THE FRATERNITY OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

PROLOGUE

It is a constant source of wonder and gratefulness for me to see the way God has raised up such a strong expression of fraternity life here in Transfiguration Parish Brooklyn, N.Y. It is a source of wonder because I could never have pre-planned or directed or even dreamt of such a development of fraternities, or small Christian Communities although I have been conscious of playing a role in their growth. It is a source of gratefulness on my part because of the innumerable graces I have received through these fraternities and which have been able to share with so many of our people.

This growth began when I had the good fortune to meet and then enter the Jesus Caritas Union of Priests, a fraternity in the spiritual family of Charles de Foucauld. I entered the fraternity in 1959. It was one of the most powerful experiences of "church" that I have ever had. In it I learned deeply to meet Jesus in a community of love, in a community of persons who were openly and totally dedicated to seeking Jesus and to serving one another.

From Father de Foucauld I learned a way of contemplative prayer of adoration. I learned the deep religious significance of becoming one with the Spanish-speaking people among whom I was working, a process called acculturation by sociologists and incarnation by missionaries. I learned to love poverty both for Jesus sake and for the sake of my fellow parishoners who were poor. I learned to lean heavily upon the scriptures and to open my heart in Search of the Well of Jesus in the review of life with my brothers.

By a kind of inner logic, I began, half unconsciously at first, to seek to share all this wealth with our people. Little by little it has completely colored my apostolate until now it full well dominates my activity in the parish. More and more I desired to share with our people as their brother, to share with them the most precious thing I had, the cause of my joy, Jesus.

About six years ago, a group of Cursillistas of the parish were going to get an apartment together. They were working men whose families lived in Puerto Rico. I had already been talking of the prayer of silence, of fraternity and a dedicated life of poverty. I had already conceived of the idea of living a dedicated form of life in an apartment close to our people. However it was too soon and the plan never materialized.

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Dear Ivan,

Perhaps you might find time to read this matter I am inclosing. It is a source of great joy to me although certainly from the point of view of numbers, it is very very small. If you have any comments, I would be very grateful.

I hope you are well and happy. I am both.

In Jesus,

Bryan

Three years later, during the summer, the possibility of an apartment presented itself again. It had become a custom for seminarians to work in the inner city during their vacation and to rent an apartment in the area where they were working in order to share more closely with the people. It was just the right opportunity. I was able to organize an apartment live-in and add to it this idea of developing a fraternity spiritual life among the Members. The summer of 1965 was a great and deep religious experience. I was very saddened when I had to close the apartment in September.

The following year we had another live-in apartment and this time we did not close it in September. We managed to keep it going and I was able to participate in it on a part-time basis. It was not the fraternity of Jesus of Nazareth yet. The members had no intention of making it a lifetime dedication.

However, during this time a young Puerto Rican man from the parish and my fellow curate began laying plans for a permanent way of life to which we could dedicate ourselves completely. There were many obstacles which by God's help were removed one by one. We tried in everything never to violate charity or upset the functioning of the parish. Only God could have made this possible. We had a year of preparation, including weekly discussions, days of recollection and much prayer.

At the end of July, 1967, the three of us began living the fraternity in the apartment in earnest. The written way of life which follows is the result of prayer, much discussion and of the experience of having lived it.

The fraternity as it now exists is, I think, a flower of the Jesus Caritas Union of priests and logical consequences of living as a member of this priests' fraternity. One cannot but feel compelled to share its riches with his lay brothers in his parish.

Running alongside this development was the growth of the all lay fraternities in the parish of which we now have 13. Each fraternity consists of around 10 persons some married some single who are Cursillistas. They meet each week in their homes and meditate on the Gospel together, have a review of life and then a period of prayer. Our Archbishop has given us permission to celebrate the Eucharist in their homes from time to time. I am literally amazed at the growth in depth and faith that has taken place among these people. Their responsable (or leader) really plays the role of a deacon. They truly help one another grow in the Spiritual life. They help one another to assist at Mass more meaningfully. They discuss problems of morality that occur in the factory.

