



# Our Lady's Fraternity

OF THE ORDER OF FRANCISCANS SECULAR

## The Work of Christmas

by Howard Thurman

When the song of the angels is stilled,  
 When the star in the sky is gone,  
 When the kings and princes are home,  
 When the shepherds are back with their flock,  
 The work of Christmas begins:

To find the lost,  
 To heal the broken,  
 To feed the hungry,  
 To release the prisoner,  
 To rebuild the nations,  
 To bring peace among brothers [and sisters],  
 To make music in the heart.

## PRAYER INTENTIONS

### In your prayers, please remember..

- Grazia, for safe traveling
- Ann Colombo, for healing
- Debbie A., for healing
- Baby Gabriel, for healing
- Bernadette, Bernadette's daughter
- Jan's father
- John, for healing
- Bill, for healing
- Kathleen, for healing, peace of mind
- Inge, for healing from back pain
- Janine, Helene and Bernadette's sister
- Hoby, Rob, Mike, Sean, Paul, Jay, and Ed, for healing and strength
- Anne, for strength
- Albert, Joan K's brother, for healing
- Alice Aubuchon, for strength and courage
- Alice Aubuchon's husband and daughter
- the deceased members of our fraternity



- our brothers & sisters who are ill or grieving,
- our families and friends
- our fraternity, that we may receive new vocations
- our retired brothers and sisters
- those who must live with aftermath of violence
- the poor and vulnerable in our communities

### Thanksgivings:

- Grazia, for her family and a gorgeous fall!
- Katie, for all your prayers during my illness
- Ann, for her father, Walter's, continued good health
- Andy, for his children, their strength, courage, and perseverance
- Bob M., for successful eye surgery

If you would like to add to our list of prayer intentions and/or thanksgivings but are not going to be at the monthly meetings, please let Andy know at either [asappofs@gmail.com](mailto:asappofs@gmail.com) or 978-930-4731.

## DID YOU KNOW...

...that there are 68 saints & blesseds who came from one of the three Franciscan orders?

## Fraternity Calendar

### Next Meeting:

**\*December 14, 2014**

1:00--Council Meeting

2:00--Fraternity Meeting

3:30--Social Time

*Prayer/Meditation:* Bernadette

*Refreshments:* Helene

*Ongoing Formation:* "Hold back nothing..." & "Nothing belongs to us" from *Francis of Assisi: The Message In His Writings*

### Upcoming Meetings:

January 11, 2015

*P/M: Ginny, R: Ginny*

February 8, 2015

*P/M: Joan K, R: Charlie*

March 8, 2015

*P/M: Ann; R: Andy*

April 12, 2015

*P/M: Grazia; R: Joan*

\*May 17, 2015

*P/M: Charlie; R: TBA*

### Upcoming Events:

March 20-22, 2015:

Franciscan Spirituality

Pro Life and Lenten

Retreat, St. Benedict

Abbey, Still River, MA



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

**Untie and Unite**

by Br. Erik Lenhart

As an 11 year-old, I had a brief career as part of a magical duo with my buddy Steve Kamas. It was precious. My mother sewed us magic-themed vests for our “gigs,” which were exclusive to our younger siblings’ birthday parties. The summer of 1993, we pooled our allowances and spent every cent on magic tricks—or as we in the industry call them “illusions.” My favorite “illusion” involved a rope with knots that magically slid up and down the rope and could be transferred magically to another rope (if my focus was good that day). I am bound by the Code of Ethics of Junior Illusionists not to reveal the secrets of this illusion, but I can tell you that our younger siblings were dazzled by the knot trick.

When I heard that Pope Francis had a devotion to “Our Lady, the Untier of Knots,” I was curious. I had never heard of Our Lady, the Untier of Knots, and I purchased several of her prayer cards and read Paul Valley’s biography, “Pope Francis: Untying the Knots.” Valley described Jorge Bergolio’s first encounter with Our Lady, the Untier of Knots in Augsburg, Germany in 1986, when he was distraught over the difficulties, tensions, and knotted relationships in his Jesuit Province, perhaps by his own actions. The icon moved Bergolio, and he passed on the devotion when he would return to Argentina.

