

A LETTER FROM THE PRIOR GENERAL OF THE ORDER OF FRIAR SERVANTS
OF ST. MARY

FRA ÁNGEL M. RUIZ GARNICA

TO THE SERVITE FAMILY ON THE FOUR HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE BEATIFICATION OF BLESSED JOACHIM OF SIENA
(MARCH 21, 1609-2009)

BEAR ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS

Siena
April 16, 2008

ACRONYMS / ABBREVIATIONS

- Const.* *RULE of Saint Augustine and CONSTITUTIONS of the Order of Friar Servants of Mary* (Servite Provincialate, Buena Park California, 1991).
- Const. Ant.* *Constitutiones antiquæ (Ancient Constitutions)*. See: *Constitutiones antiquæ fratrum Servorum sanctæ Mariæ a S. Philippo Benitio anno circiter 1280 editæ*, ed. P. SOULIER: Monumenta OSM I (1987) pp. 7-26 (introduction); 27-54 (text). There is an English translation: *Constitutiones Antiquæ of the Friar Servants of Mary*, in *Sources for the History and Spirituality of the Servants of St. Mary. I. from 1245 to 1348* (Provincia Veneta O.S.M. – Associazione Emmaus, Vicenza – Sotto il Monte 1998) pp. 107-111 (introduction) 112-148 (text).
- LbJ* *Legenda beati Ioachimi Senensis (Legenda of Blessed Joachim of Siena)*. See: *Vita ac Legenda beati Ioachimi Senensis Ordinis fratrum servorum sanctæ Mariæ Virginis, auctore coævo circa 1335*, ed. P. SOULIER: Monumenta OSM 5 (1902) pp. 5-7 (introduction), 7-19 (text). There is an English translation: *The Life of Blessed Joachim of Siena* in *Sources for the History and Spirituality of the Servants of St. Mary. I. from 1245 to 1348* (Provincia Veneta O.S.M. – Associazione Emmaus, Vicenza – Sotto il Monte 1998) pp. 315-317 (introduction) 318-334 (text).
- LO* *Legenda de origine Ordinis fratrum Servorum Virginis Mariæ (Legenda of the Origin of the Order of friar Servants of the Virgin Mary)*. See: *Legenda de origine Ordinis fratrum Servorum Virginis Mariæ*, ed. A. MORINI: Monumenta OSM I (1897) pp. 55-60 (introduction), 60-106 (text). There is an English translation: *Legenda de origine* in *Sources for the History and Spirituality of the Servants of St. Mary. I. from 1245 to 1348* (Provincia Veneta O.S.M. – Associazione Emmaus, Vicenza – Sotto il Monte 1998) pp. 189-194 (introduction) 195-262 (text).
- RsD* *Regula ad servos Dei [Rule for the servants of God]* of St. Augustine; English translation from *The Rule of Saint Augustine: Masculine and Feminine Versions*, translated by Raymond Canning O.S.A. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1984).

*Above all else there is charity, the perfect bond.
Bear one another's burdens and thus you will keep the Law of Christ.*
Liturgy of the Hours OSM, February 3
Office of Readings, alternative reading I, responsory (cf. *Col* 3, 14; *Gal* 6, 2).

My dear brothers and sisters,

1. *Bear one another's burdens and thus you will keep the law of Christ.*

Let us never slacken in doing good ...

let all our actions be for the good of everybody, and especially of those who belong to the household of the faith (Gal 6, 2. 9. 10).

The apostle Paul wrote these words to the Christians of Galatia to remind them that

the love of God and neighbor fulfilled the Law of Moses (cf. *Gal* 5, 14; *Mt* 22, 36-40), mutual love is the definitive mark of a disciple of Christ (cf. *Gal* 6, 10; *Jn* 13, 35), fraternal charity conforms to the Law of Christ (cf. *Gal*. 6, 2).

2. *Bear one another's burdens.*

The biblical passage that includes these words (cf. *Gal* 6, 2-3. 7-10)

is read as part of the Eucharistic Celebration on February 3rd,

the commemoration of Blessed Joachim of Siena

the seven hundredth-anniversary of whose death

occurred in 2005 (April 16, 1305-2005).

According to the author of the *Life and Legend of Blessed Joachim (LbJ)*,

Blessed Joachim's whole life was a singular example of fraternal charity,

from the small acts of generosity he performed in childhood (cf. *LbJ* 1)

to the *act of charity (LbJ* 18)

he performed on Holy Thursday

the eve of his death (1305).

An anniversary

3. As we prepare to celebrate the four hundredth anniversary

of his beatification (March 21, 1609 – 2009)

by Pope Paul V,

I would like to stop, reflect on his life and personality

and draw useful lessons for our own life.

