

YOUNG MEN WILL COME TO YOU LIKE DEW FROM THE MORNING'S WOMB



Monthly Reflection:

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There is a memorable little moment in the Padre Pio movie where a priest, watching an enthusiastic young man walk into their seminary remarks to another: "This indeed is the greatest miracle of Francis. After 800 years, he keeps on attracting young people." The long line of young people drawn to Francis include St. Claire, St. Anthony, St. Bonaventure, St. Kolbe and Padre Pio. Today their very lives stand as a testament to the fulfilment of the promise that "streams of living water" will flow out of the thirsty (John 37: 7,8). The image of Francis, though sketched in simple strokes, draws our hearts to it like a magnet – a manifestation of the same miracle at work.

When his father accused him of giving away everything, and denounced him before the Bishop of Assisi, St. Francis quietly took off the clothes that belonged to his father, put on a sack cloth, lifted his eyes to heaven and exclaimed: "To this day, I called Peter Bernard my father. Henceforth, I have only my heavenly Father." He called God his Father and the people around him called him the 'Second Christ'.

An encounter with the heavenly Father always brings with it an infinite widening of horizons. A bursting forth, a yearning to embrace the entire universe in love. As a part of the movement, every Jesus Youth has been formed in this crucible of love. Today St. Francis compels us to cast ourselves completely into the loving hands of the Father who waits to envelop us in his love. And every time we fail to live up to this love, this encounter awaits us – transforming us into his image all over again.

"You are not attractive to behold, neither are you eloquent. Yet so many come seeking you!" marvels brother Leo. Perhaps Leo's puzzlement is a lesson for every youth leader. Francis reminds us that a heart that clings to Christ and a mind that points only to Him is the key to the promise spoken in the Psalms. (Arrayed in holy splendor, your young men will come to you like dew from the morning's womb. Psalm 110:3)



Often, when we stand bewildered before young people who are immersed in evanescent pleasures and self-deluding subjective 'truths', St. Francis reminds us that the carpenter who attracted the most young people across centuries will continue to do so through each one of us.

In the middle ages, as the Church adorned itself in robes of temporal power, it began to lose its likeness of the one who knelt down to wash the feet of his disciples. This shook the very foundations of the Church and in Pope Innocent's famous dream, it was a man in sack cloth who was holding up the falling Church. At a time when it would have been easy to ridicule and condemn, Francis lived his firm conviction that he was chosen and called to rebuild the Church of Christ. Through unconditional love and personal sacrifice Francis was able to bring nourishment and transformation to the impoverished Church. When we are tempted to abandon or even throw stones at the Church for its blemishes, we must take to heart the example of Francis who picked up every stone and rebuilt the Church.

For Francis, the resistance he later faced within the community that he lovingly nurtured, or even the feeling that things were drifting away from the way he envisioned them, was a call for him to refine and rekindle the fire of love that "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:7,8).

In fact, his continued life as a simple friar within the community in obedience and sheer joy challenges our stubborn self-will and our unrelenting struggle to manoeuvre others into our ways.

As the heavenly patron of our movement, Francis reminds us to hold on and preserve his style of 'Youth ministry' that has endured the test of time. As we remember the blessings and growth of the movement over the last four decades, we should not forget that it was only the flames of love (1 Cor. 13) fearlessly kindled by the young people in our early years that made the movement relevant and real. Today, as true love becomes more relevant than ever, as technology takes our message far and wide, Francis reminds us of the promise "your young men will come to you like dew from the morning's womb." Let us desire and pray that this promise comes true in each of us and the movement as it came alive in St. Francis – as we model our lives in his footsteps.

-Fr Shoji Vechoorkarott

A Jesus Youth even before discerning his priestly vocation, Fr Shoji was the previous chaplain of Kerala Jesus Youth Council. He serves as the principal of St John's College, Anchal.

