



FRANCISCAN FRIARS
Province of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Homily for the Solemn Profession

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"It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit... remain in my love." (Jn 15:9, 16)

Five years ago, Sally, a dear friend for many years, suffered a severe stroke that left her left side paralyzed. For months she lay in critical condition, unable to speak, and for a stretch of it in a medically induced coma while her brain was given time to heal. Phil, her husband of more than twenty years, set his life aside and remained with her. Every waking hour, he was at her bedside.

After months of hospital and rehab care, Sally came back, though not all the way. Her left side remains paralyzed; she cannot stand or move without help. Phil is still there, doing the smallest things and the largest ones. Before the stroke they were world travelers, always out, always with people — she a successful lawyer, he a successful investment broker. Now there is the wheelchair and the walker, and a world that has narrowed in so many ways.

I visited them not long ago and watched him care for her with tender attention and watched the way she received it. What moved me most was not the care itself but the joy underneath it — not a giddy or skittish joy, but something that welled up from deep within them.

Alone with Phil, I asked how he was managing. He did not pretend it had been anything but brutally painful, especially at the beginning. He was disappointed — that Sally's life, professional and personal, has been so dramatically altered at the height of her productive years. But there was no bitterness in him. He told me he had learned more about life, about suffering, and about God's love for the two of them in these past five years than in all the years before. He was grateful that God had given him the grace to keep loving her just as he had the first day he met her. Then he slowly recited the vows he made to her twenty years ago: to be true to her

in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, to love and honor her all the days of his life.

Phil then told me: "Since Sally's illness, my spiritual life has deepened. God is so present to me and to Sally, in a very personal, intimate way. God talks to me and I talk to God. I sometimes complain about her condition, but most of the time I give thanks that she is still alive and that I am able to love her and she to love me."

By then we were both in tears. Tears of joy for a love that suffering could neither define nor dampen. Tears of hope, not despair. Tears of gratitude for a love that was tested and did not fail — abiding, constant, persevering.

My dear brothers - Tyler, Kevin, Domingo, Phillip, Brian, Joan, Carlos, and Nathaniel - today you make a lifelong commitment to follow closely in the footprints of Jesus Christ according to the gospel way revealed to St. Francis of Assisi. You chose the Gospel of St. John, where Jesus invites his disciples to "remain in [his] love." During our recent meetings with you via the internet, Br. Erick and I sensed in each of you **a desire to leap into the infinite love and mercy of God — with fear and trepidation, but also with a deep desire to entrust your entire futures into God's hands.** You told us, in language echoing that found in the second half of that same gospel passage, that you recognize it is God who chose you and not the other way around, chosen and appointed to "go and bear much fruit."

"Remain." "Abide." "Love one another." These words take us to the heart of what God is accomplishing in your lives. Today you profess to live forever the *Rule and Life* of the Friars Minor: in simplicity of life, holding nothing as your own; in unselfish, chaste love, so that you might discover a greater capacity to care for others as God cares for them; and in a willingness to listen attentively to the voice of the Most High calling you to follow Him unreservedly, speaking through your brothers in fraternity and through the Church, the Body of Christ.

At a deeper level, this Gospel is about entering an entirely new kind of relationship with God — a friendship that lasts forever. It is not warm and fuzzy. The friendship Jesus offers brings us into the heart of God, where we are entrusted with a secret: what the Father is doing, and why the Father is doing it. The trust God shares with us can never be earned; it is not something we merited or ever will. It

is pure gift. Pope Francis, quoting the very text you selected, reminds us that Christ's open heart "has gone before us and waits for us, unconditionally, asking only to offer us His love and friendship." It is not that God is in our hearts. The deeper truth is that we are in God's heart. And the only thing asked of us is to remain there — *live on in my love* — and to let that love flow through you to one another and to all whom God brings into your lives. St. Francis understood this. He called his companions Brothers, and he washed their feet. He washed and kissed the leper's wounds; he embraced the way of the poor and showed mercy without measure.