I would like to consider:

- Chiaramonte, a young nobleman, searching for God;
- Joachim, a Servant of St. Mary;
- Joachim, a patient and compassionate friar;
- Joachim, a faithful disciple of Christ.

CHIARAMONTE, YOUNG NOBLEMAN, SEEKING GOD

*My sons, let us not love with just words or our tongue
but with deeds and in truth*

Liturgy of the Hours OSM, February 3
Office of Readings, alternative reading 2, responsory (cf. *I Jn* 3, 18).

A rich young man, a free spirit

4. According to the *Legenda*

Chiaramonte – the future Blessed Joachim –
was born in Siena of noble parents (*LbJ* 1).

Like the rich young man in the Gospel
he observed the commandments faithfully (cf. *Mt* 19, 16-20),
and was a young man of impeccable character (*LbJ* 1).

One could foresee the future saint.

But unlike the rich young man (cf. *Mt* 19, 22),
he was not tied to or trapped by his wealth:

on the contrary while still a child

he willingly gave away household possessions to the poor (cf. *LbJ* 1),
and later at the age of fourteen

he did not hesitate to abandon material security
and enter our Order,

against the will of his parents,

who were more attached to the goods of this world than those of heaven (*LbJ* 2).

A future saint

5. The author of the *Legenda*

employed the image of a growing plant
to describe Chiaramonte's promising future:

From the beginning he was a plant of God (cf. *Ps* 92 [91], 13-14)
and gave signs of his goodness:

[Chiaramonte] *was a boy of almost perfect character
and showed clear signs*

*of love, above all, for the honor of the glorious Virgin:
everyone thought he looked like a saint*

and foreseeing a future saint would say:

“If this child lives he will be a great saint.” (*LbJ* 1).

This passage in the *Legenda*
calls to mind

the universal vocation to holiness
reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council^[1]

and based on Jesus' words

Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect (cf. *Mt* 5, 48).

Each of us

was created in the image and likeness of God (cf. *Gn* 1, 27).

In baptism

we were immersed in the life of God,

we promised to live as God's child,

as brothers to all mankind

following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ,

our teacher and the model of all perfection.

Our striving for perfection and holiness

is undermined by our eagerness to become saints

by our own efforts, our so-called *merits*.

Our real task
 is to let God penetrate our being
 and direct our actions
 so that the brothers may see in us
 a reflection of God.
 Certainly it is tiresome
 to deny ourselves (cf. *Mt.* 16, 24),
 to give the first place to God
 in all circumstances
 and do what He wants.
 Joachim, the humble,
 until the day of his death (cf. *LbJ* 18)
 was aware of his own limitations and of the fact that he was a sinner (cf. *LbJ* 11);
 he depended on the charity and prayers of his confrères.
 Yes, it is a good thing to seek God's assistance constantly in prayer,
 confident that His help will sometimes come to us
 through the charity of our brothers.

Blessing babies

6. It is a custom in Siena
 for parents to bring their newborn infants
 to our church
 to the tomb of Blessed Joachim
 to ask – through Joachim's intercession –
 for God's blessing on their children.
 It would be a good thing to establish this custom –
 seeking God's blessing on children
 through the intercession of Blessed Joachim –
 in all those places where our communities are found.
 Jesus let the children come to him,
 He laid hands on them and blessed them saying:
 “*Let the little children alone, and do not stop them from coming to me; for it is to such as these that
 the kingdom of Heaven belongs*” (*Mt* 19, 14).
 Let us make our own these words of Jesus,
 let us follow His example.
 Let us watch over children
 lest they lose their smile,
 their serenity (cf. *Mt* 18, 5-6),
 or their joy in living.
 We must see to it that they grow in hope.
 Jesus warned us:
*See that you never despise any of these little ones [...]
 it is never the will of your Father in heaven that
 one of these little ones should be lost* (*Mt* 18, 10. 14).

A Sienese, sensitive to his neighbor's needs

7. Chiaramonte was born in Siena (cf. *LbJ* 1),
 a city in which neighborhoods and families
 were often proudly at odds with one another.
 In this atmosphere Chiaramonte-Joachim
 was constantly concerned with the welfare of his fellow citizens (cf. *LbJ* 1, 4, 6, 11-14).