The image has an interesting history. As Valley reports, in 1610 an aristocratic Bavarian couple with marital difficulties approached a saintly Jesuit, Fr. Jakob Rem, for help in their marriage. Quoting St. Ireneus, who spoke of Mary as, “the one whose obedience loosed the knot of Eve’s disobedience,” Fr. Rem raised up their wedding ribbon and prayed, “for all knots to be loosed and resolved.” The couple overcame their conflict, and

around 1700 their nephew commissioned the painting, seen [below] this piece. The reconciliation of the couple was not ‘magic,’ but rather the power of God to overcome division and make peace for those who avail themselves to God’s grace.

In the image, Mary is untying knots in a rope handed to her by angels in the light of the Holy Spirit. The original, painted in 1700, is by Johan Geroge Schmidtner. The prayer on the back of the card reads: Through your grace, intercession, and your example, deliver us from all evil, Our Lady, and untie the knots that prevent us from being united with God.

A devotion to the Untier of Knots seemed like a very practical Marian devotion to me. Like all human beings, I have both internal and external knots in my life that affect my relationship with God and others. Some knots just need a light tug to loosen. Others have been tightening for years and will need a fork to loosen like my own mother used to use whenever I had a knot in my shoelace that was beyond my ability to untie. I was drawn to the idea of Mary, the Untier of Knots, because I need grace from God, the grace that Mary received fully, to loosen some of the knotted situations in my life.

I took the Untier of Knots prayer card on retreat as I was preparing for my final vows as a Capuchin Franciscan and also while preparing for my ordination as a deacon. In both retreats, I prayed with the image while asking God for the grace to loosen the knots in my heart and life. While praying, I happened to look down at the cord of my habit, which has the three knots that symbolize my vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. At that moment, it occurred to me that my life revolves around maintaining and tightening knots, which unite me with God. With a simple switch of





## FOOD FOR THOUGHT (CONT'D)

letters, to untie becomes to unite. This is the goal of the spiritual life: to become more and more free from sin, to unite closer and closer to the Lord. Sin is that force in our world that robs us of our freedom to be bound to God's offer of covenantal love and joy. The prayer to untie our knots is a prayer for freedom that we may bind ourselves to God's will and vocation for us. I had been praying for weeks before I realized what I sought was the release from one sets of knots so that I might embrace another. The knots that I need loosened are things that are not-God. Things like selfishness, fear, and power-seeking spring up like thorns to entangle us with confusion and darkness, which strangle our minds with fear (a noose around our nous).

*The knots that God offers us in our vocations give the freedom to love selflessly, without fear, and empowered by God's grace. {emphasis mine}*

Untie to Unite- a simple switch of letters, describes the dynamic of God's twofold covenantal action: Freedom from sin and freedom for unity. God's offer of freedom is at the heart of Christianity. The word "religion" comes from the Latin word religare meaning "to bind fast." By becoming free from the things that ensnare us, we can accept God's gift of live and union to be bound to God.

My favorite thing about the image might be the way that Mary is very nonchalantly trampling the serpent. This image is a great insight about the spiritual life. Focusing on doing God's work is the surest way to drive away distraction and despair. In my vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, I ask God to untie me from distractions of money, sex, and power so that I might unite myself to Franciscan poverty, chastity, and obedience. Religious vows are difficult and there is no 'magic' that makes them easier other than trying to imitate Mary's humility. This is the key difference between "magic" and humility. Magic seeks to manipulate things to obey our will to dazzle and impress others with our abilities. Real freedom within authentic Christian humility seeks to place our life into God's hand trusting that the knots that we might experience can be loosened and our hearts made free to give and receive the joy of Christ. The Lord's call to us can be mysterious or even counter-intuitive, but God never "tricks" us, and the grace that God offers is not an illusion, but a real intimate friendship that asks us to loose the anxiety and fear and be bound to God's liberating mercy.

St. Francis of Assisi Friary  
Jamaica Plains, MA  
October 23, 2014

<<http://www.capuchin.org/news/detail/415>>

*As Cardinal Bergoglio Pope Francis promoted the special devotion to Our Lady Untier of Knots in Argentina. Here's is his prayer:*

Holy Mary, full of God's presence during the days of your life, you accepted with full humility the Father's will, and the Devil was never capable to tie you around with his confusion

Once with your son you interceded for our difficulties, and, full of kindness and patience you gave us example of how to untie the knots of our life.

And by remaining forever Our Mother, you put in order, and make more clear the ties that link us to the Lord.

Holy Mother, Mother of God, and our Mother, to you, who untie with motherly heart the knots of our life, we pray to you to receive in your hands (the name of person), and to free him/her of the knots and confusion with which our enemy attacks.

