

FMA FOCUS

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Franciscan Mission Associates
Mt. Vernon, NY 10551

Missions in Guatemala - Honduras - El Salvador, Central America

Fortitude: Strength in the Face of Adversity

The saying, "You can do anything you set your mind to," is not quite accurate. We have limitations. It is more accurate to say, "You can do anything God wants you to do if you set your mind to it, because He will give you the grace." To do this requires fortitude, which is the virtue by which we choose the good despite difficulty.

Every Christian has a part in bringing Christ's message to the world. To achieve this, we must overcome our own fears and the resistance we encounter. Fortitude will help us accomplish that.

We acquire virtues through practice, the example of others, and God's grace. When we act virtuously ourselves, look to the saints and others, and pray to God for His strength, we incorporate virtue into our life.

Fortitude is a cardinal virtue. It comes from the Latin word meaning "hinge." Fortitude is one of the virtues on which our spiritual life hinges because we need God's strength to fight temptation. Our world today is called "post-Christian," so perhaps now more than ever, Christians need fortitude to follow the ways of the Lord. ■

Practicing Spiritual Fortitude: Beyond Physical Strength and Wealth

The gift of fortitude is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. "Strength" and "perseverance" are synonyms for fortitude, and fortitude is referred to as "might" in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.

Very often, our world interprets strength in physical, military, or financial terms. We like to reward the strongest person, the strongest nation, the strongest investment portfolio. Yet, in the spiritual sense, none of those things make a difference. Spiritual fortitude is our ability to stand strong in the face of adversity, to persevere in prayer despite feeling as if God is not listening or responding, or to be mighty in our resistance of sin.

We all face difficulties. Some of these are very traumatizing. The loss of loved ones, physical illness, abuse, financial instability, and other such experiences can be very challenging. It is at these times more than any others that we are called to remember that God is in

control. His goodness will never fail us, and if He allows us to undergo some type of suffering, it is for the good of our soul. If offered in union with Christ's suffering, it can bring about much grace for ourselves and others. Our Lord faced great pain and fear on the cross and He Himself cried out to His Father, asking why God had abandoned Him. Yet He commended His spirit to the Father, knowing that God's plan was the one that should ultimately prevail.

As people of prayer, it is imperative to have fortitude. We believe that God answers every prayer. However, the answer is not always the one that we desire. Sometimes the answer is "yes," sometimes "no," and sometimes "not yet." God knows what we need and when we need it better than we ourselves. Prayers are answered in His time, not ours. It can be difficult to feel as if our prayers are not answered. Jesus prayed that the cup of suffering might pass by Him. But He ended that prayer with "Thy will, not mine, be done." We must do the same. That is true strength — that is fortitude.

Like Jesus in the desert, we all experience temptation. Sometimes we fall; but we are also given the grace to resist temptation, just as Jesus did. Trusting in God's plan for our lives and persevering in prayer will help us

to resist the temptations that come our way. And when we do fall, we have a God whose mercy is inexhaustible.

Fortitude, along with the other gifts of the Holy Spirit, was given in Baptism and strengthened in Confirmation. When we use the gift of fortitude, we can confidently say what St. Paul said to the Philippians: "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." ■

Feed the Poor with St. Anthony's Bread

There is a centuries-old practice of making an offering in honor of St. Anthony to feed the poor. These offerings are made either in petition for a favor sought or in thanksgiving for a favor received and are known as **St. Anthony's Bread**. You can learn more about this practice and help us feed the poor with St. Anthony's Bread in these ways:

Online by scanning:



Email us at:
admin@franciscanmissionassoc.org

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Franciscan Mission Associates,
PO Box 598, Dept. 1244,
Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598

We respond personally to every message and donation.



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Please address all correspondence to Father Robert, OFM, at P.O. Box 598, Mount Vernon, N.Y. 10551. Please send changes of address six weeks in advance; if possible include your mailing label, and give both old and new address.

Never Give Up: St. Joseph Cupertino's Resilient Faith

The lives of many saints provide inspiration through their lived examples of perseverance and fortitude. Padre Pio, St. John Vianney and Mother Teresa of Calcutta are just a few examples. On September 18, we celebrate the feast of St. Joseph Cupertino, a Conventual Franciscan who needed great fortitude to pursue his vocation.

