

## STATION TWO: THE SEEKER

MOUNT SUBASIO RISES ABOVE ASSISI. PATHWAYS LEAD UP THE TREE-COVERED mountainside that conceals clefts, hollows and caves, ideal for shelter or solitude. This station marks the beginning of a period of prayer when Francis sought solitary places to come face to face with his inner self and to seek discernment. "The First Life" by Thomas of Celano, describes the listlessness that dogged Francis' convalescence.

When he had recovered a little and, with the support of a cane, had begun to walk about here and there...he went outside one day and began to gaze upon the surrounding countryside with greater interest. But the beauty of the fields, the delight of the vineyards, and whatever else was beautiful to see could offer him no delight at all.... From that day he began to regard himself as worthless and to hold in some contempt what he had previously held as admirable and lovable, though not completely or genuinely. For he had not yet been freed from the *bonds of vanities* nor *had he thrown off from his neck the yoke* of degrading servitude.<sup>1</sup>

During this solitary period, Francis had one companion with whom he could discuss matters of the soul. He underwent a radical inner transformation of soul. From an initial feeling of loss and wretchedness, Francis was moved to seek repentance for his sins. Although he was gradually able to accept God's mercy, he remained in fear that he would continue to live in sinfulness.

The man of God...was accustomed to enter the cave...and inspired by a new and extraordinary spirit he would pray to his *Father in secret*.... He prayed with all his heart that the eternal and true God guide his way and *teach him to do His will*. He endured great suffering in his soul, and he was not able to rest until he accomplished in action what he had conceived in his heart. Different thoughts followed one after another, and their relentlessness severely disturbed him.... He repented that he had sinned so grievously and that he had offended *the eyes of majesty*.... [H]e was not yet fully confident of refraining from future [transgressions].<sup>2</sup>

Francis grappled with himself until he fully experienced the power of God's mercy. He was suddenly overwhelmed when he became conscious of the greatness of God's love. This filled him with indescribable joy. He had found the hidden treasure promised in the gospels. A new strength enabled him to return to life in Assisi where he believed that he could do great and noble things.

God did not move Francis too quickly. Nor did Francis make a complete break once and for all from the earthly things he enjoyed. The "Legend of the Three Companions" describes what happened when Francis tried to resume his former lifestyle, treating his friends to a banquet and leading them in their after-dinner revels. He was suddenly struck by a sense of all-consuming tenderness which overwhelmed him completely and made him stop in his tracks. His friends assumed that he was thinking about a woman, which Francis found himself saying was true. Much later he realized that this bride represented both the religion and the lifestyle of poverty that he was finally to adopt.

CONTRIBUTIONS

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REDEMPTION

Disoriented  
As if separated from  
the Way  
grasping for some  
stabilizing branch

Yearning to see  
I had lost sight  
desperate to know love  
forgetting how

upside down  
striving for uprightness  
afraid of the inside  
shutting all doors.

Then subtle  
light  
like gentle fingers  
that unfold  
the eastern sky  
pointed the path home.

*Lynda Maraby*

BREATH OF GOD

O breath of God, come set me free  
From weighing burdens set on me.  
Unforgiveness keeps us apart  
When anger resides within my heart.

Make me willing to see my plight;  
Open my eyes and give me sight...  
That I may look within my soul  
To see what keeps me from the goal  
Of love of neighbor and of self.

Let me not too busy be...  
To sit,  
To ponder,  
To stay with Thee....  
Until my heart does soften more  
And I can open a once closed door.

*Jean Mahan*

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THE WORD—A GOD WHO CAN ONLY LOVE

The Lord calls in silence.  
In a world of peace, God's word comes  
like the descent of a quiet, velvet night.

There is no special way to speak to God,  
no particular way that says everything.  
What a marvelous experience,

to be in the presence of God—  
and what is adequate is silence.

God reads the heart  
and proclaims marvels to people who love God,  
even to those who may not know God.

God writes, etches our names  
on the palm of God's hand  
where they are seen when God raises  
those hands before his eyes.

If the world were to stop tomorrow,  
God would still be present to me.  
Should I die or no longer be able  
to speak, or see, or walk,  
God would still exist and love me.

If all the things I have done,  
all the people I have met,  
all the panels I have nailed to walls,  
the cabinets I have created,  
the words I have written,  
the sermons I have given,  
if they would all disappear,  
God would still be present  
and God would still love me,  
for our God is a faithful God.

