

**PRAYER DISCUSSION
FRANCISCAN CORE VALUES
CONVERSION OF HEART**



LEADER: CALL TO PRAYER: Let us take a moment to quiet ourselves, breathe deeply and relax in the loving embrace of our God. (pause). Who shall we bring into our circle of prayer this day?

(Allow time to share the names of individuals or groups of people especially for those facing life decisions, transitions, or situations where it is hard to find the right path to God. This would be a good opportunity to raise up the names of the outreach Associates of your group and any of our Sisters in special need.)

LEADER: INTRODUCTION

We have heard and been inspired by the conversion stories of many people who have lived in recent times. Dorothy Day, Philip and Dan Berrigan, Oscar Romero, Mahatma Gandhi, to name a few. Each of these people had a significant moment in their lives that called them to radical change, often through the actions of another person. St. Francis always attributed his conversion to his meeting with the leper. From the stories of these revered people we begin to understand that conversion is not a one time event. It is simply the first verse of a song that God is singing in us. We are called to recognize its challenge daily. Our lives are made up of both spectacular and routine conversions on a daily basis. So let us pray together:

ALL: OPENING PRAYER:

Holy One, we come together in your presence as Franciscans,
striving to learn from the lives of Francis and Clare.
Today we pray to experience your call to conversion.
Help us to grow in a deeper understanding of this daily challenge.
Be with us during this time together
as Light of understanding and Fire of Love. Amen.

SUGGESTED MUSIC: The Summons. YouTube 2:48, Oct 2009 version is easier to understand. The lyrics can be Googled.

LEADER: PRAYERFUL DISCUSSION AND/OR SILENT REFLECTION. IF THE GROUP IS LARGE YOU MAY WANT TO HAVE THEM SHARE WITH A PARTNER.

Share a time in your life that was a significant moment of conversion. A turning from one way of life to another, or a movement from one good to a greater good.
Who were the people in your life at the time? Who was helpful? Who opposed you?
How did you come through?

You may also want to retell and reflect on the story of Francis and the leper, or of another person. What qualities of conversion seem to be universal in these experiences?

PSALM 139:1-12. ALTERNATE SIDES.

- + O God, you search me and you know me. You know if I'm standing or sitting. You perceive my thoughts from afar.
- + Whether I walk or lie down, you are watching; you are familiar with all my ways.
- + Before a word is even on my tongue, O God, you know it completely.
- + Close behind and close in front you hem me in, shielding me with your hand. Such knowledge is beyond my understanding, too high beyond my reach.
- + Where could I go to escape your spirit? Where could I flee from your presence?
- + If I ascend into heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in darkness, you are there! If I soar on the wings of the morning or dwell in the deepest parts of the sea,
- + Even there your Hand will lead me, and your love will embrace me.
- + Search me, O my Beloved, and know my heart! Try me and discern my thoughts! Help me to face the darkness within me; enlighten me, that I might radiate your Love and Light!

PAUSE FOR A FEW MOMENTS OF REFLECTION BEFORE BEGINNING THE READINGS.

READER 1

With the Psalmist, we acknowledge that God is always drawing us forth into Godself. Yet we often resist. The story is told of Francis that one day he passed right by a beggar, showing no acknowledgement nor response. But after moving on a way, he was overcome with remorse and returned giving all he had to the man. The beggar received not only money but a blessing. So we see that Francis was not always perfect. He referred to himself as the greatest sinner, and thus, always in need of conversion.

READER 2

For Franciscans embracing Gospel life, conversion of heart is an ongoing process. When Francis, in his writings, urges us to begin a life of penance, he means we must totally and continuously open ourselves to conversion. We make a dwelling place for God within, so that our love can grow by continuously turning toward God and our neighbor. This is a daily challenge and often we fail. At the end of his life, Francis confessed that he had only just begun.

REFLECTION AND SHARING

Do I really believe that God is not finished with me yet?
How do I deal with the changes that are necessary to grow in faith and love?
How do I accept these changes? With trust? With joy?
What Scripture passages inspire and strengthen me to recognize the invitation to conversion?

READER 3

Finally, we remember that conversion is a turning to God and our neighbor. So, let us meditate on the counsel of Peter in his first letter, 3:8-11.

Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing....."Those who desire life and desire to see good days, let them keep their tongues from evil and their lips from speaking deceit; let them turn away from evil and do good; let them seek peace and pursue it."

REFLECTION AND SHARING

How does this Scripture speak to us in our personal lives?

How can we relate it to the challenges of the Corporate Stances of our Congregation, i.e., nuclear disarmament, care for creation, abolishing human trafficking and anti-racism?

INTERCESSIONS: LEADER WITH GROUP RESPONDING IN CAPS

To you, merciful God, we bring the needs of all our brothers and sisters:

- + For all who are struggling with the call to conversion: MAY THEY EXPERIENCE YOUR PRESENCE THROUGH THE FAITHFUL WITNESS OF OTHERS
- + For all who seek reconciliation within families and communities: MAY THEY EXPERIENCE HEALING AND FORGIVENESS.
- + For those entrusted with authority over others: MAY THEY HEED AND SERVE THE NEEDS OF THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED
- + For all who strive to serve you: MAY THEY JOYFULLY WORK TOWARD AN END TO WAR AND VIOLENCE, HUNGER AND HOMELESSNESS, AND INJUSTICE OF ANY KIND
- + For whom else shall we pray.....

CLOSING PRAYER

Gentle God, you call us to be free and give us peace. Calm our minds in the midst of the frenzied pace of everyday concerns and teach us to order all things rightly according to all your dreams for us. May we bring your peace to the world. We make our prayer with the Christ who lives within us. Amen.

CLOSING ACTIONS

Sing the last verse of the song and/or extend the sign of peace to each other.

SOURCES

Associate Manual, Companions on the Journey, Chapter 1

Franciscan Morning and Evening Praise, Week 1, Conversion of Heart

(For those who have the original version of the above, the music and lyrics of the song, The Summons, is on p. 1457.)

Psalms for Praying, Nan C. Merrill

SETTING SUGGESTIONS

As a call to conversion, a bell that has a kind of chiming tone could be used at the beginning.

For display: candle with one of the "source" books mentioned above or a Bible.

