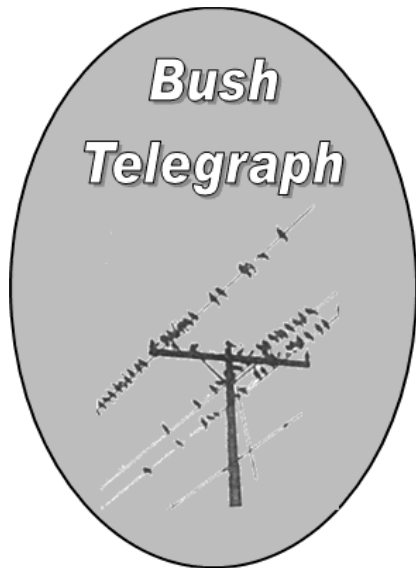


# BUSH TELEGRAPH

An irregular newsletter



2024

## RESTRICTED AREA ENCLOSURE

WHY?

### HERMITAGE

St Francis in his 'Rule for Hermitages', gave very clear instructions about protecting the enclosure for the Brothers living in a hermitage.

### LITURGY OF THE HOURS

Enclosure is there to protect the Liturgy of the Hours which is at the heart of the Brothers' life. Before dawn, at dawn, mid-morning, mid-afternoon, mid-day, sunset and at the end of the day, are specific times set apart for liturgical worship to be in the presence of our Risen Lord Jesus Christ.

### WORK PLACE

If you want to study you don't go to a discotheque with an extroverted partner. If your interest and passion is astronomy then you need a clear, dark night sky. Enclosure excludes distractions and provides the environment for a person to live a particular way of life with God – the Franciscan Eremitical Life.

### TRAINING

Like a sports team, military unit, or any group selected for a particular or difficult task, enclosure offers the rhythm and discipline of life for the brothers. It is a training ground for people from different back grounds, education, ages and personalities to function as a close knit fraternity, co-operating, helping and loving each other in our mutual vocation, despite our differences. Restricted Access/Enclosure provides this environment so that we can focus on deepening our relationship with God through prayer, manual work, community and times of being alone in our hermitages, guided by the rule St Francis wrote for his brothers living in a hermitage.



### TECHNOLOGY

With all forms of communication, we need to be discerning and vigilant, both on a personal level and as a fraternity, in order to safeguard our life and Charism.

### PURPOSE AND GOAL

Our purpose or goal is to live the Franciscan Eremitical Life with St Francis' *Rule for Hermitages* as our guide, witnessing to the primacy of prayer in our relationship with Jesus. It is necessary to protect that time with Him from all that would draw us away and hinder it from being our first priority.

## ST. FRANCIS SILENCE, SOLITUDE

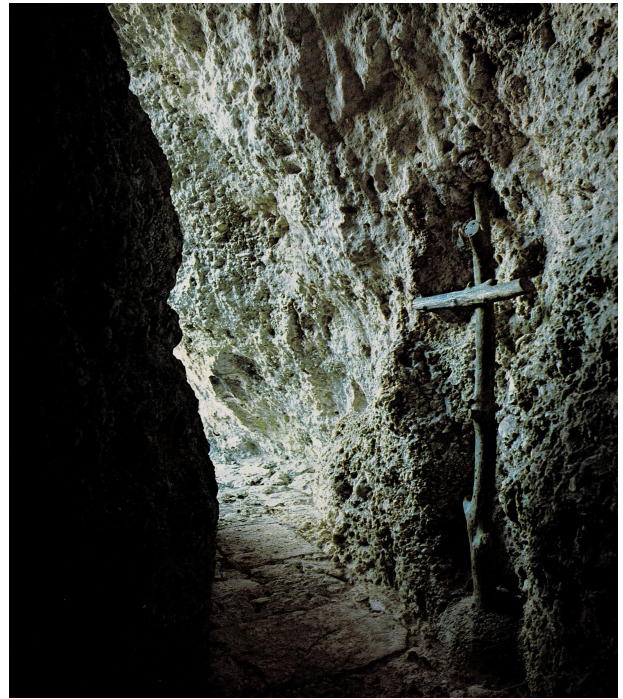
In the time of Francis the Carceri was a series of caves that he sought because it was a place of solitude and prayer.