It is difficult for a person  
who is full of "self"  
to acknowledge such a loving God.  
It would mean acknowledging

that there is Someone whom I cannot control,  
Someone whom I cannot teach,  
Someone whom I cannot stop  
from loving me  
and calling me to new life.

Despite whatever I may do,  
God continues to be God,  
continues to love me,  
continues to call me to love  
so that God's will may be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.

A proud person is blind.  
It is a blindness that comes from the  
brilliant shine of his/her own sun.  
It is too bright  
and blinds our eyes to the Light of the world.  
How strange it is, to realize  
that two different lights  
have two different effects.  
One leads to blindness,  
the other to light and vision.  
Lord, heal the blindness caused by my own sun.  
Open me to the light of your Son.

Make me a Eucharist,  
someone who is always thanking you  
for the wonder of you  
Light and the Word-made-flesh. Amen.

*Lester Bach*

DEAR LORD, HELP ME TO COPE WITH THE REALITY OF MYSELF

Dear Lord, help me to cope with the reality of myself,  
Help me to be aware of the things within myself  
which push me away from you;  
Let me take to myself as truth  
the fact of your all-consuming love  
And give me the hope  
that comes from knowing that my sins are forgiven. Amen.

*John McLeod*

. . . .

A HOUSE DIVIDED

I have discovered a part of myself that I am deeply ashamed of, and yet it is so much a part of me that the exorcising will be immensely painful. I am divided against myself.

This is not simply a bad habit or sin that I can “stop doing.” It’s woven into the fabric of my personality. Only You, Jesus, can cast out this demon. Yet this demon holds me back from approaching you in true Franciscan humility.

O Lord, help me to want to be rid of it. Last night I dreamed of a terribly forceful wind that was driving everyone into the sea. There was only one person who was being driven in the opposite direction, and this person was trying to save the others by holding them against the fierce wind. It was a losing battle.

This was I, Lord, trying to save the parts of myself that are possessed by the demon. I couldn’t do it. Lord, I beg of you to still the winds of self-destruction that push against my coming closer to you. Please Lord, cast out my demons. I am exhausted, and can go no further without you.

*Miriam Kennedy*

CHILD OF A KING

Father, just how long  
Can I sustain this lie,  
Denial of the truth of who I am?  
It is as if, like Francis,  
I'd been cursed,  
And chosen for myself  
A beggar to father me,  
Refusing to acknowledge  
I'm the child of a King.

But all the lies I've lived,  
The deceit,  
The guarded silence of my soul,  
Are being shattered,  
As the chains fall off my limbs  
The gag removed,  
And I am clothed in the naked freedom  
Of a child of God.

My real self, now recognized,  
Demands a freedom to obey,  
Not slavishly,  
But with delirious joy.  
Bubbling up  
To soar into the sunlight,  
Where the hidden one  
Now calls me to the shelter of his side.

He calls for rings and gowns  
To celebrate a feast for me.

I find it hard to understand myself.  
Just why did I believe the lies  
That kept me groveling in pigsties.  
No more like a ragged gypsy will I roam.  
I am the child of a King.  
I'm home.

*Maureen Maguire*

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AS SAINT FRANCIS DID

As Saint Francis did, may we keep our eyes and thoughts and hearts and praises lifted to the glorious mysteries on high; rather than downcast to our toils here plodding upon this dirt floor of creation. Lord, Grant us through grace the strength and courage we need this day, that together with the hope of our faith we may confront our challenges, and in so doing learn and grow all that we can from them regardless of their outcome. Draw us toward your sacred wisdom and its revelation that yours is not only the light of the world and the light of life, but also the light of our salvation. Empower us to live as examples of your Word in this world of darkness that others may be drawn toward your light. Wherein, all who are enveloped by nature's magnificence, and awakened by our senses blessed bestowance, can but stand speechless before creation both beholder and beholden.

As I kneel before you now I do so humbly, bearing the yoke of my sins. Lord, in your mercy help me rise to become the man I can be—the man you created me to be. With your Holy Spirit as my staff, though I will falter in my travels and travails, I shall never fall.

God of all that was and is and will be, you are my comfort and my joy realized in conquering my weakness thru your divinity. Lead me