St. Joseph Cupertino was born Giuseppe Dessa in Cupertino, Italy, in 1603. His father died before he was born and the family home was seized to pay the debts his father left behind, forcing his mother to give birth to him in a stable. From the very beginning, his life demanded strength.

From an early age, Joseph was said to have experienced ecstatic visions, a phenomenon which would continue throughout his life and sometimes made him the object of great scorn. While young, his uncle apprenticed him to a shoemaker, but Joseph felt called to religious life. He applied, in 1620, to the Conventual Franciscans, but was rejected due to his lack of education. He then applied to the Capuchin Franciscans in Martino, where he was accepted, but soon dismissed because his ecstasies made him unable to perform his duties.

After returning to his family, he begged the Conventual Friars near Cupertino to let him work in their stables. Over the next few years, his devotion and simplicity would impress the order and persuade them to admit him to study for the priesthood. He was ordained in 1628 and went to the convent of Santa Maria della Grotella,

just outside Cupertino, where he spent the next 15 years. His perseverance — his fortitude — enabled him to achieve his spiritual goals.

During his time at the convent, his ecstasies increased, and it was claimed that he could levitate during Mass and the Divine Office (a fact which is disputed). He gained a reputation for holiness among people in the local region and beyond, but his superiors saw this as a disruption and confined him to a small cell, forbidding him to participate in public gatherings of the community.

Since levitation was widely believed to be a sign of witchcraft, Joseph was denounced to the Inquisition. They commanded that he be transferred from one Franciscan friary to another for the next almost 15 years, under the direction and supervision of the Capuchins. He practiced great asceticism, eating solid food only twice a week and adding bitter powder to his meals. Finally, on July 9, 1657, he was allowed to return to the Conventual community in Osimo, where he died on September 18, 1663.

From the time of his birth to the time of his death, Joseph was gifted by God with spiritual blessings but also underwent much misunderstanding, judgment, and ridicule. In his example of steadfast faith and perseverance through resistance and hardship, he is a model to all Christians. God gives us all that we need to endure the pains and sufferings that this life brings us. Joseph of Cupertino showed great fortitude, and his example should strengthen us too. ■

Donate Online to Help More People in Need

Each day, families in the poorest and most dangerous nations see hope and light because of your donations. When you choose to offer financial support through our secure website, you enable us to provide more help, faster. Simply use the link to the right to read more about our work and learn how a small sacrifice from you can make life-changing differences for so many.



We respond personally to every message and donation.

God's Time Is Not Our Time: The Power of Patience in the Lives of St. Monica and St. Augustine

Over the last 100 to 150 years, the world has changed radically. Transportation, communication, and so many other innovations have developed at an incredible pace. Inventions of the late 19th and early 20th centuries — like the telephone, the automobile and the airplane, television, and the more recent developments of the internet, cell phones, and artificial intelligence — have altered the way the world operates. Information that used to require hours or days of research can be accessed in seconds, and trips that once took months now can be accomplished in hours.

Many of these developments have had a positive impact on humanity. However, some pitfalls also come along with them. One of these is that we have become used to having our desires met immediately. Instant gratification has become a significant force in our society. We do not like to wait, even for God.

In our prayers, God sometimes answers us quickly. At other times, the answer is delayed. This was the experience of St. Monica. She was the mother of St. Augustine, who became one of the greatest theologians that the Church has ever known — but he was not always like that. Augustine lived a life centered on himself and his own pleasure. Intellectually, he sought the truth, but the truth was secondary to his own desires. In his book, *The Confessions*, Augustine details how, despite the fervent prayers of his mother, he continued to indulge in the pleasures of this world and resist the Truth that Jesus would bring.

St. Monica, however, would not give

up on her son. She continued to pray that Augustine would convert to the Catholic faith. Although she did not experience an instant answer to her prayers, she was determined to persevere and trust that God had it all in hand. Eventually, Augustine met the Bishop of Milan, St. Ambrose, who was himself a convert and a brilliant man. Augustine began to listen to him, and in the year 387 was baptized. He would go on to become a priest and a bishop, as well as a prolific writer and preacher. He also founded a religious order that still exists today. The prayers of St. Monica were not in vain; they just required patience and perseverance.