When one of them strays a bit, with great delicacy they win him back to the Lord by the warmth of their fraternity. They have managed to maintain their spirit and fidelity for almost 2 years.

Each Saturday morning, some of the men from these fraternities come to our apartment at 7:00 A.M. for adoration and an exchange on the various aspects of our life. During the week, we visit them regularly during their review of life. So we are really able to share our joy and experience in the Lord with them.

Then a group of Sisters of the parish also following the thought of Father de Foucauld obtained permission to form a fraternity-apartment in the parish. Each week they invite some of the women of the fraternities to share with them their prayer and study-discussions.

Thus the ever growing number of lay fraternities ofthe parish are nourished by the two cardinal fraternities, one of men who dedicate their lives in a special way in prayer simplicity and celibacy and the other of women with the same dedication. For me celibacy, evangelical poverty and prayer never had more meaning. Their witness value becomes so clear in this fraternity setting to say nothing of their value to the thousands of unchurched people among whom we live in like apartments as real neighbors.

This written Way of Life which follows is the result of our having lived it, discussed it together and having prayed about it. It is written out primarily to explain our life to others and to serve as a reminder to ourselves. We call it a "Way of Life" rather than a rule. Although it deliberately lacks legal precision, something that is shied away from today by many in the church; nevertheless it has proved to be a clear and binding guide for us while leaving plenty of room for growth and Movement of the Holy Spirit.

Just exactly where the Lord is leading us in this renewed expression of gospel-living is not clear to us now. But the fact that so many diverse elements and conditions were necessary for this growth and that the growth appears to be so solid, gives me great confidence that Jesus is indeed calling.

B.J.K.
Feb. 10, 1968

THE FRATERNITY OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

I. PURPOSE AND SPIRIT

In a world that is rapidly changing, whose population is growing in leaps and bounds and pressing in upon itself is beginning to feel deeply the need for close personal association in its constantly urbanizing and automating society, in a church that is profoundly and rapidly renewing itself and learning to relate to this new changing world, we feel the need to develop a "New Expression" of religious life.

Following the lead of Father Charles de Foucauld, the Fraternity wishes to be a permanent brotherhood of men who will dedicate themselves to seek Jesus in the friendship and simplicity of the gospel, in a life of true contemplative adoration but a life thoroughly immersed in and open to the poor people of our inner city.

Our life is to be simple without distinctions and marks. It must be very close and accessible to the ordinary people of our city. But in its simplicity it must contain a depth of love for Jesus and his brothers which may well remain unsuspected by the majority of men, all this in imitation of Jesus of Nazareth.

The Fraternity will try to make the simplicity of the gospel tangible to the men of today. Hence the brothers will live in simple ordinary apts. and will work in ordinary jobs in the city. The Fraternity will contain priests and "laymen" who will live together in brotherly equality. In working in a factory, giving an instruction in a parish rectory or shopping in the local super market the brothers will strive to work with a burning love for Jesus, His Father, His Spirit and all His bretheren.

The brothers will strive to live a genuinely contemplative life immersed in the world. They will seek an intimate personal friendship with Jesus and through Him with the Father in the Holy Spirit. They will spend prolonged periods of time in the prayer of silence in which they will seek to enter into the attitude of Jesus toward His Father. Their lives must slowly become one prolonged act of adoration.

In this way they will be able to bear a constant witness by their life of contemplative prayer to the real possibility of personal relations with God in a world which is frequently tempted either to stress his inaccessible trancendence or claim His total irrelivance amid technological advance or the problems of the ghetto. What chance does the person in the ghetto have to know Jesus personally? In the factory all days he is shouted at by the foreman, irritated by the constant noise of machines and the smoke and dust they raise and constantly threatened by the power-press which at any unguarded momen can promptly remove two or three of his fingers. At lunchtime he is constantly acosted by obscene conversations and can hardly avoid the pin-ups when he goes to the bathroom. Back in the neighborhood, sex and marajuana are as much a part of every party as music and lights. It is in this milieu that the borthers will move and bear constant witness to the friendship of Jesus.