One clear way for this friendship to grow is to cultivate it daily by following in the Master's footprints — going to the mountain with him in prayer; living transparent and loving relationships with your brothers in fraternity; practicing the justice and love Jesus expresses in the Beatitudes: welcoming and protecting the stranger, the migrant; rejecting every form of violence and hatred; denouncing injustice in all of its nefarious forms; showing mercy when your heart tells you to do the opposite; loving those you call enemy, and seeking to embrace enemies so that they might become brothers, sisters, co-sojourners on the road back into the heart of God.

Let me be honest with you — consecrated life lived through fraternity and mission can never be sustained by natural affinity or by a passive agreement to live and let live (*laissez faire*). That will always fail. You will experience moments of great joy, peace, and satisfaction but also of intense suffering, confusion, and disillusionment. You might even be confronted by moments when you are tempted to leave this life and seek greener pastures. Only a shared spiritual journey toward the mind and heart of Christ will carry you across a lifetime — one day, one week, one month, one year at a time together with your brothers and with the people of God who will love and support you through it all.

The vows you profess today will strengthen what God has already begun in you. Francis of Assisi's embrace of the leper, foundational to his own journey, led him to embrace minority, keeping nothing for his own — *sine proprio* — and singing a hymn to Lady Poverty, his constant companion. In his desire to follow the crucified Christ he embraced a chaste, celibate life, a gift from God that moved him in three directions at once: toward union with the crucified Christ; toward communion with his brothers, with St. Clare and her sisters, and with all who

embraced the gospel life; and toward wherever there were open wounds to be healed and deep yearnings for more abundant life.

Francis heard the Gospel as addressed to him personally, answering without asking for commentary. He listened wherever the word reached him: in a leper's face, in a small church at Mass, in a brother's request, in Damietta where he shared a moment of fraternity with the Muslim sultan, in intense moments of prayer, in the song of the larks. As he wrote in his Testament, "no one showed me what I should do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the form of the Holy Gospel" (Test 14). The obedience you profess today is nothing more nor less than that same willingness to listen — to the Spirit speaking through life, through the fraternity, through the Church — and to embrace what you hear, without counting the cost, until death do you part.

My dear brothers and sisters, all of you who have come to witness this profession: what happens here in a few moments is not only about these eight men. Every human being carries within him or her a God-given vocation planted as a seed from the first moment of conception. God places His Word in the heart of His beloved children, inviting us into a deep and abiding friendship with Him. What these men profess today is the maturing of that same call. It is not something exotic laid on top of their humanity — *it is their humanity revealed fully for what it is*. And it declares something about all of us: that we, together with the whole of creation, are begin held in God's love and drawn into communion with God.

Brothers, when you place your hands into the hands of your brothers and ratify your definitive "Yes," you join a chorus far older and wider than the Franciscan Order — the same chorus Francis joined in his *Canticle of Brother Sun*. You add your *fiat* to the assent of all creation, to the grace and love of God at work within you, within the Order, within the Church, and within this wounded and beautiful world: *Laudato Si', O' mi Signore!*

"Our vocation is not wonderful because we are wonderful," Dominican Cardinal Timothy Radcliffe writes. "It is wonderful because it is a sign of a hope that belongs to all of humanity, and not to us alone."

That is why we are here this morning — not to admire eight men, but to be reminded that the same God who is calling them to "remain in his love" is calling

each of us, calling Phil and Sally my friends, to pour themselves out for the sake of one another and for the sake of the future hope of the entire world. It is a love that flows from the same source: Jesus. It is a love that is moving us towards the same end: a shared future of love, mercy, justice, and peace - through Christ, in Christ, and with Christ.

Our world, indeed, the entire created universe, are longing for such a sign of enduring love, hope, and peace. Brothers, may you “Remain in Christ’s love” expressed through the gospel life you promise to follow from this day and each day forward, forever and ever...

And let the Church say: “Amen!”