There is a saying in Scripture that says, “to God, one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.” God’s time is not our time. Trusting that He knows better than we do is key to a healthy spiritual life. Being able to access things more readily is great, but we can learn from St. Monica that patience and perseverance are important virtues. ■



Bearing the Cross of Christ: The Message of the Stigmata



Any Christian who is serious about their spiritual life asks God the question, “How can I better please you?” During a retreat in the town of La Verna in Italy in September 1224, St. Francis asked this question of God. In his prayer, he repeatedly opened the scriptures to the account of Christ’s crucifixion, and so he sensed that the crucifixion was what pleased the Father the most.

Francis is reported to have prayed, “O Lord, Jesus Christ, before I die I ask you for two graces; first, that in my lifetime I may feel, as far as possible, both in my soul and body, that pain which you, sweet Lord, endured in the hour of your most bitter Passion; second, that I may feel in my heart as far as possible that excess of love which moved you, O Son of God, to suffer so cruel a Passion for us sinners.”

During his prayer, Francis experienced an apparition of a seraph (a rank of angels who stand in constant praise of God). Between the wings of the seraph, there appeared the figure of a man who had been crucified. Francis was filled with emotions of both joy and sorrow; joy at the tender look of Christ toward him, and sorrow for the pain the Lord experienced.

After the vision, Francis realized that he had received the stigmata, the miraculous impression of Christ’s

wounds on his own body. The wounds from the nails were on his hands and feet, and a wound from which blood flowed pierced his side. For the last two years of his life, these wounds would cause Francis constant pain, but they helped him identify himself with the salvific love of Christ.

Other saints throughout history have been graced with the stigmata. It is believed that St. Paul experienced it. In more modern times, both St. Padre Pio and St. Faustina have received this grace. Though rare, some who are particularly close to Christ are privileged to know His pain.

Franciscans celebrate the Feast of the Stigmata on September 17th. This year marks the 800th anniversary of this miracle, a great milestone for the Franciscan Order.

Although we personally may not receive the stigmata, we are able to unite our own sufferings with those of Christ — sufferings that may seem insignificant can bear great grace if we offer them to the Father and endure them joyfully. They become a self-giving, a sacrifice that pleases God and gains more grace for ourselves, for those we love, and even for those we don’t know. May our everyday crosses aid in the redemption of the world. ■

The New Manna: A Bread Much Better

During the summer months, the Gospel at Sunday Mass for several weeks was taken from the Gospel of John, chapter 6. Scholars call this passage “The Bread of Life Discourse.” It begins with the miraculous feeding of the 5,000 with five loaves and two fish. When Jesus departs after performing this miracle, knowing that the crowd would “carry Him off to make Him king,” He attempts to go to a more deserted place. The crowds, however, follow Him.

The people immediately want Jesus to perform another miracle, like Moses did in the desert when the people had manna to eat. This is not only a reference to the past, but also a call for Jesus to bring “the new manna” that the Jews expected would come when the Messiah appeared. Jesus reminds them that it was not Moses who gave the people manna, but the Father in heaven, and He goes on to say that now “the true Bread from Heaven” is here: It is His own flesh and blood, given to them to be their spiritual food and drink. At the Last Supper, Jesus fulfills this promise by giving His Apostles His very Body and Blood, under the appearances of bread and wine. He commands them to “do this in memory of Me.”

Since the time of the Apostles, the Church has always held that the words of Jesus mean what they say. The Eucharist is the very Body

and Blood of Christ. When the priest pronounces the words of consecration over bread and wine, they become the flesh and blood of the Son of God. They are the “new manna” given by the Messiah; a bread much better than that which the Israelites had in the desert.

Many of Jesus’ followers turned away that day, finding it too difficult to believe what He said. Even today, we are told, many who profess Christ as Lord do not believe in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. But for those who do, the Eucharist is a source of strength unlike any other.

