

# Reflection

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*Offered by Sr. Rose Mary Pint  
September 17, 2015*

## **FEAST OF THE STIGMATA OF FRANCIS**

Today we reflect upon the five wounds of Christ impressed upon Francis's body on Mount La Verna located 100 miles from Assisi. Francis lived in solitude there in a little hut of reeds built on a ledge overhanging a chasm some hundred and twenty feet deep.

Legend and reliable biographers say on the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, September 14, 1224, the miracle of the Stigmata occurred. "In that hour which precedes sunrise, kneeling before his hut, Francis prayed, his face turned toward the east. "O Lord," he pleaded, "I beg of you two graces before I die – to experience in myself in all possible fullness the pains of your cruel Passion, and to feel for you the same love that made you sacrifice yourself for us." (St. Francis of Assisi: A Biography by Omer Englebut, pg. 242.)

Now I ask who of us ever prays to experience as much suffering as is humanly possible?! Most of us are busy seeking every possible remedy for what ails us or causes us grief. So what is this all about in Francis's request to suffer and in St. Paul's letter to the Galatians where he says: "may I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." (Galatians 6:14-18) Or Jesus's words in the gospel of Luke: "If any wants to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." (Luke 9:23-26)

Three mystics, Francis, Paul and Jesus are pointing to the deepest transformative Christ mystery present in our lives and in all of creation – that it is through the letting go of our illusion that we control our lives that we fall into the mystery of God's encompassing love. It happens most notable in our times of suffering and loss. Those times in our lives when we are clearly "taking up the cross" of illness, death, disappointments, thoughtlessness, tragedies, death of loved ones, or simply responding to the needs of others whether we feel like it or not. Love and suffering are two of the most transformative human experiences that we have. Accepted with total trust in the God who

so unconditionally loves us, they lead us to Paul's words in Galatians (2:20): "I live no longer, not I, but Christ lives in me and I in Him." Transformation happens in those times of giving over ourselves to a loving God and trusting that we are slowly but surely being changed into the image of Christ alive in us from the moment of our creation. Christ energy is regenerative. We see it everywhere we look in the changing of seasons, the changes in ourselves as we grow, and the changes in our consciousness. We are on the move toward falling into the unfathomable mystery of Christ's passion and love present everywhere. As Paul wrote to the Colossians (3:11): "There is only Christ: He is everything and He is in everything."

Francis did not love suffering. Francis loved Christ. He wanted to **be** like Christ in every possible way. His spirit sought the deepest possible intimacy with Christ. His insistence on poverty was about his knowing that it is necessary to empty ourselves of anything and everything (self-centeredness, distractions, things, etc.) – anything that keeps the Christ presence from being central in our lives.

This feast day of the Stigmata is a summons from our Brother Francis to become lovers of Christ. Or said in the words of Simone Weil: "If we go down into ourselves, we find that we possess exactly what we desire" in other words – Christ! Like Francis we can trust that grace from the Holy One is slowly but surely transforming us into the living image of Christ right now – today! All praise be to Jesus Christ whose presence we celebrate in ourselves and around this table of Eucharist here and now. Amen!

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