

Laudato Si' 2020

Theme: "Everything is Connected"

A 9 day Retreat

16 – 24 May 2020



23 May 2020

Capuchin GEM (Green Environment Movement) – JPIC Office - OFM Capuchins

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Peace and Good.

To commemorate the 5th year anniversary of Laudato Si', we invite you to join us in a 9 day retreat.

Each day, we will provide you with materials from which you can find inspiration. All that is required of you is to provide yourself a few minutes each day to find a quiet place to read and reflect in peace.

For today, Day 8, we have five topics:

1. The Grace of Working
2. Manual Work
3. The Poor are our Brothers!
4. The Novitiate
5. Rural Gardens

Happy reading and God bless you always!

Office of the JPIC, OFM Capuchins

I. The Grace of Working

On October 26, 2015, Capuchin brothers from all over the world gathered in Rome to reflect and formulate a document that deals with an important aspect of our Capuchin life: WORK. Their efforts gave into light the Document of the **8th Plenary Council of the Capuchin Order (CPO 8)** entitled: **The Grace of Working**. This document was finally published on January 15, 2016 and was shared to all the Capuchins worldwide.

Today, we will reflect a little on **CPO 8: 'The Grace of Working'** as we relate it with the scriptural passage in **Deuteronomy 24:19-22** which states:

"¹⁹ When you reap your harvest in your field, and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow; that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. ²⁰ When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. ²¹ When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not glean it afterward; it shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. ²² You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this." - Deuteronomy 24: 19-22

This passage touches on two important aspect of our Capuchin life: **Manual work** and **Solidarity with those who are poor and hungry**. The mention of harvesting crops from the field, gathering the fruits

from olive trees and gathering of grapes from the vineyard highlights a special form of work that brings us into direct contact with creation; **Manual work**. At the same time, the passage suggests to us that the fruits of our labors are communal and are not just for ourselves. It tells us that we need to share the graces received from the Lord with those who have no means of acquiring food.

Modern times have led Capuchin brothers to engage in various forms of work as they continue to serve in the vineyard of the Lord. We see friars engaged in many fields such as medicine, law, engineering, nursing, carpentry, plumbing, education, counseling, church ministry and many more.

CPO 8 recognizes this reality and proposes that:

“After assessing the abilities and the aptitudes of the friars in formation, (we should) let them be sent for specialization also in fields not linked to ordained ministry (agriculture, medicine, economics, information technology, social sciences, etc.), adopting this criterion also in the assignment of study burses.” - CPO 8 #12

“The formation of the friars should prepare them to engage in a professional way the issues affecting society, even offering them the opportunity to live among the poor for a good period of time before perpetual profession.” - CPO 8 #14

II. Manual Work

Despite the variedness of our apostolates, there is one kind of work that I believe all Capuchins cannot do without because it is part of our tradition and it is beneficial to our Capuchin life: MANUAL WORK.

It is heartwarming to note that even in modern times, the tradition of working with our hands in the field as a fraternity can still be observed in many friaries especially in houses of formation. The *horarium* of Formation houses worldwide often includes manual work as part of fraternal life together with prayer, study, household chores and recreation. Experience has taught us, that working together in a garden or a field promotes better fraternal interactions and strengthens the bond between brothers.

“Manual and domestic work makes us experience an altruistic love for the brothers, in the humility and minority of service. If practiced with devotion, beginning from initial formation, it allows us to develop a sense of belonging to the local fraternity and to the circumscription.” - CPO 8 #10

“The Capuchin tradition has also made work an ordinary part of daily life. Our history is continually enriched by the lives and example of friars who serve the community with all their physical, mental, and spiritual abilities.” - CPO 8 #2

The role of the formator is vital in instilling this aspect of our Capuchin life among our young friars. CPO 8 emphasizes this by stating that, *“It is important, therefore, that the formators especially participate in domestic and manual work, each according to his own ability, and so communicate the value of such work as a dimension that characterizes our style of life.” - CPO 8 #9*

Manual work also contributes greatly to prayer and contemplation. It provides a venue for friars to experience moments of silence, self introspection, spiritual reflections and contemplative prayer as they cultivate the earth. Our experience of prayer and contemplation while working in the field can then be extended to other works and apostolates.

