



Quotes and Reflection Questions from

Gerard Thomas Straub's

The Loneliness and Longing of St. Francis of Assisi

Offered on the online 10-session reflection at <https://www.gerardstraub.com/saintfrancis>

For Individual Reflection and Small Group Discussion

Reflection 01 (19:12): Saint Francis of Assisi: A Timeless Story of Transformation

The journey of Saint Francis of Assisi invites us into a profound meditation on change, faith, and the search for meaning beyond worldly success. Gerard Thomas Straub's film, [*The Loneliness and Longing of St. Francis of Assisi*](#), captures this spiritual odyssey with a quiet intensity that resonates deeply. This series breaks the full length film into clips that are conducive to pausing, watching, and pondering.

Reflection Questions on Quotes from the Film:

"And what does this saint from 13th century Italy have to say to the world at the dawn of the 21st century? He speaks to our growing interest in mysticism, our concern for the ecology, our desire for simplicity, our search for alternatives to violence, our anxiety over the harsh plight of the poor. St. Francis speaks to our hunger for God."

- Which of the concerns listed in the quotation above holds the most significance for you? Please explain.

"This film will walk in the footsteps of St. Francis through Assisi and all the places in Italy that help shape the beloved saint."

- Think of the places... and people... of your past who have shaped you. What were some of the most transformative experiences that resulted from places you've lived or people you've known?

Reflection 02 (16:35): Pilgrimage

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Reflection Questions on Quotes from the Film

What feelings are evoked as the fast-paced images of Rome whirl by leading up to Gerry's reflections on what "pilgrimage" means? He says, "A pilgrimage focuses us on what is essential. To be a pilgrim is to travel light, to leave behind all that is unnecessary."

- What would a spiritual pilgrimage look like in your life? To where would you journey (physically or spiritually)?

This reflection ends with Gerry's quote, "Today is a day to pray ... that my pilgrimage brings me closer to the heart of God."

- What is your vision of being closer to the heart of God? What does that 'look like'?

Reflection 03 (11:35): Icons of Holiness

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Reflection Questions on Quotes from the Film:

"In Assisi, there is a synthesis between poetry and prayer, between sanctity and song. Assisi reveals that simplicity, serenity, sincerity, and silence are the heart of the Franciscan spirit."

- When you think of Franciscan communities, what charisms/gifts of those communities come to mind? Is there anything about them that attracts you?

"The call to holiness is an invitation to enter fully into a committed relationship with God. As we respond, God graciously nurtures growth in the relationship. By using events, circumstances, and people in our lives as instruments to hasten a contemplative outlook on life, prayer becomes a vital part of our day and, in prayer, we encounter more fully the author of our life."

- Describe an event, circumstance or person that you feel called you to an encounter with the author of your life.

"We can quibble about what being holy means, but essentially it means being really, really good, even when no one is watching. For a Christian, the essential meaning of holiness is more precise. It means being like Christ."

- How could you choose to be more Christ-like today?

"The good news is we don't have to be another St. Francis or another St. Clare. We simply need to become the saints we were uniquely created to be. They're not perfect, but they allow the love of Christ to transform their weaknesses and imperfections into something beautiful."

- Think of a weakness you have or experience. How has God used that weakness to accomplish something beautiful?

Reflection 04 (8:27): A Context for Saint Francis

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Reflection Questions on Quotes from the Film:

"Francis was born in 1182, smack in the middle of an era of heated hostility and confrontation. The second half of the 12th century was a turbulent, intense period for Europe and the Western church. A great schism had rocked the church. Heresy sprouted, and spread like weeds. Monasticism was on the decline. Critics of the rich and powerful clergy expressed open hostility toward the church hierarchy. The laity were demanding a more active role in the church. Sounds pretty familiar to what you might hear today."

- Turmoil within the Church is not a new thing. Is there something going on in today's Church that concerns you? What can you do to help alleviate that concern?

"Carlo Carretto writing in the first person as St. Francis in his inspirational book [I Francis](#) wrote, 'Religion in my day was badly lived. Parishes were only half alive and were for the most part, cults rather than life. Priests in their sermons sought to terrify people with the usual discourses on eternal punishment, while the gospel was buried in a heavy, inexorably clerical tradition. There was no room for laity, married people, country folk ... only the religious counted. Above all joy was missing.'"

- The need for reform in St. Francis' day was apparent. Who do you know, in our day, who exhibits real Christian joy? How do they make that joy contagious?

"Each of us can have a lasting ripple effect in our families and communities. None of us is being called to be another Francis. All of us are being called to be a new Francis."

- What, in your image of St. Francis, is his most appealing charism? What is one way you can be a 'new Francis' today and make your charism come alive?

Reflection 05 (13:18): A New Vocation

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Reflection Questions on Quotes from the Film:

"It's good to realize we're on a journey, a journey to God. What are we taking with us? Me, I'm lugging a lot of stuff, far more than can fit in a sack. Mostly I'm carrying my sins."

- How do you define sin?