If we look at our own society and time
it is in some ways similar to the world of Blessed Joachim
and we think immediately:
is it possible to work for the common good
to seek justice and peace
in so diverse and multicultural a world,
where the social and cultural backgrounds
as well as the political aspirations and interests of citizens
vary so greatly?
Can we work for harmony among men
and overcome our differences?
There is no quick answer,
nor is there an easy solution to situations so various and complex.
I believe the answer can be found in a culture of altruism,
in the pursuit of a higher good.
In every family, community, country
we must look for what unites us
concentrating on the good qualities rather than defects
focusing on the common good,
the reason why we live together
in the same house, the same city, the same religious family.
Our lawgiver, St. Augustine, reminds us:
*Before all else live together in harmony
Being of one mind and one heart on the way to God.
For is it not precisely for this reason
That you have come to live together? (RsD 3).*

FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION, FRATERNAL DISCUSSION AND CONCRETE ACTION

1. Read and pray together a passage from the Bible. For example: *Mk* 10, 13-16 (Jesus and children); *Mt* 18, 10-14 (taking care of little ones).
2. In the house (community, family) examine together your personal and community progress.
3. In the house, through open and respectful dialogue, bring possible disagreements into the open and reestablish peace.
4. Establish contact with neighborhood young people. Share their dreams. Interest them in an evangelical life.

JOACHIM, SERVANT OF ST. MARY

*He chose the name Joachim, Mary's father's name,
to be more intimately linked to her.*

Liturgy of the Hours OSM, February 3
Office of Readings, alternative reading 2 (cf. *LbJ* 3).

Called to serve through love with Mary

8. According to the author of the *Legenda*, from childhood Chiaramonte displayed *special devotion to the Blessed Mother of God* (*LbJ* 1). He acted as if she were the mistress of his house and his life: *when he came home for dinner he would climb the stairs praying to the glorious Virgin on every step so that he said as many prayers as there were steps* (*LbJ* 1). It was this same Mother of the Lord who appeared to him in a dream and called him to her service (cf. *LbJ* 2). The child responded with *a firm decision to enter the Order of her Servants* (*LbJ* 2). He overcame his parents' objections and at age fourteen Chiaramonte went to the Servite Priory in Siena, *he asked that he be permitted to enter the Order and be called Joachim because by taking the name of Mary's father*^[2] *he would always be totally linked to her* (*LbJ* 3).

A wisely guided young man

9. The fourteen year-old Chiaramonte already cherished a great ideal and made this holy resolution: although he felt called to the Order he had not yet reached the age prescribed by the *Constitutions* (15); therefore the intervention of the Prior General was necessary, Saint Philip Benizi^[3] was the General and he was a father of really great holiness, and thus Joachim made his dream come true or rather he answered the divine call to live his vocation and become a saint.

I think of the obligations that we as adults have towards young people:
we must educate them
by word and example;
this is a task in which many members of our Family are engaged (elementary, secondary schools, ...);
it is a serious endeavor
and not simply the passing on of information;
it involves guidance and direction,
the transmission of values,
an understanding of life,
life's purpose and reasons to love life

in spite of its problems and disappointments.

Benedict XVI tells us: *in a small child there is already a strong desire to know and to understand, which is expressed in his stream of questions and constant demands for explanations. Therefore, an education would be impoverished if it were limited to providing notions and information and neglected the important question about the truth, especially that truth which can be a guide in life.*^[4]

With love and commitment we assume responsibility for teaching, guiding and educating those young people the Lord brings to us and entrusts to our care.

Servant of St. Mary

10. Chiaramonte wanted to be called by the name of the father of Blessed Mary, Joachim, because he wanted to be intimately linked to Holy Mary with his whole person (LbJ 3).

Like the humble handmaid quick to accept the Lord's plan (cf. Lk 1, 38, 48), Joachim devoted himself totally to a life of the deepest humility (LbJ 4) and wanted in all things to do the will of his Father in heaven (LbJ 5). Like the Virgin of the Magnificat (cf. Lk 1, 46-55), Joachim praised the Creator of all things (LbJ 15; cf. Dn 3,56-88), with arms outstretched and face glowing (LbJ 16). Like the mother standing next to Christ crucified (cf. Jn 19,25-27), Joachim suffered with those who suffered (LbJ 4) and brought them comfort and relief (cf. LbJ 6). On our pilgrimage to Christ we follow the example of our first Fathers and Blessed Joachim, our eyes are on the Virgin Mary, our Lady, and we learn from her, the Mother and Servant of the Lord (Const. 1), to receive the word of God and to be attentive to the promptings of the Spirit (Const. 6), to carry out God's will and to praise Him for His wonders (cf. Const. 29), to understand and alleviate human suffering (Const. 6).

A humble servant

11. According to the *Legenda* Joachim devoted himself totally to a life of the most profound humility: in spite of his noble background and youth he was happy to act as an adult and perform the lowest work and the most trivial jobs (LbJ 4). Blessed Joachim's example of humility and service tells us something for our own life. He displayed his love for the community even in his care for the community's furnishings. Anyone who shows love for the house and common rooms, cleaning them and keeping them orderly, is showing love for the people who use these places,

our brothers and sisters.