The brothers will put great emphasis on their own fraternity life. They will be bound to one another and to Jesusby a deep friendship. Their real and human friendship for one another will be a sign and sacrament of the presence of Jesus among them. Their great common dedication will be to seek together Jesus with all their powers. All that they do will be a sign of their friendship for one another and for all their neighbors. Thus they will bear special witness to Jesus' desire for our real friendship. The brothers will seek to develop similar fraternities around them. These secondary fraternities will be compised of men and women in the Parish, or factory or place of work, who wish to seek Jesus in the same way. The net result will be clusters of small christian communities growing up in the parish where they live or place where they work. These secondary fraternities will continue to extend their witness. Hence the Fraternity will be an important vehicle in the regrouping of the Post-Vatican Parish. The Parish-Church and plant will relate to these Fraternities as the cathedral does to a diocese.

The brothers will express their love for Jesus and their fellow men by a life of celibacy. They will express their love for Jesus in this particular way confident that Jesus will respond in depths of their soul in a unique way befitting their unique expression. They hope to be able to serve their fellow parishoners, workers and friends by their celibacy by giving them the service of a witness to the reality of Jesus" love, its disinterested character and its completion in the resurrection. Their service to those who are married will be returned by the special witness of self-sacrificing love of husbands and wives who slowly spell out their love in their daily lives with their children.

For the brothers, work will be a very important part of their life in Jesus. They will embrace in intimate union with Jesus the daily sufferings of a job in a factory with its boredom, dust, noise, and dirt and its perils to life and limb, the pressure and pain of sharing the problems of the poor, of the priest or professional worker. This intimate union with Jesus nourished by their prayer of adoration will make their own work and sufferings an extension of those of Jesus. It will make them "Saviors with Jesus". It will make their work redemptive of the very people with whom they are working and who seem not to understand or even care. This attitude toward work will become a witness very much needed in our world of workers, skilled and unskilled, professional and unprofessional.

II. STYLE OF LIFE

In order to follow Jesus of Nazareth as closely as they can and in order to fulfill in the particular way Jesus calls them to the committment made to Jesus in their baptism, the brothers will live according to the following style of life. They will strive to live this life with a full heart in deep dependency on Jesus as he expresses His will through the brothers.

1. They will make a daily hour of adoration striving to enter deeply into the Eucharistic attitude of Jesus in His total gift of Himself to His Father through the Holy Spirit and in His total gift of Himself to men.

2. They will seek to be alone with God, to live and feel their total dependence on Him by a monthly day of Desert. They will make the day of Desert in union with Jesus who went out into the desert led by the Spirit. Each year they will make a week's retreat during which they will seek as much solitude as possible.

3. They will place great emphasis on the regular reading and meditating of the sacred scriptures, especially the gospels.

4. They will hold a long review of life each month with more frequent and shorter informal reviews interdispersed. In each review they will seek the will of Jesus which is revealed by His spirit who dwells in their brothers.

5. They will place great emphasis on the life of Nazareth. They will seek no marks or distinctions but rather to live a very ordinary life on the surface while striving underneath to fill each act with an intense love of the will of their Heavenly Father in imitation of Jesus in Nazareth.

6. Each brother will seek work among the poor, work which he will accept in a truly religious spirit. It is preferable that the work will enable the brother to share in love the lot and sufferings of his poor neighbors. The work may be an unskilled job in a factory, as a priest in a parish, or as a worker in social service, education or a trade. The brothers will seek to earn their daily living and not depend on outside contributions and will share together their living costs.

7. The brothers, out of love for Jesus who was poor and out of love for their poor neighbors with whom they wish to be real sharing brothers, will live in gospel simplicity. Their apartment, their interests, their behavior will reflect the simplicity of the beatitudes. They will not amass savings but will retain the administration of their own savings. Although they accept, as mature men this responsibility of administration of their earnings, they will be aware that they possess nothing and that all they have belongs to their brothers and to all those in need. Each brother must determine the order of need and manner of distribution. In all this, he will let his brothers be his guide through the review of life where he will make a brief accounting each month.