The Second Vatican Council called it “the source and summit” of the Christian life. From it, we draw all our faith, and our faith points back toward it. Strengthened by His Body and Blood, we look at life differently. We can endure whatever may come, confident that the Eucharistic food is a real source of God’s power, and of our own power as well.

Just as our bodies need physical food to survive and be strong, so too do our souls require spiritual food to grow in holiness. Prayer, good works, and community with others provide this food, but the greatest gift that God offers to strengthen our souls is the gift of Jesus’ Body and Blood. ■



Director's Letter

Fr. Robert, OFM

FRANCISCAN FRIARS/P.O. BOX 598
MOUNT VERNON, NY 10551-0598
TEL: 914 664-5604



Dear Friend of the Franciscans,

As we mark the 800th anniversary of St. Francis receiving the stigmata this September, we reflect on his profound legacy of **fortitude** and sacrifice. St. Francis, graced with these wounds as a participation in the passion of Our Lord, bore them courageously until his passing. This example has inspired Franciscan communities across the globe, including our own, to boldly preach the Gospel and serve those in need.

At Franciscan Mission Associates (FMA), we strive to maintain close relationships with each of you, knowing that the care of one soul emanates to all others. The *Focus* publication is one of our central means of connecting with you, and we hope you will find that this issue's focus on the theme of **fortitude** is meaningful and inspiring. As we continue to adapt to meet the evolving needs and expectations of our donors, we are introducing some new initiatives that you can look forward to this year and into 2025:

- We are already leveraging our Facebook page to connect with followers there several times each week, providing inspirational as well as educational content for your reflection. Follow us on Facebook at [/franciscanmissionassoc](#).
- *Focus* newsletter will now be published two times per year, in September and February.
- In 2025, we will begin to offer a *monthly* email newsletter and a brand-new website. Both will feature regular fresh, new content, including updates about the impact of your support on the Franciscan Friars and their missions.

Our missionaries and friars tirelessly devote themselves to the call of St. Francis to “rebuild my Church,” showing great fortitude and perseverance. Whether serving abroad or at home, we are all part of this missionary endeavor, tasked with spreading the Gospel and the message of Christ to all the world.

Thank you for your support as we continue to fulfill our purpose to bring the ministry of St. Francis to peoples' daily lives through a two-fold undertaking of providing spiritual and financial support.

God bless you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Fr. Robert, OFM". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Fr. Robert, OFM

Fortitude in Mission: The Resilient Ministry of Bishop Maurus



It takes a great deal to become a missionary. It takes even more to continue that kind of work. But mission work is a calling given by God, and those who answer that call dedicate their lives to serving others and spreading the Gospel. Our Bishop Maurus is one of those who answered this call.

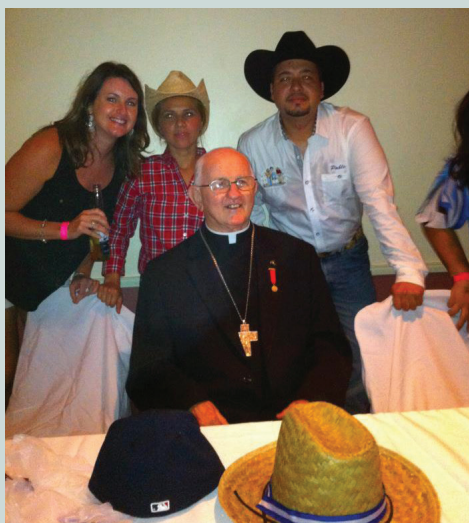
Bishop Maurus entered the Franciscan Seminary in Andover, MA, as a teenager in 1956. Although the formation process was long, he endured it and was ordained a priest in June 1966 at the age of twenty-seven. Just a month later, he was sent to Central America as a missionary.

His first missionary assignment was in Juticalpa, Olancho, Honduras (1967-1969), where he later ministered as a bishop. After three years in Honduras, he transferred to the Parish of San Antonio in Acajuta, a port city on the Pacific coast of El Salvador,

where he stayed until 1971. He moved from there to Guatemala, where he spent eight years as Director of the Christian Formation Center, training lay leaders to minister in small communities that had no resident priest.