Obedient brother

12. According to the *Legenda*

Joachim loved especially obedience

and called it the soul's food,

as the Savior says:

“My food is to do the will of my Father in heaven” (Jn 4, 34) (LbJ 5).

Joachim made the words of Jesus his own

like Jesus he wanted to be one with the Will of the Father,

like Jesus he wanted to say *in the midst of the community* (cf. *Const.* 148):

Here I am, I come to do Your will, O God (Heb 10,7; cf. Ps 40 [39], 8-9).

He became a “member of Jesus’ family”

for, as the Lord said:

Whoever does the will of God,

he is my brother, sister and mother (Mk 3, 34).

For those of us who have been called by the Lord

to live together in His service

we must not be distracted by the discordant voices that surround us

but rather be constant in listening to the Word of God (cf. *Lk* 2, 19. 51; 8, 19-21; 11, 27-28)

and devote each day to the study and meditation of this Word

for at least a half hour (Const. 31a),

remaining always attentive to its summons in our hearts,

in other people, in events and in all creation (Const. 24b).

We must be constantly open to God’s instruction

and ready with our brothers to discover His Will (cf. *Const.* 12)

and carry it out conscientiously.

Man of prayer, an intercessor and a blessing

13. According to the *Legenda*,

Joachim was a man of prayer

and *great contemplation* (cf. *LbJ* 15)

so devout that one day

while praying in front of the altar

a flame appeared over his head

that then turned into a ball that rose on high (LbJ 8).

Many people depended on his prayers:

the prior of his community

to *cast the devil out of a man (LbJ 11);*

a devout layman

who was cured of *an intestinal ailment (LbJ 12);*

his confrère, Andrea,

who was cured of *a pain in his side (LbJ 13);*

a girl whose *paternal uncle* brought her

to be cured of *a goiter (LbJ 14).*

Let us too pray for one another (cf. *Const.* 30),

let us support each other with mutual prayer.

Some evils can only be expelled

through prayer and fasting (Mk 17, 21).

Through the intercession of Blessed Joachim and our Seven Holy Fathers,

let us all pray to the Lord of Life

who has called us
to be witnesses to the Gospel in fraternal communion
that He may enlighten and free us from all evil.

FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION, FRATERNAL DISCUSSION AND CONCRETE ACTION

1. Read and pray together a passage from the Bible. For example, *Lk* 1, 26-38 (the annunciation); *Heb* 10, 5-10 (obedience).
2. In the house (community, family) examine together your life from the perspective of the Gospel and the Commandment of Love.
3. Visit and pray for those who depend on our prayers, for the outcast, for those who are forgotten or ignored.
4. In the house (community, family) perform those humble services that are often overlooked by others.

JOACHIM, A PATIENT AND COMPASSIONATE FRIAR

*Following the example of Christ who bore our infirmities and sorrows
Blessed Joachim took upon himself the sufferings of an epileptic*

Liturgy of the Hours OSM, February 3
Office of Readings, alternative reading 2, responsory (cf. *Is* 53, 4).

Healing the epileptic

14. *Bear one another's burdens (Gal 6, 2).*

Blessed Joachim

followed the Apostle Paul's suggestion:

he knew how to suffer with those who suffer (LbJ 4).

The author of the *Legenda*

tells us that Blessed Joachim so loved his neighbor

that he asked God and was granted

the grace of taking an epileptic's sickness upon himself

since he could not comfort him with words.

Once Fra Joachim and Fra Acquisto d'Arezzo

were traveling together:

when night and rainfall came upon them suddenly

they found shelter in a hospice where there was a sick man

who had been suffering a serious illness for some time.

Blessed Joachim heard him complaining about his pain and said to him:

"Be patient, brother,

this sickness of yours will be your salvation."

The sick man replied, "It's easy to praise sickness, my dear friar,

But quite another thing to have the disease!"

Joachim said to him:

"Then I will pray Almighty God that you be freed from this sickness

and that He give it to me, His servant:

and may I not be healed until I die,

may I bear always in my body

the endurance of Christ" (cf. *2 Thess* 3, 5; *2 Cor* 4, 10; *Col* 1, 24).

The sick man jumped up from his bed

and was totally cured,

Joachim, though, was struck with epilepsy on the spot,

from which he suffered much for the rest of his life.

It was for him like the crown of martyrdom (LbJ 6).

Blessed Joachim asked the man to be patient

because he was convinced of the effectiveness of patience.

He proved this conviction by taking the man's sickness upon himself.

