

JMJ

**Br. Simon's Homily for
The Feast of St. Anthony of Padua (transferred)**

Delivered during SSF Provincial Chapter at Little Portion Friary, Mt. Sinai, NY, 5/24/2010

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be always acceptable in your sight O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

*"The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him."
Luke 4:20b*

When Br. Jude told me that, as one of the newly First Professed, I would be preaching at a mass of St. Anthony I freaked out a little. St. Anthony: the illustrious Franciscan preacher and Doctor of the Church. Much like Sr. Judith yesterday, I wondered what I could possibly say to all of you that you haven't already heard before or hasn't already been said earlier this week by those more eloquent than I am. But it struck me that in the hagiography we heard today it is mentioned a few times that St. Anthony inspired people and won converts not only by his preaching but also by his simple way of living. It was the witness of the holiness of his life that is credited for much of his success. So I want to share with you a bit of my own life story that's being written right now.

One of the things that has been for me a difficulty about wearing the habit is the scrutiny of our lives that we experience because of it. That we stand out when we wear the habit in public is exactly why it is such an effective witness. But it can be

uncomfortable. Bishop Provenzano in his homily on Friday said that the Church needs us, and needs to see us in our habits so they can know that there are many ways to live out the gospel. But sometimes I wonder if that is what others see in me. Do they see the gospel? Do they see God's compassion, forgiveness and love present and active in my life?

Like I think all of us, I was really very moved by Don Bisson's presentation on Saturday about the theme of "surrender" in religious life. My own spiritual journey during my time in SSF has been all about learning this art; learning how to accept that I am no longer the center of my life because I can't do it on my own. I need all of you. We are in relationship, and in that relationship we experience God; God's grace; God's gift. Though it shouldn't have surprised me, I wasn't prepared to have these lessons continue when I arrived here for Chapter.

It was about a month ago – and maybe even two – that I mentioned to Br. Jude that I hoped he could get a plain cotton rope for my cincture. Not only is it the kind I had grown accustomed to wearing but also the knot tends to stay fairly tight and I'm not having to futz with it as much. Well he did his best to find it in San Francisco but to no avail, so I put it out of my mind. But when we arrived at Little Portion he found an old cincture somewhere made of my preferred material that

was the right length. All that really needed to be done was to have Sr. Jean whip the ends of it. But when I went to see Sr. Jean on Wednesday I picked up the rope and she promptly told me that, no, that was Ambrose's cincture which she had just shortened to fit him.

I know this is going to sound silly (and it sounds silly to me looking back at it now), but I got really very angry about it. As I stood there making knots in this other rope and measuring out the right length, I found myself looking at the other cincture and thinking, "That was supposed to be mine. It should be mine. Jude found it specifically for me!" And I had to get away as fast as I could. I found myself thinking, I don't want to wake up every morning in Los Angeles and look at Ambrose and think, "That cincture was supposed to be mine." And here is where the shift came, because I realized that I didn't want a stupid thing like a cincture to get in the way of loving my brother, and my sister.

I had become attached to the physical symbol of the cincture and forgot what it represents: surrender, to God and to the relationship we have with each other in community. But I still found myself wondering, why do I *have* to give it up? Why can't I have the rope I want? But then I thought about a letter I got last week from my friend Mike, who is an OFM Novice in the Santa Barbara Province and who is

also preparing to make his first vows in July. He ended his letter by saying, “Thank you for being brave enough, strong enough, hopeful enough, and foolish enough to give all of you away!”

And that is the call to religious life. To hold back nothing of ourselves for ourselves. And yes, that means even something as simple as a rope must be released if the attachment to it gets in the way of the vocation.

Little did I know that more was to come when on the opening day of Chapter I walked in to find that someone had sat on my computer. My first thought was, “this too, God? This was mine before I joined community. Do you have to take this from me as well?” The “last straw” though, was on Friday during the intercessions at Mass. As each of the four of us who had just been elected to profession were remembered, Br. Derek somehow forgot my name and referred to me simply as “the other one.”

I know this sounds silly, but I got really angry at that too. It’s not that Derek forgot my name. That happens. But I couldn’t understand why God was taking that from me too. Even my *name*?!? That too, God? And the answer, of course,

was a resounding “Yes!” As Don Bisson reminded us, the call to religious life is the call to return all that we have, which is pure gift, to God. Yes, even a name.

Now is the time to take this Insight and turn it into Action. Now is the time for me to learn how to interrupt my old patterned behavior, and like Christ to empty myself so that I can be filled with God’s love for me, for my brothers and sisters in community, and for the world. As Br. Jude reminded us in his opening address, “...the life of the Order is meant to give a man the opportunity to learn how to be Christ like.”

May we always fight the good fight of the faith. May those who look at us always see us as a community of men who, as Paul says to Timothy in today’s epistle reading, “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness.” May others always see in us a community of men who, warts and all, are ever striving to grow in compassion, forgiveness and love, and so to be more Christ like, and like St. Anthony bear the message of Christ into the world.

Brothers and sisters, pray for me – for perseverance in my vocation – as I ever pray for each of you. Amen.