Fr. Maurus then returned to Honduras and was assigned as Pastor in the coffee region of La Libertad, Comayagua, and later as Pastor in Comayaguela/Tegucigalpa from 1979-1982. In 1983, he was ordained as a Franciscan Missionary Bishop. For thirty years, Bishop Maurus cared for the flock entrusted to him, offering spiritual support, the Sacraments, and the leadership of a Good Shepherd. He retired from active ministry and is now living in a skilled long-term care facility outside Boston, MA.

An acquaintance of Bishop Maurus recalled of him: "Bishop Maurus once told me about one of his longest mission trips, a



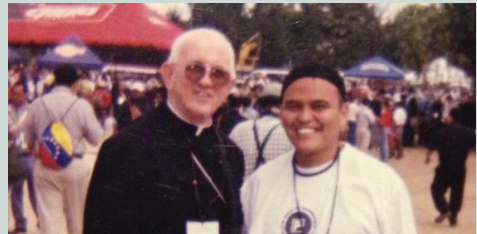


Confirmation visit. He traveled five hours by jeep, two hours on horseback, and one hour in a river boat – eight hours, the time you could drive from Boston to Washington, DC. On the trip, he passed through two parishes of his diocese. In driving from Boston to Washington one would pass through some sixteen dioceses. After fifty years, Bishop Maurus knows all the tricks of travel and survival in the mountains of Central America. I think he fell off his horse more than once and I know that not too long ago he drove his 4X4 Toyota pickup truck off a cliff.”

We celebrate Bishop Maurus’ years of dedicated ministry, made possible by our generous donors. His steadfast commitment,

supported by the community’s charity, has significantly impacted many lives. We honor both his service and the vital contributions of our supporters in fulfilling God’s mission.

As we were preparing for print, Bishop Maurus was taken home to God. We pray that his soul may be taken by the angels to his eternal reward. ■



Your Lasting Legacy

A powerful way to ensure your good work for the Franciscan missions endures is to remember them in your will. To do so, simply make a bequest of any amount to:

Franciscan Mission Associates, Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598.

We are available to provide you with more information about giving through legacies and bequests. Simply write to us, call, or email:

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admin@franciscanmissionassoc.org

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Fortitude in Formation: My Summer Assignment in Central America

by Br. Daniel, OFM

During this summer, I was first able to return home to the Dominican Republic and see my relatives. After the passing of my dad and a year without seeing them, I was able to see how my family is coping with it all. It was helpful for my grieving process, as I visited his grave and met with friends and family. I also went back to the parish of my hometown where I started my Christian life, and it was comforting to recall when I was just a child. It was a very pleasant time with my family and friends.



Then at the end of July, I traveled to El Salvador and there at the airport, I was greeted with a wonderful welcome by the young people who are in vocational discernment at our mission in Agape.

Once there, I was able to help in the home for the elderly by helping to serve breakfast for them and in the celebration of “Grandparents Day.”

Providentially, I was asked to help with some spiritual accompaniment on a program on Facebook Live, and from that was born the program called “Following in their footsteps,” which is broadcast Monday through Friday at 3:00 pm. This program seeks to talk about the vocational process of St. Francis of Assisi and the different calls that Jesus makes in the Gospel.

I have also helped with the distribution of food to the poor people who come to Agape every day. On the radio programming that Agape has, I have also contributed to the segment called Spiritual Strip, with some recordings and reflections of St. Francis of Assisi. I would like to thank Fr. Jack and everyone at Agape for making that summer yet another memorable experience within the wider province. Peace to all. ■



Vocations

The young men in our formation program continue to discern God’s call to follow the way of St. Francis. They are eager to dedicate themselves to God and the good of His people. Many other men and women who are discerning the call to religious life need only the special courage to hear God’s call and to answer Him.

Your prayers and donations help them in their process of listening to God’s call, the important first step in ensuring that there are devoted priests, brothers, and sisters to do Christ’s work in today’s world and tomorrow’s.

To encourage and support Vocations, you can: Donate online by scanning ↘

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Words to Live By

Do not lose courage in considering your own imperfections.