I would like to consider

the question of *patience*.

God, the "Patient One", the merciful

15. With the parable of the pitiless servant (cf. *Mt* 18, 25-35),

Jesus urged His disciples to show the same patience to each other

that God shows towards us,

unconditional and unlimited

patience.

God revealed Himself
 in Christ Jesus
 who sought the welfare of all
 and who patiently *bore our sins in His body
 on the wood of the Cross (1 Pt 2, 24)*.
 God revealed Himself
 as a kind and compassionate Father
slow to anger and full of love (Ps 86 [85], 15):
 He makes no distinction between the good and the wicked
 but bestows His benefits on all (cf. *Mt 5, 45*);
 He is merciful and benevolent
 and desires not the death of the sinner
 but that he be converted and live (cf. *Acts 3, 26*).
 From Him who is patient and merciful,
 we learn patience and mercy.

Mutual respect

16. *In our journey toward perfect charity
 we fall and make mistakes
 because of human weakness (Const. 52)*.
 If one of our brothers errs and falls
 we follow Jesus' example (cf. *Jn 8, 1-11*),
 and condemn the sin, not the sinner.
*Mindful of the Lord's presence among us (cf. Mt 18, 20),
 we must love and esteem one another (cf. Rm 12, 10),
 and bear one another's burdens (cf. Gal 6, 2)*.
*For this reason we shall avoid all malicious talk
 as a serious obstacle to fraternal life (Const. 53)*.
*We should surround a guilty brother with love
 realizing that often a person falls because he is not supported
 by our love and understanding (Const. 56)*.
 Brothers and sisters
 who make a religious profession
 depend not just on the mercy of God
 and intercession of Our Lady,
 but also on fraternal charity,
 to support their own weakness (cf. *Const. 154*).
 If we were all aware of our limitations
 only kind words
 would come out of our mouths,
 words of comfort, respect and encouragement
 for everyone else (cf. *Mt 7, 5; Const. 55*)
 and we would live *united by love
 and sustained by mutual esteem (Const. 3)*.

"Fraternal" patience: pardoning one another
17. *How many times should I pardon my brother
 if he sins against me?*
Seven times? (Mt 18, 21) Peter asked the Master one day.
I say not seven,
but even seventy times seven (Mt 18, 22) Jesus answered;

in other words, always,
throughout one's whole life (LbJ 6).
 I believe that knowing how to forgive,
 how to love the sinner but not the sin,
 to exchange good for evil,
 to help a fallen brother rise again,
 and make up for the wrong he has done,
 is one way to support him
 and one way to support each other.
Have patience with me (Mt 18, 26. 29).
 Like the servant in the parable,
 we must humbly ask pardon of each other
 so that we can get up again
 and commit ourselves to following Christ more closely.

The sick one, "the patient"

18. A doctor calls the sick people under his care
 "patients."
 Certainly, they must practice patience.
 To visit and be cared for by the physician
 they must wait their turn to see the doctor,
 but they must above also be patient with themselves,
 with their suffering, wounded, fragile and weak bodies.
 And this – basically – is what the Blessed asks
 the man with epilepsy to do:
*"Be patient brother,
 your disease will be your salvation" (LbJ 6).*
 And he proves to the unbelieving sick man
 how sincere his words are
 by taking the poor man's disease upon himself,
 showing his own patience
 for the rest of his life.

In this way he makes his own the words of the Apostle Paul:

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church (Col 1,24).

There is always something positive
 to be found in trials and suffering.

We are forced to stop,
 focus,

look at our lives with new eyes,
 and reaffirm our faith.

Like Blessed Joachim

when this new and serious disease struck him,
 we can say with the Apostle Paul:

When I am weak, it is then I am strong (2 Cor 12,10; cf. LbJ 17),

strong in our faith in Christ, our hope,
 strong in the new life begun at baptism,
 strong in the good news of salvation.

Close to the "suffering/patient" Christ

19. *Mercy is recognized*

*as one of the characteristics of Servite spirituality,
 Servites continue in their lives the example of the Mother of God (Const. 52).
 Like the beloved disciple at the foot of the Cross (cf. Jn 19, 25-27),
 we, Servites, intend to stand with the Mother
 next to Christ who is still being crucified
 in our suffering brothers and sisters (cf. Mt 25, 35-36)
 to bring them *comfort and redemptive cooperation* (Const. 319).
 This is what Blessed Joachim did
 throughout his entire life:
 he knew how to suffer with those in pain (cf. Rm 12, 15),
 he served the sick
 and personally with extreme dedication
 performed for them the most humble services which others found repugnant (LbJ 4).
 Let us show ourselves equally devoted to those
 we encounter on our journey who are suffering
 and offer them comfort.*

FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION, FRATERNAL DISCUSSION AND CONCRETE ACTION

1. Read and pray together a passage from the Bible. For example, *Mt 5, 43-48* or *Lk 6, 27-38* (God's patience); *1 Pt 2, 21-25* (Christ's patience); *Mt 18, 21-35* (fraternal patience); *Mt 25, 31-40* (parable of the Last Judgment).
2. In the house (community, family) examine together the degree of compassion or patience you show others, and your concern for the welfare of individuals.
3. In community celebrate a chapter of review and renew your commitment to fraternal communion.
4. Visit and comfort someone who is suffering.