"... then the voice asked, is it better to serve the Lord or the servant? Francis quickly responded, 'The Lord, of course.' And the voice replied, 'Then why do you serve the servant?' Francis had no answer, And so he asked, 'What would you have me do?'"

- What do you think the Lord is asking you to do?

Reflection 06 (12:43): Kissing the Leper

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Reflection Questions on Quotes from the Film:

"The only way for me to chase away the hopelessness is to spend time in prayer every day. Prayer is a lifeline to hope and a pilgrimage can be a lifeline to prayer."

- How do you define prayer? What is your favorite practice of prayer?

"Thomas Merton said it best: 'We all exist solely for this: to be the human place God has chosen for his presence, his manifestation, his epiphany.'"

- How would your day be enhanced if you woke up in the morning and prayed, "Today I will choose to reveal God to others intentionally?" What could you do to manifest God's presence?

"More and more, he saw the image of Christ in the poor and the afflicted. It was as though, in looking at the leper, Francis saw the broken and bleeding body of Christ, his brother, Francis would never again be able to treat another human being, no matter how lowly or disfigured, with indifference or contempt."

- How would current events be different if more of our citizenry could see Christ in the poor and the afflicted?

Reflection 07 (14.30): Transformation

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Reflection Questions on Quotes from the Film:

"I ask myself a very tough question: 'What in my life needs to be stripped away? Am I willing to stand naked in front of God, stripped of everything that stands between myself and the Divine?'"

- What is something you've had to let go of in order to grow closer to God? What made that difficult? What do you think God might be asking you to let go of next?

"The words of the Gospel became marching orders for Francis, The powerful, challenging words spoken by Christ reverberated through Francis' mind and heart. This is what he had longed for with all his heart."

- Francis was inspired by a particular Gospel reading on February 24th, 1209, that totally changed his life. What Gospel reading has impacted your life in a pivotal way? How have you been transformed?

Reflection 08 (8:58): We are All Blind Beggars

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Reflection Questions on Quotes from the Film:

"In the wake of the barbaric events of September 11th, 2001, the subsequent illegal immoral and unjustified war in Iraq, and the recent global economic collapse, it is abundantly clear that we are all blind beggars and we all need to stretch out open hands to God who will give us sight and teach us how to see things differently..."

- As blind beggars, what do you think God is trying to teach us today? How does that pertain to today's current events?

"I think St. Francis came to see clearly that the fundamental principle of the gospel requires that the weakest and least presentable people are indispensable to the church and that followers of Christ must be in communion with the poor and must be willing to love our enemies."

- How could being in communion with the poor and loving our enemies shape our domestic and foreign policies? What is an example of a person, or community, who served those living in poverty? Who is an example of someone who loved an enemy?

"As Francis' followers began to grow in number, he told them that they were to be a fraternity at peace with everyone."

- What kind of support do you need to follow Jesus' call? What people could you gather with to find that support?

Reflection 09 (9:12): Growth and Continued Conversion

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Reflection Questions on Quotes from the Film:

"... What the volunteer coordinator said was, 'And what if we really believe that about each person that came into the line? That this was our brother and sister, that this was the person that we were called to take care of? Wouldn't we be different? Wouldn't we look at things differently?' And I think that that's what the call of the gospel is to,.. our brothers and sisters who just need us and we need them and we need them badly."

- What are ways our brothers and sisters, who live in physical poverty, or some other type of poverty, need us? How do we need others? What did the friar mean when he said, "We need them badly?"

"[In Psalm 119:14], the Psalmist cries out, 'I treasure your ways more than great riches.' This certainly was true for St. Francis. He told his brothers that poverty is the special way of salvation. Francis chose the path of voluntary poverty because Christ chose to be poor."

- How do you feel when you contemplate poverty? Do you feel called to a simpler, more other-centered life? What would our present day political situation look like if leaders put others first... other people, other political parties, other countries?

"In that gentle stillness, the mystics tell us, the voice of God becomes audible."

- Have you ever had a moment, born in stillness, in which God's voice was unmistakable? What was the fruit of that experience?

Reflection 10 (15:34): Interior Journey and Final Prayer

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Reflection Questions on Quotes from the Film:

"He no longer wanted any behavior from his past to have any power over his present, which was consumed by a love of God"

- Do you ever find yourself unable to let go of a past behavior, decision, event, or situation that seems to have power over your present? What could/would it feel like to be free of any guilt, shame or regret that keeps you from God?

"We are doers, performers who always have an itch to be acting. It's hard for us to simply sit before God and listen. How can we speak about God or share God's love when we haven't fully experienced it ourselves?"

- Have you ever been intentionally still? If so, how would you describe the experience? Does stillness facilitate prayer? Have you experienced God in stillness? If so, how would you describe the encounter?

Gerard Thomas Straub, a Secular Franciscan as well as the the producer, writer and director of *The Loneliness and Longing of Saint Francis*, ends with a prayer from his heart.

- If you were offering a heartfelt prayer, would you make Gerry's prayer your own? Would your prayer be somewhat or substantially different? What would your prayer be?