St. Francis de Sales

Fortitude is the marshal of thought, the armor of the will, and the fort of reason.

Francis Bacon

Hope has two beautiful daughters: their names are anger and courage. Anger that things are the way they are. Courage to make them the way they ought to be.

St. Augustine

Fortitude is the guard and support of the other virtues.

John Locke

Lord, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

The Serenity Prayer

I know of no higher fortitude than stubbornness in the face of overwhelming odds.

Louis Nizer

The principal act of courage is to endure and withstand dangers doggedly, rather than attack them.

St. Thomas Aquinas

Gird your hearts with silent fortitude, suffering yet hoping all things.

Felicia Hemans

Pray! Pray, but pray with faith – with living faith! Courage! Outward, ever onward!

St. John Bosco

Our Readers Gladly Write...

Dear Fr. Robert,

In the last three months I have had a big problem with my heartbeat because it was beating abnormally because of my heavy work. I was very anxious, worried and unsure about the future. I could not do any work. So, I started to recite the novena to St. Dymphna, and I got a healing today when I finished the novena. Thank you, St. Dymphna, for your intercession before the throne of God, thank you Lord for your healing touch.

B.V.P., Lubbock, TX

Dear Father Robert,

I recently made novenas to St. Anthony and St. Jude for good medical test results for me and my husband. Please accept this donation for prayers answered and publish my letter in thanksgiving to St. Jude and St. Anthony. They have never failed me. Thank you, and God bless you.

D.K., Irving, NY

Dear Fr. Robert,

Thank you for sending "FOCUS." I find it informative, and it brings me closer to God. I am reminded how lucky I have been and how other people live with little or no means. I am 89 and was diagnosed with cancer. No treatment

was the road I took. God's will be done. He will decide when to call me. Please pray for me and my daughter.

M.P., Lincolnshire, IL

Dear Father Robert,

I greatly appreciate the thank you notes you sent me. I cannot wait to read them. They fill me with so much hope and encouragement. The words you write are a blessing to my soul. I keep the prayer cards you sent me. I have a collection of the ones I say every day. All of them uplift my faith. Thank you, Franciscan Friars, for praying for me. I pray for all of you also.

K.M., Winston-Salem, NC

Dear Fr. Robert,

In thanksgiving for answered prayers and a true miracle through St. Anthony's Novena and intercession. I needed major dental treatment, a new dentist, and funds for it! It looked impossible. After praying to St. Anthony, the entire situation resolved and I received a gentle, patient, compassionate dentist, treatment that has already begun with no pain, and the funds for the entire treatment. Thank you St. Anthony the miracle worker.

J.T., Fayetteville, GA



The Irony of Willpower: Strength in Surrender



When we think of the word “fortitude,” which is our focus in this edition, we most often associate it with our ability to “keep on going.” Indeed, fortitude, strength, and perseverance have a great deal to do with the inner desire to continue toward something.

There is, however, a trap we can fall into with this thinking, which is believing that fortitude is merely an internal characteristic that we generate ourselves. But fortitude is not merely willpower. Ironically, it is the surrender of one’s will to the Will of God. We must ask ourselves, “Where does my strength come from? Why am I able to persevere in difficult situations?”

In the garden of Gethsemane, when Jesus experienced His agony, He prayed to the Father that the cup He was to drink could be taken away. In His humanity, He didn’t want to experience the pain, the rejection, the humiliation that would come with the trial and the crucifixion that would ensue. He fervently begged the Father that He might be spared all

of this. However, His final words are what is most important: “Not My will, but Thy Will be done.”

On the cross, as He is about to take His final breath, Jesus speaks these words: “Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit.” Once again, He surrenders Himself to the Father’s Will, accepting death as part of the plan of salvation.