JOACHIM, FAITHFUL DISCIPLE OF CHRIST

We carry always and everywhere in our bodies the death of Jesus because we also carry the life of Jesus in our bodies.

Liturgy of the Hours OSM, February 3

Office of Readings, alternative reading 3, responsory (cf. 2 Cor 4, 10-11).

20. It is interesting to note how in the various *Legenda* our saints and blessed are presented as faithful disciples of Christ and this is usually illustrated with an event in their life. In the *Legenda of Blessed Joachim* an account of specific events does this.

From being rich he made himself poor

21. The Apostle Paul gives an effective description of the *kenosis* of Christ, *though he was rich he became poor* (2 Cor 8, 9) for our sake so that we might become rich through His poverty.

The author of the *Legenda*

presents the Blessed as a faithful disciple of Christ from the perspective of poverty:

from a rich nobleman – something he was by birth - the young Chiaramonte made himself poor

and vowed to God and the Virgin Mary

to live without property (Const. Ant., chap. 16)

and *devote himself totally to a life of the most profound humility* (LbJ 4);

in spite of his noble background and youth,

he would perform – as we have seen – the humblest of tasks,

the tasks others thought trivial (LbJ 4).

This provides us with a concrete example

of his witness to evangelical poverty

voluntarily assumed

through *work, sharing possessions*

and a moderate style of life (Const. 57).

I would like to focus briefly

on three aspects of our vow of poverty.

Work

22. Just as Christ came *to serve*

and not to be served (Mt 20, 28; cf. Const. 43),

so Blessed Joachim from the day he entered the Order

was at the service of his brothers

and especially those who were most needy (cf. LbJ 4-6, 11-14).

No one ever saw him idle (LbJ 15; cf. 2 Thess 3, 7. 11).

We are and we are called “Servants” (Const. 9).

This constitutes our place in the world,

to share in the common lot of all mankind (cf. Const. 57a).

We are servants, industrious,

well aware that *our daily bread*
is a gift of Providence (Const. 59),
 and the result of our work (cf. *I Cor 3, 8*).
Whoever does not want to work shall not eat (2 Thess 3, 10)
 are the peremptory words of the Apostle Paul.
 This warning of St. Paul
 was taken to heart – especially by the desert fathers^[5]
 and those who gave birth to religious life
 like St. Anthony, the Abbot,
 who never excused himself from manual labor^[6]
 and St. Benedict (c. 480 – c. 547),
 the lawgiver of Western monasticism,
 whose well known motto was *Ora et labora*.
 Our Seven Holy Fathers were known
 for their zeal for daily work.
 Their works of mercy
 included service at the *Ospedale di Fonte viva* in Florence;
 the *Legenda de origine Ordinis* tells us
 that St. Alexis (+ 1310)
was very attached to manual labor
 even in his old age.
 We are servants, not masters;
we share the lot of all men and women,
we collaborate in the creative work of the Father
and associate ourselves with the redemptive work of Christ (Const. 57a).
 We place our hands
 at the service of God, *the Architect and Builder (Heb 11, 10),*
 we join in his creative work
 to make a new world visible (cf. *2 Cor 5, 17*) -
 something that began with the Incarnation
 and the death and resurrection of Christ, the Redeemer.

Sharing

23. Our ideal – “sharing our possessions”-
 as evident in the life of Blessed Joachim,
 is rooted in the counsel of Jesus (cf. *Mt 19, 21; Lk 12, 33*),
 follows the edifying pattern of the first Christian community
 whose members held all things in common (*Acts 2, 44; cf. 4, 32*)
 and imitates the example of our Seven Holy Fathers,
 who, to possess the pearl of great price – *our Order,*
... did not just distribute their possessions to the poor
but following the Gospel counsel, they sold everything
and offered themselves with joyful determination
to the faithful service of God and Our Lady (LO 17).
 From the very beginning in our Order
 no one could say
 “This is mine,”
 but everything was held in common
 and each received what he needed
 to live (cf. *Acts 4, 32. 35, RsD no. 4*).
 The evangelical counsel to live, freed

from selfish attachment to material things (*Const.* 147),
 affirmed by St. Augustine in his *Rule for the Servants of God* (*RsD* nos. 4-5)
 and articulated in the vow *to live with nothing of one's own* (*Const. Ant.*, chap. 16)
 does not simply refer to material possessions.

