

A Special Message from Fr. Timothy Lyons, OFM Conv., Shrine Chaplain and Director

EMBRACING THE ISOLATION OF THE CORONAVIRUS LIKE ST. FRANCIS AND ST. KATERI

My dear friends,

When St. Francis left the abusive relationship he experienced from his father and dedicated his life to God the Father, he experienced unexpected changes on this journey. Francis met a leper whom he first recognized as repulsive and feared due to his own desire to remain healthy and unscarred. He eventually embraced this leper after realizing the dignity that was present in this man, the same dignity we all have achieved by the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. God led Francis to San Damiano Chapel and instructed him to "rebuild my church." As we know from the life story of Francis, he immediately began rebuilding the physical structure, which led him to a deeper spiritual life of living the gospel message, establishing the Order of Friars Minor and the Poor Clares, and receiving the stigmata. It is through the cross that he experienced God's love and mercy, which strengthened and deepened his relationship of trust in God's will for him.

St. Kateri, experiencing smallpox at age four and losing her family to this disease, also found herself isolated. But she, like Francis, did not become bitter or feel sorry for herself. From what her mother had taught her about the love of God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and reinforced by the Jesuit missionaries, she too developed a love of the cross.

I believe that God draws us all to Himself in unexpected ways. The isolation and the anxiety that the present coronavirus has caused within our own lives is such a change. We can greet this present situation with anger and fear, which will only result in negative isolation with no benefits, or we can embrace this isolation and use this time to pray, to deepen our own spiritual life, and to see the scars of Francis and Kateri as a roadmap to lead us to a deeper understanding of God's will for us.

Listen to the medical experts at this time. Distance yourself from others, eat, sleep. Also take this unexpected change in your routine and add prayer, spiritual reading, and the rosary to keep your spiritual life strong and healthy.

Ask God the Father to inspire you to become another Francis or Kateri. As Jesus told us in the Gospel, "When you pray, go to your room, close the door [isolate], and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

Thank you for praying with me each day. "It is through the cross of Jesus Christ that we are healed."

-Fr. Tim