These two examples given to us by the Lord show us a most unique feature of Christianity. Our strength comes from giving over control of our lives and situations to the God who knows us and whose providence directs our lives. God’s plan is greater than ours; He knows how it all works out. It is true that bad things happen to good people, and that suffering is a part of every human life. However, when we surrender control of our lives and our circumstances to the God who created and loves us, we miraculously find the inner strength — the fortitude — to go on. Relying only on ourselves and attempting to make things “go our way” ultimately brings only heartache. Trusting in God’s plan for our lives and for the world brings not only the strength to endure whatever may come, but also a sense of peace that, as the Letter to the Romans says, “All things work out for the good.”

It is not always easy to surrender ourselves to the Lord, and often we try to take back the control we have handed over. Perhaps that is why the most perfect prayer we have, given to us by Jesus Himself, says; “Thy Will be done.” The strength of surrender is the most powerful force of all. ■



There's Always More to Learn: Maintaining Spiritual Fortitude in Our Golden Years

As a society, humanity is growing older. During the next ten years, the number of people aged 60 years or over globally is projected to grow by 38 percent, from 1 billion to 1.4 billion, outnumbering youth. As a result, many scientists and researchers examine the process of aging to understand what life is like for those who are “getting on in years.” These studies tend to focus on the physical, emotional, and psychological effects of aging.

It is also important to look at the spirituality of aging, how our relationship with God changes as we grow older. Many people strive to maintain an intimate relationship with the Lord throughout their lives. This may be through a daily prayer routine and doing one's best to love God and neighbor as Jesus commanded. These things ensure a healthy spiritual life and create a sense of community.

As we grow older, however, our ability to “do” becomes limited as our physical capacity diminishes. We begin to be faced more and more with our own mortality, and the reality of life's shortness confronts us. As we lose friends and loved ones and experience our own decline, we think more about our passing from this life and increasingly contemplate what may happen at the end of our earthly existence.

Aging requires us to exercise another type of fortitude and perseverance. As our bodies grow older, it may become easy to allow our spiritual life to sag a little bit. It may become difficult to get

to Mass and receive the Eucharist, or to find the energy to complete the spiritual exercises we are used to. Despite our best intentions, we may feel that our relationship with God will suffer.

But there are several things we can do to avoid that.

First, set aside time for quiet prayer each day. Just ten or fifteen minutes can make a huge difference.

Next, use aspirations to get you through difficult times. Short phrases like, “My Jesus, mercy” or “Jesus, I trust in You” can help to stay focused on the Lord during the day.

Divide up some of our spiritual exercises. For example, you might say a decade of the rosary several times throughout the day if it is difficult to do it all at once.

Finally, if you are unable to get to Mass, watch it on television and find out if your parish has an outreach to provide communion to those who are unable to get out of their homes.

Terence Cardinal Cooke, the former Archbishop of New York, in his book *Thy Will Be Done*, written before he died of cancer, said that he was sure when he got old or sick that he would spend his days in prayer, but when the time came, he didn't want to pray. Maintaining our relationship with God in our golden days can be difficult, but it is necessary. Pray now that the Lord will grant us the grace of final perseverance.

■

Ghebreyesus, T.A. It takes knowledge to transform the world to be a better place to grow older. Nat Aging 1, 865 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43587-021-00120-9>

The Franciscan Protomartyrs: Fortitude in Persecution

For the first 300 years of the Church's existence in the Roman Empire, it was illegal to be a Christian. Not until the emperor Constantine encountered and embraced the faith did Christians receive legal status. In those first years, many men and women gave their lives as martyrs for the faith. The spirit that motivated them still existed hundreds of years later when the Franciscan order was founded. Five of the first followers of St. Francis would carry that spirit to its conclusion, laying down their lives rather than denying their faith.

Three of these martyrs, Saints Berardo, Ottone and Pietro, were priests. The two others, Accursio and Adiuto, were lay brothers. They came from the area in Italy around Terni and were among the first sent by St. Francis himself as missionaries to preach the Gospel.

At that time, much of Spain had been conquered by Muslims. The missionaries were sent to Seville to evangelize. They began to preach in mosques, which angered the establishment. They were taken prisoner and endured severe beatings, and were even forced to appear before the sultan, Muhammed al-Nasir, also known as Miramolino. The sultan tried to frighten, bribe, and beat them into submission, but

was unsuccessful. They were then transferred to Morocco with strict instructions to stop preaching the name of Christ.