We live, *with one heart and one mind in prayer,*
listening to the Word of God
and breaking together the Eucharistic Bread (cf. *Acts* 2, 42-47; 4, 32-35)
and the bread earned by our labor
in watchful expectation of the Lord's coming.
United by charity and sustained by mutual respect
we hold our possessions, aspirations and activities in common,
we make all our decisions together as brothers (*Const.* 3).

We want to live this ideal
 of joyful poverty in sharing
 even though worldly and selfish
 temptations and urges abound
 in our contemporary society.

Sobriety

24. The simple style of life
 characteristic of Blessed Joachim and our other Saints and Blesseds (cf. *LO* 27)
 and recommended by St. Augustine's *Rule for the Servants of God* of (*RsD* nos. 6-8, 14-18),
 is based on Jesus' counsel:

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat (or drink), or about your body,
what you will wear... But seek first the kingdom (of God) and his righteousness, and all these things
will be given you besides (*Mt* 6, 25. 33).

In the school of Jesus,
 we concentrate on the essential
 and are not distracted
 by the superfluous or transient.

Last Supper

25. The author of the *Legenda*
 tells us how the last two days
 of Blessed Joachim's thirty-three years in the Order
 resembled the last two days
 of the thirty-three years the Master lived in this world;
 it was even the same liturgical season,
 Holy Week, 1305.

Like Jesus *before the feast of Passover,*
he knew that his hour had come
to pass from this world to the Father (*Jn* 13, 1),
 Blessed Joachim felt *the hour of his death was near*
and he prayed to the Most High that he be called
on the same day the Savior left this world (*LbJ* 18).

Like Jesus at the Last Supper^[7]
 delivering His last discourse to the disciples (cf. *Jn* 14-17),
 Blessed Joachim,
on the eve of his departure from earth (*LbJ* 18) in 1305,
 left a spiritual testament
 to the brothers gathered for the Lord's Supper.

He said:

*Beloved brothers I have been with you for thirty-three years
the same number of years Our Lord lived on this earth.*

*You have rendered me so many services
and have helped me with so much concern
in all my needs.*

*I cannot possibly thank you sufficiently
for all you have done;
may the Lord Jesus Christ thank you for me
because you have graciously received me, a sinner,
into your house (LbJ 18).*

Just as Jesus at the Last Supper
performed an act of charity for His disciples
washing their feet
so that they might do likewise with each other (cf. *Jn* 13, 1-20),
our Blessed performed *an act of charity* (LbJ 18)
and friendship for his confrères
and received *Holy Communion* together with them (LbJ 19)
and then shared *some wine* with them (LbJ 18).

As for Blessed Joachim, so too for us
the Eucharist is a commemoration of the Last Supper,
a sign of unity and a bond of charity,^[8]
and the center of our prayer life:
*in it we proclaim and make actual
the paschal mystery of Christ
until His return (Const. 24a);*
*in it we find grace and strength
for our daily service (Const. 28b).*

Through the celebration of the Eucharist
we are formed by the Lord
and become the 'ideal' community
He wanted us to be.

In the Eucharist
the Lord gathers us together and teaches us,
He nourishes us by giving Himself, the Word and Bread of life,
to each of us.

Through communion with His Body
He makes us one Body in Him,
*and we are, each of us,
part of each other (Rm 12, 5).*

Living stones linked to Christ the cornerstone,
we are a mutual support for each other,
we strengthen the spiritual edifice:
the Church, our Order and our community
willed and led by Him (cf. *1 Pt* 2, 4-5).

To live and die with Christ

26. Like the Master just before the great Sabbath
realized that His hour had come,
so Blessed Joachim
on Good Friday, April 16, 1305,

felt that the Lord was calling him to Himself *from this world* (LbJ 19).
 While during the Church's liturgy
 the account of the Passion was being read,
 the story of the Lord Jesus' death
 in the presence of His mother and four disciples^[9],
 Blessed Joachim
 in the company of four friars (LbJ 19),
 at the words "he bowed his head and gave up the spirit" (Jn 19, 30; Mt 27, 50),
 raised his eyes up
 and in the presence of the friars gave up his spirit to the Most High Creator (LbJ 19).
 He died with Christ, his Master.
 He did not die alone,
 but surrounded by his brothers,
 serene and at peace.
 I believe it is important and our duty
 that we care for the sick and aged brothers
 in our communities:
 each of them must feel he is loved;
 and that he can continue working
 as much as his health will allow;
 he must feel *our constant concern* for him (Const. 18),
 even at the supreme moment of his own "Easter."
 This is a human, a religious and a Christian duty.

FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION, FRATERNAL DISCUSSION AND CONCRETE ACTION

1. Read and pray together a passage from the Bible. For example, *Sir* 2, 1-11 (perseverance); *Jn* 13, 1-20 (Washing of the Feet); *Acts* 4, 32-35 (sharing); *Mt* 6, 2-34 (trust in Providence); *2 Thess* 3, 7-11 (industriousness).
2. In the house (community, family) examine together your loyalty or difficulty in following Jesus, our Master, closely in real-life situations of suffering.
3. Perform an act of charity and service for the least important.
4. Assist a terminally ill or dying person. Comfort the family of someone recently deceased.

*I am happy in my weakness,
in the persecution and agony I suffer for Christ
for when I am weak, then I am strong.*

Liturgy of the Hours OSM, February 3
Evening Prayer, *Magnificat* antiphon (cf. 2 Cor 12, 10; *LbJ* 17).

Love in deed and truth

27. On the commemoration of Blessed Joachim
Servites sing the words of John, the Apostle and Evangelist:

Children,

*let us love not in word or speech
but in deed and truth (1 Jn 3,18).^[10]*

In his first letter,

John invites us

to walk in divine light (cf. 1 Jn 1, 5 – 2, 29)

and to live as sons of God (cf. 1 Jn 3, 1-26).

He urges us to break with sin (cf. 1 Jn 3, 3-10)

and observe the commandments,

above all the commandment of charity (cf. 1 Jn 3, 11-24).

He reminds us of the essential message

Christ has left us *in deed and in truth:*

that we love one another (1 Jn 3, 11; cf. Jn 15, 12),

as He has loved us,

to the point of giving His life for us (cf. Jn 15, 13).

Blessed Joachim

accepted totally Christ's words

and made the holy and radical resolution

to love God and his neighbor,

and he did this in deed and truth:

full of compassion he took upon himself the sickness of another,

in solidarity he bore the burdens of others.

Let us follow his example

and help each other

day after day.

We must be each other's keepers.

Take courage!

28. And when the weight of our cross
grows heavy

let us take courage and trust in the Lord

and like Blessed Joachim

repeat the words of the Apostle Paul:

When I am weak,

then I am strong (2 Cor 12, 10; cf. LbJ 17).

May you make progress!

Fra Ángel M. Ruiz Garnica, O.S.M.

Prior General

From our Priory, Santa Maria dei Servi, Siena

April 16, 2008

Anniversary of the death of Blessed Joachim of Siena

Prot. 220/2008

Notes

^[1] VATICAN II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: *Lumen Gentium*, no. 40 (November 12, 1964)

^[2] According to the apocryphal *Protoevangelium of James* (2nd cent) Mary's parents were named Joachim and Anne. The Eastern Church celebrates them in the liturgy.

^[3] The *Ancient Constitutions OSM* (chapter 14) forbid accepting anyone into the Order who is under 15 years of age unless authorized to do so by the Prior General. Accepting the 14 year-old Chiaramonte into the Order had to be authorized by the Prior General who was Fra Philip Benizi at the time. (Editor's note: the age of 16, cited in the English translation of this document in *Sources for the History and Spirituality of the Servants of Mary* is incorrect. The correct age is as it appears here, 15.)

^[4] BENEDICT XVI, Lettera alla diocesi e alla città di Roma sul compito urgente dell'educazione (January 21 2008).

^[5] See for example *Vita e detti dei padri del deserto*, edited by L. MORTARI (Rome 1996) pp. 463-464 [Silvano 5].

^[6] Cf. *Vita Antonii 3*, Italian translation: *Vita di Antonio Apoftegni. Lettere*, ed. By L. CREMASCHI [Rome 1984], p. 103.

^[7] Cf. *Mt 26, 27-29; Mk 14, 24-25; Lk 22, 17-20; 1 Cor 11, 25f.*

^[8] St. AUGUSTINE, in *Ioannis Evangelium*, tractatus 26, cap. VI, no. 13; VATICAN II, Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* on the Sacred Liturgy (December 4, 1963) no. 47.

^[9] *Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala ... and the disciple whom he loved (Jn 19,25-26; Cf. Lk 23,49).*

^[10] The Servite Commemoration on February 3 uses the passage (*1 Jn 3,18*) in the Liturgy of the Hours OSM (Office of Readings, Alternative Reading 2, Responsory) and at Mass (Gospel song).