“Every workbench, desk, ironing board, or kitchen counter can become an ‘altar’ where the work of our hands and the intentions of our hearts are presented to the Lord of the harvest. Our work becomes liturgical and therefore prayer. One doesn’t work so much by himself, or for himself, but in communion with others.” – CPO 8 #5

III. The poor are our brothers!

Now we go to the social dimension of our work.

Deuteronomy 24:19-22 teaches us that whatever blessings we receive from God, especially the fruits of our labor, are not just only for ourselves. They also must be shared with others.

“We Capuchin friars are called to provide whatever is necessary for our support through our work and to share this with the poor.” - CPO 8 #6

“Let us remember that the purpose of our work is not only to ensure our support, but to share our life with people, putting ourselves at their service as lesser brothers. Every circumscription of the Order shall have at least one structure to provide assistance and advancement for the poor.” - CPO 8 #20

The scripture reading reflects clearly the dynamics of JPIC (Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation). It reminds us to share God’s blessings that we receive through the abundance of creation with foreigners, the orphans and the widows. It is important to note that the abundance we received from creation was the result of the care we rendered to creation through our manual work. In this scripture passage, we see all together the elements of JPIC: dialogue, justice and care for creation.

As we reflect further on our Capuchin tradition, we realize that it invites us to go a step further than just sharing the excess of what we have received. Our tradition challenges us to share even the choicest parts with the poor. This reminds us of our Capuchin *questors* who shared first with the poor what they have received from their questing and whatever is left, they take with them to the convent.

We share the choicest portions with the poor because the poor are our brothers. Whatever we have also belong to the poor. We operate in the knowledge that, being brothers and sisters, we deserve equal shares. This point of view is very radical and we often fail in this regard. But the important thing is that we are aware of it and we are constantly working towards it.

To make the radical even more radical, CPO 8 challenges us to take another step forward. Aside from generously sharing our resources with the poor, we are also asked by it to work hand in hand with them. *“We are not called only to work for the poor, but above all with the poor.” - CPO 8 #18*

The journey towards this radical way of living is a long and challenging one hence there is a need for us promote love for the poor among our young brothers early in their formative years.

IV. The Novitiate

To encounter Jesus in creation, in the oratory and in the faces of the poor

In the Philippine, the Capuchin Novitiate is situated in Baguio City. Here, the Novice Master receives novices from several circumscriptions of the Pacific Asia Capuchin Conference. Hence, the novices do not come only from the Philippine Province but also from other countries in Pacific Asia (e.g. Malaysia, Korea, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea etc). This environment teaches our novices that the Capuchin Order is international. It opens the door for them to learn to dialogue with people that belong to

different cultures.

The beauty of Novitiate life is that it mirrors the life of St. Francis at the beginning of his religious conversion. When St. Francis finally responded to the invitation of God, he went out of the walls of Assisi and searched for God in three places: (1) in the midst of creation as he contemplated in the caves of Mount Subasio (2) in a ruined church as he contemplated on the Cross of San Damiano and (3) in the faces of the lepers living outside of Assisi.

In the Novitiate, the novices also search for God in the same three places. They search for Him (1) in the midst of creation as they cultivate and beautify the garden of the Novitiate each day (2) in the Novitiate Oratory as they celebrate the Mass, pray the Divine Office and meditate and finally (3) in the faces of the poor that they often welcome and entertain when they take up the role of porter for the fraternity.