The friars did not comply. They began to preach the Gospel once again and were imprisoned. After several floggings, they did not waver. As a result, they were sentenced to death and were beheaded on January 16, 1220.

Upon hearing the news of their martyrdom, St. Francis said, "Now I can say with certainty that I have five minor friars." Their bodies were brought to Coimbra, Portugal, where a young Augustinian named Anthony was at the time. It is probable that he had previously heard of these men when they were in Portugal on their way to Morocco. Moved by the story of their martyrdom, he left the Augustinians and joined the Order of Friars Minor. Besides St. Francis, St. Anthony is probably the most well-known Franciscan in history. His preaching would spread far and wide, and his intercession is sought by millions to attain favors from God. The fortitude of the Franciscan protomartyrs inspired St. Anthony, who has subsequently influenced millions. The ancient Christian, Tertullian, said, "The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians." The fruit that has been born by the martyrdom of these Franciscans certainly proves that statement. ■

Remembrance on Your Birthday

Father Robert includes a special remembrance for all Franciscan Mission Associates and their benefactors on their birthday if he knows when it is. To be remembered in his Mass on your birthday, please let us know.

Email us: admin@franciscanmissionassoc.org, call us: 914-664-5604 or mail us this completed form:

My name is _____

My birthday is (*Month and Day*) _____

My address is _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Send to:

Franciscan Mission Associates
PO Box 598, Dept. 1245, Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598

Special Novena Schedule Fall/Advent-Christmas 2024

All year-round, Franciscan Mission Associates conducts a regular schedule of spiritual and devotional exercises in which all benefactors are invited to take part. During the coming months, the Special Novena schedule is:

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| September 2 – 19 | St. Jude Novena |
| September 21 – 29 | Feast of St. Michael |
| September 26 – October 4 | Feast of St. Francis |
| September 29 – October 15 | Feast of the Holy Rosary |
| October 29 – December 24 ... | Novena to St. Anthony on the nine Tuesdays before Christmas |
| November 2 – November 30 | Novena for the Faithful Departed |
| December 1 – December 31..... | Infant Savior (31 Masses) |
| December 8 – December 16..... | Feast of the Immaculate Conception |
| December 16 – December 24 | Feast of Christmas (in Padua) |
| December 24 – January 1..... | Feast of Christmas (in Assisi) |
| December 25 – January 2..... | Christ Child Novena (in Bethlehem) |

Holy Mass is offered each day for all Franciscan Mission Associates benefactors and for the special intentions they request. Kindly forward your petitions for the Novenas scheduled to:

Franciscan Mission Associates
P.O. Box 598, Dept. 1241, Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598



April 2024 Annual Pilgrimage: Deepening Our Connection

In April 2024, more than 30 pilgrims embarked on Franciscan Mission Associates' spiritual journey, carrying the prayers and intentions of our friends and benefactors to the Marian Shrines across Portugal, Spain, and France. The pilgrimage began with a Mass at Lisbon's Church of St. Anthony, located at the saint's birthplace. We then visited the sacred town of Fátima, where Mary appeared to three shepherd children in 1917. This is among the most famous of the Marian apparitions, and our visit deeply moved all participants, who felt a profound connection to the history and sanctity of this place.

Our journey continued through the historical cities of Salamanca, Ávila, and Zaragoza, celebrating Mass at sites imbued with the spirits of St. Teresa and St. Ignatius de Loyola.

In Lourdes, we prayed at the Grotto where Mary appeared to St. Bernadette, dedicating our prayers to our benefactors. Our pilgrimage concluded in Barcelona with visits to the Abbey at Montserrat and the breathtaking Sagrada Família Cathedral.

The 2024 pilgrimage profoundly engaged and inspired the participants as they journeyed through sacred sites. Each location fostered unique moments of spiritual renewal, deeply connecting each pilgrim with the divine realities.

Those interested in future pilgrimages may reach out to us for more information on how to join us in these transformative spiritual adventures:

Franciscan Mission Associates • P.O. Box 598, Dept. 1242, Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598
914-664-5604 • admin@franciscanmissionassoc.org