**Homily for Simple Profession of Vows**

***Delivered by Fr. James McCurry, OFM Conv.***

***St. Anthony Shrine, Ellicott City, Maryland***

***16th July 2020***

From the moment that young Friar Cristofer entered our Franciscan Order, he has been a man on the move – first to postulancy in Chicago, and then to novitiate in California. Now today your brothers of Our Lady of the Angels Province welcome you HOME, Cristofer, to the east coast of the United States. Your life as an itinerant Franciscan now anchors itself back at the heart of our Province. How fitting it is that, with friars and your family in attendance, you are professing your first vows as a friar in this chapel where generations of friars for nearly a hundred years have professed the same vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, which you will be professing today!

In this modern era, the formation program for Friars of our Province takes place in collaborative settings, where English-speaking friars from the USA, Canada, Great Britain, Ireland, and Australia come together in a common embrace of the ideals of St. Francis of Assisi. Itinerancy – moving from one region of the Order to another is now part and parcel of our Franciscan training program. Such itinerancy is nothing really new, however. It has been a fundamental aspect of our Franciscan charism from the time of St. Francis of Assisi 800 years ago. We friars go, not where we want, but where God wants. We friars do, not what we want to do, but what God wants us to do.

Now – In the constantly changing itinerant lives of Franciscan Friars – ever ancient, ever new – where do new friars like Cristofer find their anchor of stability? Where do any of us friars find our spiritual moorings? We seek them first where St. Francis sought them – in the Holy Scriptures. Remember what Francis did at the Chapel of San Nicolo in Assisi in 1209 when discerning what God wanted him to do with his first small band of followers? He engaged in the common medieval practice of *Sortes Scriptorum –* the practice of consulting the Bible by opening it at random three times in a divination of God’s oracles. The worn old Assisi Missal of San Nicolo that Francis opened three times is now housed in the Walter’s Art Museum in Baltimore, Maryland. It was put on public display there in February of this year, for all to behold as Francis did, until the Coronavirus pandemic closed the museum.

Actually, I have had the privilege to hold that Missal in the Walters museum many times in the past twenty years. I have carefully studied the three passages which Francis found – All three are about the call to a life of Gospel Itinerancy – giving up everything for the sake of God’s love and serving God’s people. These Biblical passages would form the core of the Rule of Life that Francis soon after presented to Pope Innocent III, and the Franciscan Order was born. Over 800 years later, that same dynamic of Gospel itinerancy, rooted in the Scriptures, has animated our soon-to-be-professed Cristofer during his postulancy and novitiate. Today our itinerant little Cristofer will embrace by vows the very ideals which St. Francis espied in the Assisi Missal, the holy ideals which Francis transformed into the Franciscan Rule of Life.

The readings of today’s liturgy, though not the same as the three passages of the Assisi Missal, do, in a sense, present us today with our own *Sortes Scriptorum,* keenly applicable to Cristofer’s Simple Profession in the Franciscan way of life. The Old Testament call of Abraham (*Gen. 12:1-4)* begins with the divine command: ***“Go”*!** This is the same very first word that St. Francis read in the Assisi Missal, where Jesus told the rich young man: *“Go, sell what you have and give to the poor” (Mk. 10:21)*. Today Cristofer will reaffirm his desire, like Abraham and Francis, to “go” wherever our good God wants.

The New Testament reading from St. Paul *(Ephesians 1:3-14)* in today’s Mass of Profession speaks of God having ***“sealed”*** His chosen ones with the promise of the Holy Spirit. St. Francis considered the Holy Spirit to be the true “Minister General” of the Order, who “seals” every professed friar with the sign of the TAU – the cross which Cristofer wears around his neck, and which the shape of our Franciscan tunic replicates. Itinerant friars, sealed by the Tau, would need “nothing on their journey” *(Lk. 9:3),* because the Church would clothe them in God’s Spirit. Cristofer’s profession of vows today clothes him in God’s Spirit and profoundly deepens the “seal of God” first given him at Baptism – a seal of approval and mission which keeps intensifying each step of his Franciscan journey.

Today’s Gospel passage from St. John *(Jn. 13:1-5)* meant so much to St. Francis that he asked to have it ready to him just before he died. It was the last words of the Scripture that Francis’s ears heard in this life. The scene depicts Jesus humbly washing the feet of His Apostles, and teaching them: *“As I have done, so you must do.”* The key word here is ***“Do”***! St. Francis understood his mandate of following Jesus *(cf. Matthew 16:24)* to mean doing what Jesus would do. Today, Friar Cristofer takes up the same mandate to “do” what Jesus would do, in the way Francis did it.

In a few moments, Cristofer, in the liturgical Rite of Profession, I shall ask you a few questions, and you will reply “**I do”!** Your “I do” will take the form of three vows – promises to God – symbolized by the three knots on the new rope cord which I shall tie around your waist. St. Francis was the first founder in the Church to make explicit in his Rule of Life these three particular vows which you are about to profess – to live **“in obedience, without anything of their own, and in chastity**.” The three vows mean that a friar wants to belong totally to God as a poor, chaste, obedient man for others – going wherever God wants, sealed without anything of his own,in the richness of God’s Spirit, in order to do the works of supernatural charity, building up God’s Church.

Cristofer, to be obedient means you want to live with an unveiled mind – focused on God’s will, not your own. To be poor means you want to live with unclenched hands – not grasping for belongings, but belonging to God. To be chaste means you want to live with an undivided heart – loving God and everyone inclusively. Cristofer, we are all here today to support you, dear brother, as you profess these Simple Vows, and as you enter a new phase of your life’s itinerant journey, humbly striving to fulfill this noble Franciscan calling. May St. Francis intercede for you May Our Lady of the Angels accompany you. May our Triune God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit bless you.