8. They will live a life of celibacy in order to respond in this particular way to the friendship of Jesus and in order to render to the community in this way the service of witness to the reality of the Risen Lord and His disinterested love.

9. The brothers will live together in an apartment fraternity. They will accept a primary commitment to the Fraternity as their spiritual family in the Lord on this earth. They will place great value on the simple exchanges of Fraternity life, meals together, chats, days off, trips, all in a spirit of the life of Nazareth. They will seek a delicate balance between their obligations and life in the fraternity and their life outside in other communities.

10. The brothers will take care to develop a salutary rhythm of life moving from periods of prayer, regular study, rest, recreation, work and mixing with neighbors and friends.

11. The brothers will strive to have a weekly ascetical exchange in common which they will try to share with other interested friends especially with members of the other Fraternities of the parish.

12. They will make a special effort to offer genuine friendship to as many as will receive it. They will strive to be brothers to their neighbors, fellow workers and all who come across their path.

III RELATIONSHIPS

The Fraternity is not and never intends to be or become a religious order or a religious congregation, although it hopes to incorporate in its life many of the values of religious life. The Fraternity is to be a charismatic movement. As a charistmatic movement it wishes to remain elastic open and sensitive to the movement of the Spirit in the Post-Vatican renewing Church and in our rapidly changing world.

As a charismatic movement it wishes to keep very close to the people. Since it will not admit any kind of marks or distinctions, it hopes to be absolutely accessible to the ordinary person. The strength and protection offered to religious by the various structures of their life, i.e. habit, rule, cloister or semi-cloister, must be supplied by extra effort to maintain their spirit and by special vigilance.

The lay members of the Fraternity do not wish to be set apart from their neighbors by any religious state, title or garb. The priest members of the Fraternity wish to remain totally diocesan priests under the leadership of their Bishop. They wish to work in and for the diocese with only one difference, namely, that they be considered as part of a Fraternity and not just as individual priests.

The Fraternity wishes to give concrete witness to the statement of the Vatican Council in the Document on the Life and Ministry of Priests, that priests are indeed brothers of the laymen and can indeed share their spiritual life with them. Since the Fraternity will be the source of the development of many other Fraternities or small communities within the parish, it hopes to be one of the means of renewing the life of the parishes of the diocese. Each new Fraternity that is developed around the cardinal Fraternity will be a nucleus of vibrant gospel living. Each new secondary Fraternity that develops will be led by a responsible who under the direction of the parish priest will assist his fellow fraternity members in weekly meetings where all will read and meditate the gospel, review their lives before the Lord and then spend time together in prayer. Could not these responsible eventually become deacons?

The Fraternity itself will have a responsible who will render the service of leadership to his brothers.

IV COMMITMENT

The brothers upon entering the Fraternity will commit themselves permanently and wholeheartedly to the life of the Fraternity, specifically as outlined in the Chapter on the Style of Life. They will come to the Fraternity and live in it with the intention of living the life for the rest of their lives although if the will of Jesus revealed through circumstances and their brothers indicates that they should not continue in the Fraternity, they will be free to withdraw. Hence the brothers will live a totally and permanently committed life. The values of stability and generosity of vows will be preserved without however involving oneself in the legal and psychological ramifications and restrictions they imply. Again, the protection and suppot offered by vows must be supplied by a constant vigilant effort to maintain the Spirit. When a man prepares to enter the Fraternity he will express informally but definitively his intention to embrace the life. The Fraternity on its part, will express informally but definitively its intention to accept him as a brother with all the mutual obligations this implies.

Because of the seriousness of this commitment, persons will not be admitted into the Fraternity without having spent a long period of preparation (approximately one year). During this preparation, they will attend the weekly exchange, have frequent contact with the brothers, spend short periods of time in the apartment and will begin to live the various practices of prayer and piety as outlined in the Chapter on the Style of Life.