

## **The teachings of Saint Francis challenges all Religions to embrace Interfaith Spirituality**

Following my recent trip to Florence to attend a family member's wedding, I was delighted that despite the torrential wet weather that we were able to include a day's trip by train down to Assisi in beautiful Umbria.

The visit to the birthplace of Saint Francis and Saint Claire of Assisi was an experience that I never want to forget. It was a real privilege just to kneel before the tomb of Saint Francis and personally thank him for his love and support over the past 40 years. Here I was alone with my thoughts and whilst wrestling with the large numbers of people that had made the journey from across Italy to be at the heart of Franciscan Spirituality, there was 'total awe' in the crypt where the body of Francis is entombed. In the same vicinity of the tomb of St. Francis, there lies his 'special friends,' fellow monks who walked alongside him in his ministry.

Who would have thought that in the year **12<sup>th</sup> century**, when the Catholic Hierarchy had lost sight of all sense of the Divine and whose lives were more focussed on ego and selfish pleasure. Yes, the Church of that era urgently required immediate spiritual surgery. All was not lost as God had a plan to bring the Catholic Hierarchy to heel by introducing them too a young man called Francis and his friends who on the surface appeared dishevelled and unkempt, possibly wreaking of sweat through living rough in the fields, yet, their joy, peace and love must have been seen as 'New Age' and not in keeping with their understanding of how monks should behave spiritually.

We accept that history is a great teacher. We know from our own personal relationship with Source that God always answers the prayers of his/Her people by sending special men and women to rescue her from the depths of despair. The Catholic Church of the 10<sup>th</sup> century onwards revealed that the Popes, Cardinals, Bishops and Clergy of those periods were loosing sight of their vocation as spiritual representatives. Their lives were more in tune with hedonism, secularism, materialism and Epicureanism.

By the 12<sup>th</sup> century, God had a plan and through the lives of Francis and Saint Claire, their simple spirituality started to touch the lives of ordinary souls and lead them back to a spiritual life that was more about respecting God in all things. The Hierarchy in the Catholic Church began to feel threatened and were indeed challenged when they summoned Francis to account for his 'way of life.' The vision given by God to Saint Francis was that he was to rebuild God's Church and restore it back to a more simplified Church reflecting the heart of a loving selfless God who loved all regardless of their religious persuasion. Over a period of time, the leaders of the Church realised that Francis may have appeared 'crazy, wild, eccentric and new age' in his beliefs, yet, they finally came round to accepting that he was indeed a man sent by God to heal the many religious divisions within the Church and reveal a simplified spiritual pathway that would encapsulate a spirit of poverty or detachment from materialism thus liberating the soul to see the face of God.

As I knelt before the tomb of St. Francis, I asked the help from this great man of God to help me discern my own spiritual journey and where I should be and what I was being asked to do, etc. I really needed clarity for myself as well as for the Tau vision and where we should go with it following on from the message that he had given to us in the summer of 2006 re: establishing the Tau Interfaith Community. In the crypt of Saint Francis, I could sense that the message that St. Francis was given by God to rebuild His Church had a resonance with the needs of the world today. There was a strong sense of holding to that vision and the words, '**rebuild my church,**' referred more to '**reaching out and embrace all beliefs and none.**' The words '**lead by example not by dogma; invite all brothers and sisters to come together and unite as one spiritual family, sharing their beliefs through unity, peace and loving acceptance.**'

Yet, at the same time, I was feeling a deep sadness in my heart towards religious leaders for having taken a '**back seat**' in bridging the gaps of religious intolerance and indifference and isolating the core issues of religious separation within the whole family of God. There was an urgency to resurrect the need to unite all brothers and sisters of all faiths and none to come together in love and worship the same Holy Father Mother God as one family. Inwardly I was battling or grappling with memories of years ago when I set up a respite centre in North Wales challenging both the Christian Church to show a more compassionate tolerance for those whose lives were affected by HIV disease and to the Medical and Nursing professions for alienating clients from services. I was equally aware that within the Evangelical Alliance, many were professing that that HIV disease was 'self inflicted' and saddened by the way that ministers of religions were trying to convince me that they truly and genuinely loved God but inwardly I sensed Like Jesus, 'that there hearts were very far from God.' How judgemental of me!

The assurances given from St. Francis to my heart were identical to what he was given way back in the 12<sup>th</sup> century from God. That the symbol of Tau that I was invited to wear on my person was the link of peace that will reunite all men and women to come back as one spiritual family and share in a common purpose, a purpose that is more about embracing our brothers and sisters who love the same God and that we should now make every effort to break down the imposed 'religious barriers' that have not served our highest good' as they have alienated us from God. Like Francis, Claire and their many followers who over the past nine hundred years have demonstrated the need to seek first the 'Kingdom of God' in our hearts through detachment from materialism and or anything that separates us from God. Here I was aware of the religious differences and issues of fundamentalism that has eaten away at man's hearts seeking revenge and control.

