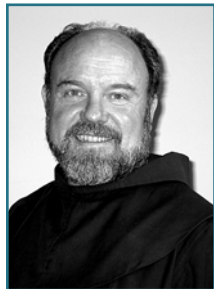


Scripture scholars, when faced with a Biblical text in an ancient language whose words allow various legitimate readings, ranging from easier to more difficult, have chosen over many years the principle of choosing the *lectio difficilior*, that is, preferring the “more difficult” reading of the text, thus enshrining an approach that inherently questions our contemporary penchant for the “clear answer.” We may do well to adopt the same principle today in regard to the *stigmata* on the body of Francis of Assisi, so well-attested by his contemporaries. Perhaps they must remain in the category that Thomas of Celano first gave to them, *sacramentum*, a visible sign (perhaps explainable some day by medical science, perhaps not) signifying an invisible reality.

If they were the marks of some illness contracted over long years of generous service to the abandoned sick and poor of the time, or signs of premature collapse of a body worn out in pursuit of peace in the deserts of the Middle East during the Crusade, or signs expressed directly by the Lord in the body of Francis like that “of a king’s seal” ratifying a document, as Saint Bonaventure describes them, the *stigmata* of Francis mark a body consumed by love, Love, LOVE. And God is love.



Brother William Short is an internationally renowned Franciscan scholar, editor and author. He is in frequent demand as a speaker and pilgrimage guide. In addition to his many speaking and writing commitments, Brother Bill continues to serve on the faculty of the Franciscan School of Theology in Berkeley, California. He can be reached at wshort@fst.edu.

With this wonderfully helpful reflection on one of the most beloved stories of Francis of Assisi, we gratefully publish our Third Prize winner in the 7th Annual Simon Scanlon Writing Awards.

Nourish Peace

By Sister Roberta Leskey

I HAVE STRATEGICALLY PLACED THE STATUE of Saint Francis and the Wolf of Gubbio near my clock, phone, and calendar on my office desk. It is a subtle reminder to tame the unpredictable wolf that abides within when I am caught up in multitasking, meeting deadlines, dealing with a fickle computer, and attempting to see and hear the Christ in all who cross the threshold of my office.

As far back as I can remember, the story of Saint Francis and the Wolf of Gubbio has always intrigued me. Allow me to briefly share the story. A fierce wolf terrorized the people in the village of Gubbio because of his rabid hunger. Francis met the wolf, blessed him, and communicated to him the harm that he had done to God’s creatures. The little man of Assisi intervened between the town and the wolf. The people would feed the wolf everyday, and he in turn would cause them no injury. The town adopted the wolf, and fed him until the day he died.

Whether the wolf was real or whether he symbolized humankind’s untamed tendencies, the account dares me to give peace a chance in the ordinary and sometimes unexpected circumstances of my life.

The story of the Wolf of Gubbio poignantly reminds me of a newspaper article that told of an incident, which occurred several years ago during a severe snowstorm in Philadelphia. When it snows, it is a common practice in the narrow streets of congested Philadelphia neighborhoods to reserve one’s parking space with an old chair or with whatever item is available. Richard Calmfurry (not real name) duly placed his marker and went about his daily tasks. Upon his return home, Richard discovered that his parking

space was occupied by his neighbor's car. Richard confronted his neighbor and an argument ensued. Mr. Calmfurry retreated to his home, returned with a gun, and shot his neighbor to death.

There are numerous buildings in our parish complex, which has nine designated parking sites for all administrative and office personnel. Very often, these designations are ignored and one is left to find another parking space. When this would happen to me, I had a tendency to ruminate over this inconvenience and lack of consideration on the part of the offending driver. This rumination would exact undue emotional energy that was not very productive. It affected the people with whom I worked as well as me. It was during these moments that the Mr. Calmfurry's story would seep into my mind. I would reflect on how little things could be turned into notorious incidents. Gradually this reflective approach helped me to stop making a mountain out of a molehill.

In October of that same year, I attended a conference and heard a talk on peacemaking given by Jesuit Father John Dear. During one of the breaks, I met a Sister acquaintance and we proceeded to discuss our methods of working for peace in our daily life. When I shared with her how Richard Calmfurry's dilemma influenced me in how I dealt with our parking saga she listened in amazement. This sister knew Richard Calmfurry because she worked part time in the prison where he was incarcerated. She proceeded to tell me that he works in the Chaplain's Office and is the nicest and kindest person one would ever want to meet. As she stated, it is hard to believe that he committed such a heinous crime.