Through your grace, your intercession, and your example, deliver us from all evil, Our Lady, and untie the knots that prevent us from being united with God, so that we, free from sin and error, may find Him in all things, may have our hearts placed in Him, and may serve Him always in our brothers and sisters. Amen

## SECULAR FRANCISCAN SAINT OF THE MONTH: DEC 15 - BLESSED MARY FRANCES

"One is as it were rich, when one has nothing; and another is as it were poor, when he has great riches" (Prov 13,7). This passage of scripture fits the servant of God, Frances, who with all her heart espoused holy poverty and thus came into the possession of the grace of God.

Born in 1819, Frances Schervier was a descendant of a distinguished family in the old imperial city of Aachen or Aix-la-Chapelle. While she was perhaps not prominent in the eyes of the world, she enjoyed the distinction of extraordinary supernatural privileges from the very days of her youth. Her desire to enter a religious order was thwarted by the early death of her mother in 1832, when Frances was only 13 years old. She was obliged to remain at home and attend to the household. But she did not let these circumstances prevent her from caring in a very special



## SECULAR FRANCISCAN SAINT OF THE MONTH: DEC 15 - BLESSED MARY FRANCES (CONT'D)

way for the poor and the sick. So lavish was her liberality that one of the old servants once remarked, "One of these days the child will have dragged everything out of the house." Later she was an active member of several benevolent societies of women and also of what was known as St. John's soup kitchen, a charitable enterprise organized to feed the needy.

Frances joined the Third Order of St. Francis in 1844. Henceforth she and four other young women resolved to lead a community life. They found a dwelling at the old city gate of St. James, and took possession of their first religious abode on the eve of the feast of St. Francis in 1845. Prayer and works of mercy were their principal occupation. Mother Frances and her first companions - the number soon increased to 23 -- received the religious habit on August 12, 1851, and a new religious family was formed. Very appropriately she called the new congregation the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis. The poverty of St. Francis and his love for the poor of Christ superseded everything else in the eyes of the foundress. On one occasion she wrote to her sisters: "The impress of poverty and penance should mark even our chapels and churches and be their distinctive feature."

The first foundation of the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis in the United States was made in 1858. Twice Mother Frances came to the US, the first time in 1863 and the second time in 1868. During her first sojourn in this country, she joined here sisters in ministering to wounded soldiers of the Civil War and to the sick, the homeless, and the orphaned. The second time, while visiting the various institutions conducted by her sisters, she also lent a helping hand in caring for the sick, the aged, and the poor.

Mother Frances sacrificed everything for the poor out of love for God, and she was amply repaid by Him who cannot be outdone in generosity. Her foundation increased visibly, and to this day it enjoys the special blessing of Divine Providence. At her holy death on December 14, 1876, Mother Frances was mourned by thousands of daughters in religion as well as by the poor, and was venerated as a saint. Unusual conversions and other remarkable events occurred even during her lifetime in answer to her trustful prayer, and since her departure from this world, such things have happened even more frequently.



## PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

We beseech Thee, O Lord, that Thy grace may ever precede and accompany our deeds; let it tend to make us ever mindful of good works. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

*from THE FRANCISCAN BOOK OF SAINTS edited by Marion Habig, OFM, Copyright 1959 Franciscan Herald Press*

## ANDY'S COLUMN

I thoroughly enjoyed our discussions at our last meeting! For those who were not able to attend (and to remind the rest of us), let me recap some of the major points.

Together we read & meditated on St. Francis' *A Prayer Inspired By The Our Father*. In our discussion we focused on several topics, but I particularly liked our thoughts on suffering, coupled with God as the Consoler who both comforts and shares in our suffering. We talked about the extent to which suffering is a part of life, and that we often struggle (often with great difficulty) to bear our burdens. In doing so, though, we grow both spiritually and closer to the Lord.

Our discussion of pages 115-123 of "The Christian Journey" covered a lot of ground, but I took confession, marriage and divorce, compassion and understanding, and loving one's enemies as the main topics. We shared the difficulties we have with going to confession, as well as how hard it is to *really* forgive your "enemies." We talked, too, about the challenges that the Church is facing on the subject of divorce. And the image that Francis uses in which he sees God as a mother was one that we found particularly poignant.

Again, what great discussions! I think each of us has a wealth of wisdom—which sometimes comes in form of questioning—to share, and we share ours very well. I know I feel inspired and rejuvenated afterwards.

