

## Summary & Conclusions: Franciscan Spirituality in 7 Steps

The summary, compliments of Friar Joe Schwab OFM: director of the  
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Franciscans view the world and God's creative presence in a particular way. How we understand this and our relationship to God is at the heart of what we call Franciscan spirituality. The following are key themes in Franciscan theology (how we understand God) and consequently in Franciscan spirituality (how we relate to God). We owe this understanding to the experience of St. Francis first, then to his followers throughout the ages, particularly St. Clare.

### **1. God is absolute love, being and creativity. Creation is dependent upon God to exist.**

No created thing exists because of its own capacity to be; only God is capable of being without depending on something else. The development of created things through time reflects God's inexhaustible ability to be creative and to remain the source of demonstrated love.

### **2. God has freely chosen incarnation (taking on human form) before the human choice for sin.**

Jesus Christ comes to us because God loves us, not because we sin. Because of sin, Jesus comes in a particular way out of free will, not because a particular method of human behavior is needed to save us. God can simply will salvation, because God is always free. Christ chooses to be with us physically now through the Eucharist until he comes again. This is reflective of God's willingness to be with us in humble ways and to nourish us physically and spiritually.

### **3. Christmas is of primary importance to us.**

Easter is the outcome of Christmas. The Incarnation is the greatest thing God could do for creation. The death of Jesus on the cross remains a mystery, because even given human sin, God was not constrained to act in this unbelievable self sacrificial way. It was done to attract us to divine love.

#### **4. Christ is the perfect image of who God is for creation.**

He is the mirror of who and what all humanity and created things are meant to be. Creatures participate in this perfection to the capacity of their natures. Humans can choose to not participate in Christ. Mary is the human person who has most perfectly chosen to participate in imaging God, both physically and spiritually.

#### **5. Every creature is unique, gifted, and living in relationship.**

No human life is a mistake, because everyone is uniquely gifted. The relationships of life are meant to be deepened according to the nature of the creature. This reflects the nature of God, who lives in Trinity and is therefore capable of the greatest depth of relationship.

#### **6. Nothing humans have the ability to do has the capacity to make God do something.**

God is always freely choosing love for humanity, even when we don't see that the choice is the best. Our knowledge is too limited by space and time, while God is not limited by them. We all remain poor at God's table, because God doesn't owe us anything.

#### **7. Mercy, forgiveness and justification are God's actions.**

They do not result from our actions. We work on our salvation, while recognizing that even our capacity to want to do good comes as a gift from God. We must do what we can - the freedom to choose comes from God - but realize that God is behind the ability to do good. God respects our freedom so much that he asks us to cooperate with him.

#### **Franciscan Spirituality (God is love)**

God always intended to incarnate (become human) into creation whether or not humans choose to sin. The sin of Adam and Eve does not make God "decide" to become incarnate and act as a redeemer. God incarnates because God loves creation and wants it to experience His love in a way appropriate to creatures. We can be intimate with God because of the incarnation. Because of the human choice for sin, however, God incarnate (Jesus Christ) comes as a redeemer, not because it's the only possibility but because God wants to show us that self sacrifice is the strongest way to demonstrate love and to conquer sin.