As I reflected on the story of the Wolf of Gubbio and Mr. Calmfurry's reaction to a seemingly unfair situation, numerous questions began to dance around in my mind and heart.

Like the Wolf of Gubbio, what do I hunger for in my daily life?
Could it be approval, peace, inclusion, love, respect, acceptance
of self, and freedom from needless anxiety?

What do I need to assuage the hungry wolf within me?

Do I usually have to have it done my way? Is there not another
creative way around an issue, conflict, and problem?

Must I always be in control?

How does it feel to let go, to leave behind?

What could I do to loosen the knots of useless anger, frustration,
and anxiety?

When was the last time I hugged the goodness within others
and me?

With these questions as a motivation, I have attempted something very simple yet very difficult. Each day upon rising, I name and thank God for one particular gift that I possess. At first, it seemed a daunting task because it was easy to identify my faults rather than my gifts. Yet, with practice I began to see the many beautiful gifts that I possess thanks to the generosity of a loving God.

Slowly this routine influenced my approach to people, events, and circumstances (my Gubbio village) in my daily life. It helped me to nourish and appreciate the goodness within. Likewise, at night I would review my busy day. Very quickly, the challenges, difficulties, worries, concerns, and negative events would leap out for attention. Despite this, I would make a concerted effort to remember the good things that happened that day. Sometimes they were small and at other times, they were quite plentiful. This is not to say that the problems, troubles, and struggles were avoided, rather they were faced at a specific time during the day and then released.

Gradually, I extended this thanksgiving ritual to those with whom I lived. Upon rising, I would name and thank God for a particular gift that I perceived in each Sister who lived in my local convent.

This practice gave me new perspective. My litany of thanksgiving became a daily, personal guide to “thanksgiving.”

My immediate environment is for me the town of Gubbio. Each day I attempt to tame the wolf within by providing him/her with food that acknowledges blessings, beauty, gifts, and goodness in others and me. It very often has a harmonious affect on my surroundings.

This process has certainly helped me. However, at the beginning and end of the day I found that it was essential to dialogue with the wolf within. Very often, my best intentions and work toward a positive and grateful disposition are offset by the busyness of my daily routine. The technological age that has provided me with many time-saving devices, such as the computer, cell phone, and e-mail, at times contributes to enraging the Wolf of Gubbio within.

As I ponder those times when I say, do, and act in ways that are not in harmony with my practice of thanksgiving, there is a tendency to beat myself up with recrimination. Thus, I infuriate the wolf. It is during these times that I walk softly and delicately on the road of forgiveness, to face and talk with the Wolf of Gubbio within. Once again, I befriend my wolf with encouragement, understanding, empathy, and compassion.

Reflection on the Wolf of Gubbio reminds me that peace is evident in my life by the manner in which I am in relationship with God, others, and myself. It is an attitude that permeates everything that I see, touch, hold, and hear. Peace is communicated in my words, body language, and actions. It is creative, energizing, and generative. Peace is possible when I nourish my mind, heart, and soul at the Table of the Eucharist and see God’s goodness in others at the tables of their lives.

The legacy of Saint Francis’ life unfolds in an ordinary yet extraordinary manner. The story of the Wolf of Gubbio gives me hope in my efforts to realize that peace in the world begins with me. Therefore, I share this brief acrostic summary to **nourish peace** in your life.

Nourish peace by taking the time each day to reflect and thank God for one gift that you possess.

Offer thanks to God for the marvelous and happy events that occurred during your day.

Unveil the beauty in others by naming one gift you perceive in them.

Rejoice when you see the sun, smell the fragrance of nature, or hear the laughter of a child.

Identify a person who may have caused you suffering during the day and pray for her/him.

Share a smile or a hearty laugh at least three times during the day.

Hasten to make amends if you hurt someone this day.

Punctuate your speech with pardon, thank you, and please.

Enter into conversation with another gently, respectfully, and with openness.

Allow for mistakes and imperfection in you and others.

Count your blessings when worries and concerns overtake your day.

Energize your village of Gubbio with a positive attitude. If you cannot change the situation, change your attitude.

Sister Roberta Leskey is a Bernardine Franciscan Sister whose ministries have included teaching, missionary work in Romania, congregational leadership and service in urban shelters for women and children. She can be contacted through *THE WAY*.