I sensed deep in my soul that as we are each 'our own teacher,' we are also responsible for our actions.' Jesus reminded us when He lived among us that we '**Are each other's keeper.**' To be a keeper of another involves being a spiritual brother and sister and when the other is hurting unjustly or through foul means, then we have a moral and spiritual duty to them before the same God, to act appropriately in a loving, just way.

The time spent in silent prayer in Assisi did have a profound spiritual impact as I was being challenged in my own religious and spiritual beliefs. I was having to revisit my understanding about does spiritual growth really entail for me the light bringer in service as a spiritual or mystical bride of Jesus. The answers that came flooding back into my heart were simple, ***‘to grow spiritually, we have to be stretched in our spiritual life on a daily basis and this will entail ‘shedding the skins of our former religious family.’*** We are guided by faith to leave our so-called ‘Comfort Zones,’ and walk in absolute trust in God, for God and with God alone. No one else can do this for us!

We have to abandon all ‘religious practices’ that no longer serves our ‘Highest Good’ and be willing to listen to what God is saying to our innermost hearts and not our heads. Yes, the head, or ego will want assurances but the journey of faith is without such luxuries. Yes, the mind reminds us that we need anecdotal evidence to support the rational mind. I was being reminded that ‘to walk in faith is to walk in truth and at all times to speak my truth regardless of rejection from others including family. When we speak our truth from a place of divine love, then we have no need of conviction or words of reassurances from others because we are at one with all that IS.

Amazingly, whilst walking around Assisi, I started accepting that the seedbed for spiritual growth is already within us. All we have to do is to reawaken to its energy through a daily diet of prayer, meditation and fasting from those pitfalls that lead us away from God, namely our uncontrolled weaknesses or self-indulgence. Yes, many perceive that a spiritual life that involves prayer, meditation, silence, retreats, etc is for the monks and nuns only. This is a fallacy as we all need to regularly top up on spiritual food for our souls’ development otherwise it will die and we along with it.

The religious strife and indifferences that we have all witnessed on our TV screens in the recent times have shown us that unless we are willing to take a leadership role and speak out from a heart infused with God’s love at the many injustices that cripple each of us, then we will give our ‘false gods’ permission to destroy all mankind. All peaceful solutions are as a direct result from prayer and not just by political means. The power of prayer is the tool that unlocks the key to the hearts of all mankind to perceive the presence of God in action. Sadly, many underestimate its efficacy and potency as a spiritual JCB to activate the healing process of reconciliation. Local radio or TV does not cover anything that involves a spiritual slant. Mankind is embarrassed when one resorts to using the words Jesus, God, Angels, etc. Why? Being in Assisi not only affirmed my personal beliefs in God but it gave out a powerful energy to walk with the great man himself and be courageous for God in the line of opposition even from those who should know best.

The Tau symbol that was initiated by Saint Francis in 1140 was not just any old symbol or good luck charm. The ‘T’ symbol represented spiritual liberation embracing ‘Peace, Harmony, Divine Connectedness, Balance and Forgiveness of self and others.’ Francis and his followers today continue to

challenge all by inviting them to forego a negative mind set or poverty consciousness and embrace spiritual wellness and wholeness for their survival in a time when other forces are threatening the very survival of the planet as well as leading many astray from their spiritual pathway to God.

Instead of building new Churches that represents religious groups worshipping the same God, wouldn't it be more appropriate to focus on building Temples of Peace, Reconciliation and Love whereby everyone can come together as members of the same family of God around the same table and glorify the Supreme Being of Creation known by many different names in varying religious cultures. I believe that that time has now come when we all need to evaluate the customs and practises that we have all been accustomed or conditioned to use without reviewing their effectiveness as sacred tools of unity. We know that many use religion to further their own agendas. Human nature been what it is will use every or any loophole to escape justice and righteousness.

Many have asked the question what is the difference between religion and spirituality? The answer is simply this, '**Religion is man made whereas Spirituality is God given.**' Or, in other words, '**Religion is for those who live in fear of Hell and Spirituality is for those of us who have come through Hell.**' Whatever sacred tool or belief system that we use to enable or facilitate our divine connection with Source, it has to be said that today, we all face a new set of real challenges similar to those experienced by Francis, Claire way back in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The Hierarchy within the Church of that period alienated mankind from God. Are we to endorse similar practises today where religious leaders advocate religious persecution using hate even death to control the minds and hearts of our brothers and sisters in serving not a God of Love, but massaging their devilish egos? Assisi is a special place whereby one is faced with reality as it is. Everywhere I looked, there was a spiritual hunger for knowledge and truth. Of the many thousands who were there that day, they appeared ordinary men and women searching for the Divine. At Assisi I sensed that today, God does really and powerfully connects only with the ordinary man and woman of the streets who remain humble, sincere and detached from ego, just like Francis.

