscan sources indicate (Celano, Bonaventure, etc.)?

This topic continues to be a great controversy among modern Franciscans and medieval scholars. André Vauchez, a French medievalist noted for his recent and thorough book on Francis, thinks that “some commentators are doubtful today, fearing to attribute to their hero a suicidal attitude or irresponsible behavior.” He writes, that “Contrary to what is sometimes affirmed, the search for martyrdom was not in contradiction with his desire to follow Christ, who died on the cross to open to humanity the way to salvation. To face tribulations and dangers, including the loss of life, to spread the Christian faith was, from the beginning, a constitutive element of Franciscan sensibility. Jordan of Giano recounts that when volunteers were needed to go to Germany at the time of the general chapter of 1221, “almost all friars, inflamed with the desire to, stood up and offered themselves up to death,” and that he himself, “assuming that he was going to immediately suffer martyrdom there,” sought to know the names of these heroes—which led him, after a combination of incredible circumstances, to leave with them. Finally, we know that Clare of Assisi, who was very close to Francis, learned of the tragic end of five Franciscans executed at Marrakesh in 1220, wept because of her condition as a female recluse extraordinary from going to be martyred in Morocco.”

In leaving to meet the sultan, Francis was thus sincerely convinced that he would be martyred for his faith; but he accepted this risk.

Recipe: Sweet Potato Pudding

Instructions

Here’s a favorite Thanksgiving side, but it’s so delicious and appropriate to serve for your Christmas dinner as well. Some say the bourbon makes this dish, but the butter, pecans and the pure cane syrup are all team players. It’s so good; you could skip dessert!

Ingredients

- 2 pounds sweet potatoes, baked*
- 3 eggs
- 1 cup whole milk
- 1/8 tsp freshly grated nutmeg
- 1/2 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1 cup pecan pieces
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 3 tbsp 100% Pure Cane Syrup
- 1/4 tsp kosher salt
- 1/2 tsp vanilla extract
- 3 tbsp bourbon



* Place washed, unpeeled, unpricked, uncut potatoes in a preheated 400° oven for 30 minutes. To avoid a mess, I like to bake mine in old, thin pie plates in case the sugary sweetness bubbles out. Reduce the heat to 375° after 30 minutes and continue baking for 45 minutes or until tender.

Directions: Preheat the oven to 350°. Mash the potatoes in a mixing bowl until smooth. Add eggs and milk and mix well. Add the nutmeg, cinnamon, 1/2 cup brown sugar, syrup, salt, vanilla, and bourbon. Mix well. Pour the mixture into a 1-1/2-quart round baking dish. Combine the pecans, remaining brown sugar, and butter and mix well. Dot the top of the potato mixture with the butter mixture. Bake for approximately 45 minutes, or until bubbly.