Turning to more mundane matters, thank all of you for your financial contributions this past month. We're well on our way to meeting our Fair Share obligation, which is due after the first of the year. Looking ahead, we should talk about our finances and set some goals for the upcoming year. Fair Share is due every year, and we have to pay St. Michael's for the use of their room for our meetings. These are the two expenses that we can't avoid. Beyond that, I think we should talk about what sorts of things that we want to do this year—charitable contributions, gifts, outreach items (such as



## ANDY'S COLUMN (CONT'D)

brochures or handouts), and so on. We may want to explore the possibility of doing some fundraising, which can also be part our outreach. It's my feeling that we should only have enough money to cover expenses, plus maybe a "cushion" of a couple hundred dollars, These are decisions that we need to make as a fraternity, though, so think about them and let's have a discussion. For those of you who can't make it to the meetings, please send me your suggestions.

Finally, I wanted to pass along an idea that was part of my pastor's (Fr. Fleming, Holy Family, Concord) homily on the First Sunday of Advent, The general idea of the homily was how the secularization of Christmas overtakes the importance of Advent, the season of expectation and preparation for the coming of Our Lord into our hearts. He stated that the only thing Jesus wants for his birthday is for us to care for the least of his brothers and sisters (very Franciscan!). He then suggested that we think about how much money we're going to spend on Christmas this year and donate 10% of it to a charity. Such a simple thing, so easily done; I've already taken his suggestion.

Peace & all good,

## FRATERNITY BUSINESS

**Outreach and Service**

Remember those books and magazines that we're collecting for those in prison!

**Ongoing Formation**

Please read the pages 123-127, "Hold Back Nothing of Yourselves For Yourselves" and "Nothing Belongs To Us Except Our Vices And Sins," for our next meeting.

**Finances**

Next meeting we'll discuss how close we are to making our Fair Share commitment, plus begin discussing how much money we want to raise for all of our expenses, necessary and discretionary.

**Tau & Herald for Excused Members**

Everyone in the fraternity—active, active-excused, and active-permanently excused—should be receiving both the Tau and the Herald. We're all listed in the regional and national databases, so the publications should be going to everyone. If you are not getting either the Tau or the Herald, or both, then please let me know.

**Contact Information:**

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- Mary, Treasurer
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**Please send correspondences to...**

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## LITURGICAL CALENDAR: DECEMBER

3rd: St. Francis Xavier, Priest	21st: Third Sunday in Advent Blessed Bernard of Baden, Confessor, Third Order.
4th: Saint John Damascene, Priest, Doctor of the Church	23rd: Saint John of Kanty, Priest
6th: Saint Nicholas, Bishop	25th: The Nativity of the Lord (Holyday of obligation)
7th: Second Sunday in Advent	26th: <b>Saint Stephen, The First Martyr</b> Blessed Jeremy Lamberthenghi, Confessor, Third Order.
8th: The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Patronal Feastday of the USA (Holyday of obligation)	27th: Saint John, Apostle and Evangelist Blessed Theodoric Coelde, Confessor, First Order.
9th: Saint Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin	28th: The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph The Servant of God Margaret Stadler, Virgin, Second Order.
11th: Saint Damasus I, Pope	29th: <b>Saint Thomas Becket, Bishop and Martyr</b> The Servant of God Didacus of Sinagra, Confessor, Third Order.
12th: Our Lady of Guadalupe	30th: The servant of God Jacoba of Settesoli, Widow, Third Order.
13th: <b>St. Lucy, Virgin and Martyr</b>	31st: Saint Sylvester I, Pope The Servant of god Melchora Tasayco, Virgin, Third Order.
15th: Blessed Mary Frances Schervier, Third Order	
16th: Venerable Mary Crucifix, Virgin, Third Order.	
17th: Blessed Bartolo of San Gimignano, Confessor, Third Order	
20th: The Servant of God Elizabeth of Austria, Widow, Third Order.	



*Pope Francis*

*The shepherds were the first... to receive the news of Jesus's birth. They were the first because they were among the last, the outcast. And they were the first because they were awake, keeping watch in the night, guarding their flocks.*

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“HE WHO WORKS WITH HIS HANDS IS A LABORER.  
HE WHO WORKS WITH HIS HANDS AND HIS HEAD  
IS A CRAFTSMAN.  
HE WHO WORKS WITH HIS HANDS AND HIS HEAD  
AND HIS HEART IS AN ARTIST.”

— FRANCIS OF ASSISI