Mother Mary over the centuries has touched many lives and even today, she continues to speak to the minds and hearts of those who are open and receptive to God's love. Sadly, many churchgoers rarely hear Mother Mary's message for reasons only known to them. I sense one reason is that there are too many who say they love God, but their actions speak a foreign language that is more to do with revenge, hate and control. Could it be that there is an unwillingness to accept change not for the sale of it but more to do about embracing a new spiritual set of challenges that is all encompassing and all embracing regardless of what faith one belongs too?

In my endeavours to view all three Churches from crypt to the upper two Churches that made up the Basilica of Saint Francis on the hill of Assisi, I was heartened in my soul that despite near starvation and persecution, Francis persevered with God's vision to rebuild His Church. The spirituality of this great holy man was to be the divine blueprint or vision that would ultimately

lead many away from materialism and dogma to a more simplified life that would empower them to embrace God. The sheer tenacity of Francis and Claire, their love of nature and the animal kingdom were evident wherever I went. They did not have it easy but one thing that permeated through their faith journey was that they had found the 'keys to the Kingdom of Heaven' and used every ounce of their energy to leave us a lasting legacy of love. This love was very much reflected in the Canticles of the Creatures written by Francis and it would challenge all of us today to rethink our relationships that we have with the animal kingdom and instead of believing that God made the earth just for us, then we are sadly mistaken. Both man and beast inhabited the earth and that both have an equal share of divine abundance from God's table.

The same vision for the Tau Tree of Life Healing Interfaith Community initiated by Lord Kutumi alias Saint Francis, in the summer of 2006 to Sean and our Therapists, is a God Incident for all to return to spiritual simplicity and prosperity consciousness, devoid of fear, control where, 'Hate is not overcome by hate, but by love.'

As we too our leave and strolled down though the many narrow streets of Assisi, I felt a spiritual connection that invigorated my heart and that I was never to give up on the vision for the Tau Tree of Life Interfaith Healing Community. Yes, the obstacles will come and test one to the point of abandoning everything. Being back there on the hill of Assisi I knew that despite how I may have felt at times re: the challenge of trying to hold it together for the whole community, I knew that we had the support of Saints Francis and Claire and the many who followed him. The video 'Brother Sun Sister Moon came flooding back when Francis would dance naked under the stars praising God with the animals joining in the merriment. Also heartening was the fact that Francis did not have the luxuries of a church building for many years but preferred the fields to connect with his God.

As our train departed the station at Assisi, I could hear the beautiful words of Saint Francis resounding in my ears.

***Lord, make me an instrument of peace.  
Where there hatred, let me sow love.  
Where there is injury, pardon.  
Where there is discord, unity.  
Where there is doubt, faith.  
Where there is error, truth.  
Where there is despair, hope.  
Where there is sadness, joy.  
Where there is darkness, light.  
O, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek  
To be consoled as to console.  
To be understood as to understand.  
To be loved as to love.  
For  
It is giving, that we receive.***

***It is in pardoning, that we are pardoned.  
It is dying, that we are born to eternal life.***  
Saint Francis.

The vision of the Tau Tree of Life Interfaith Healing Community reflects everything that is said in the above prayer. More importantly, the vision is more about healing divisions caused by religious intolerance and ignorance and allowing the beating heart of a loving, selfless God reach us where we are at in our faith journey. Often, when we are at our very lowest, it is then that God comes knocking on our heart to open the rusty lock and allow His love penetrate thus setting us free to celebrate and rejoice just like Francis and Claire did in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Society today, desperately needs men and women of conviction, just like Saint's Francis and Claire who will challenge all religious beliefs to embrace the Divine within all mankind regardless of colour, creed, religious persuasion, sexuality or diversity in our communities.

Becoming a member of the Tau Community is not about becoming a monastic or hermit isolating oneself from the world but more about joining a group of ordinary men and women who seek first the Kingdom of God for their personal spiritual growth and when replete, they have the reserves to share surplus resources with their fellow brothers and sisters.

Incorporating the ancient spiritual beliefs of the Essenes, members of the Tau Interfaith family unite in daily prayer each morning and evening by reciting the Daily Communion privately in their own homes. Currently, members of the Tau family meet on the first Saturday of each month for a spiritual retreat day that involves times for personal and group support at the Founder's home at Chapel Gap, Storth in the South Lakes. The aim for the Tau Family is to locate a suitable property where members can either stay or visit. If you would like more information about The Tau Tree of Life Interfaith Healing Community, then please visit our website at: [www.taucommunity.com](http://www.taucommunity.com)

Namaste

Brother Sean  
Founder