The contemplative environment of the Novitiate teaches the brothers to constantly remain in the presence of God even as they shift from one activity to the next. To expound on this further, I would like to share two quotes from the writings of St. Vincent de Paul regarding the contemplation of the presence of God in the 'faces' of the poor and the suffering. St. Vincent wrote:

"Do not become upset or feel guilty because you interrupted your prayer to serve the poor. God is not neglected if you leave him for such service. One of God's works is merely interrupted so that another can be carried out. So when you leave prayer to serve some poor person, remember that this very service is performed for God." – **St. Vincent de Paul**

"If you must leave prayer to attend the sick, leave it, and as you leave God in prayer, you will find God with the sick." - **Vincent de Paul**

The Porter

One of the memorable experiences that every novice will have is the honor of being a porter. Part of the duty of the porter is to welcome the poor.

Whenever a poor person visits the Novitiate, the porter will welcome his guest warmly into the receiving parlor and listens to his request. After which, the poor would be asked to sit comfortably while the porter goes to the refectory and prepare a meal for him. The porter will serve the food in a special way. He would serve it on a tray together with a beverage and silverware. He then encourages the poor to eat in peace. The brother would then go and prepare a packet of food and other items that he later he gives to the poor after the meal.

During Advent and Lent, the care for the poor takes a deeper meaning with the knowledge that the money they save through fasting are used to provide the food that the porter generously share with the poor.

The brothers learn early in their religious formation to regard the poor with care and respect and to contemplate the face of Jesus in them. Each encounter with the poor becomes an opportunity for them to also encounter Jesus.



Rural Gardens

IV. Rural Gardens

I grew up in a rural setting where every family has a small garden with vegetables and fruit trees. What fascinates me about these small gardens is that the garden of one family is also the garden of the whole community. When a family is in need of a vegetable or a fruit that is not available in their garden, they would visit a neighbor that has the vegetable or fruit they need and would ask it from the neighbor. The neighbor on his part would give the item generously without expecting any payment for it. At other occasions, if a neighbor approaches the family and ask for a fruit or a vegetable that they have, they on their part share it generously. When families cook a special meal, they cook not only for the family but also for their neighbors.

During my immersion among the Bla'ans of Mauno, Columbio, Sultan Kudarat, the community where I lived had just recently suffered from a drought and food was very scarce. The father of the family that adopted me was a pastor of the community. A few days after I arrived, the corn stalks that my foster father had planted a few months earlier have finally matured and I accompanied him to harvest them. After the harvest he whispered to me that we will be sharing the harvest with the rest of the community because many have not yet recovered from the drought. In the days that followed, I would regularly see people discretely going to the kitchen of our house and would come out with a sack or a bag of corns.

"Ho, every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. - Isaiah 55:1

With the advent of the COVID19 pandemic, the concept of a vegetable garden at home is regaining its previous popularity. Quarantines have given people more time to tend gardens. The increased rise of unemployment and the contagion of COVID19 in food processing plants have likewise made the home garden a sound economic option for many.

REFLECTIONS:

1. The poor does not forget!

Every year, our Capuchin Postnovices would begin the Advent season with the Greccio Experience. It is a one week retreat that culminates with the reenactment of the Birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. On the day before the reenactment, we would send off the Postnovices, just as St. Francis would send off his early brothers to the four corners of the world in order to preach the Gospel. The brothers would visit houses or meet people along the way and greet them with peace. They would then invite the people to join the reenactment celebration.

One time, the Greccio experience was held at the Novitiate in Baguio and I was fortunate enough to facilitate the sending off of the brothers. The brothers went around Baguio for the whole day. Many tourists and rich people would often ask the brothers from what congregation they belong. When they tell the people that they are Capuchins, the next question they receive is: What are the Capuchins?

In contrast, each time they meet a poor person, even when the poor person is still far away, the automatic response is: Look! The Capuchins!

The poor does not forget!

2. Oases in the middle of the pandemic

It would be nice if we can continue our Capuchin tradition of manual work by creating and maintaining vegetable and herb gardens in our convents especially in this time of the pandemic. They can be oases in a desert of unemployment and homelessness. They can also be an inspiration for others to create similar oases in their own homes.

We frequently worry about not having enough money to buy the things that we feel are essential. We tend to overlook the fact that oftentimes ***the best things in life are free!***

May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life, Amen.

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