The *Carceri* is set in the secluded steep forest gorge of Monte Subasio 4km from his hometown of Assisi. It was only later in the 15<sup>th</sup> century that the building was constructed.

As his active ministry grew he wondered whether his real vocation was solitude and prayer and to be a hermit. But when he consulted his spiritual advisers St Clare and Brother Sylvester, they said “For the good of Christ's church this was not to be”. But that deep desire for a life centred in solitude and prayer never left him.

Though Francis embraced the active life at least half of the year and at various times he sought out remote places for silence and prayer. He wrote a Rule for those brothers who lived in hermitages. It is both simple and profound, and scholars agree is written by Francis's own hand, reflecting his own experience.



Another cave significant in the life of St Francis

St Francis would often remind his brothers that wherever they were they must be as humble and decorous as if they were in a hermitage or a cell, adding; *“For wherever we are and go we have our cell with us. Brother Body is our cell, and our soul is the hermit that resides within, in order to pray to God and meditate on Him”*.



Here at the hermitage we use that idea in the concluding prayer at Terce: *Lord Jesus, help me through the events of this day to constantly turn to you who dwell in the hermitage within.*

## REMOTENESS & LOCATION



### CHOOSING PLACE

In seeking a place that was away from urban life and in the country we found, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, land outside a small country town in the rocky foothills of the Great Dividing Range in far northern NSW. This area is commonly described by the locals as rubbish country – which is so poor that even the wallabies have to take their picnic lunch! But for us we experienced a deep and profound love for this place from the very beginning. Two examples, one from scripture and one from the life of St Francis himself, have helped us to appreciate the richness of this place we have been led to.

At Bethel, Jacob lay down to sleep and had a dream where he saw a ladder that reached up into heaven, with angels ascending and descending on it. He was afraid and said: *“What a terrifying place this is! It must be the house of God; it must be the gate that opens into heaven.”* From the beginning until now, 37 years later, we can say with confidence this place is our Bethel. 'The Lord is in this place.'

At the Portiuncula or 'little portion' was a little destitute church near Assisi which lay abandoned in a wood of oak trees. It was here that the Franciscan movement had its beginnings. As a few brothers joined Francis

they built huts/cells of wattle, straw and mud and enclosed with a hedge. It was a special place for St Francis and in his last days when he was dying, he said:

*“See to it, my sons, that you never abandon this place. If you are driven out from one side, go back in at the other. For this place is truly holy and is the dwelling place of God. Here, when there were but few, the Most High gave us increase; here he enlightened the hearts of his poor ones by the light of his wisdom; here he set our wills afire with the fire of his love.”*

A commitment to stay and develop our spiritual identity has been a very strong and essential element to our formation from the very beginning of our establishment as Little Brothers of Francis. In shaping and forming this place over the years it has shaped and formed us also.



This forming and shaping of both the place and us has taken place through picking up rocks to terrace little pockets of soil, clearing new fence lines, gathering rocks for the construction of our buildings and their thoughtful location. Over the years we have improved the soil's fertility with manure and organic material to benefit our fruit trees, vegetable garden and pasture. The creek plays an integral part of our life, supplying water for our livestock, garden and domestic purposes. We have integrated our flocks of goats and sheep into our land management practices, especially bushfire protection. Floods, droughts and predators have brought us into a real and living spiritual relationship with this place.

In our 37 years we have been formed and shaped in our spiritual practice by this evolving relationship with the place. It has given us a language that has been part of our worship and song from the beginning. By living here we have recognised from our own Franciscan tradition, the ability to celebrate the natural world and its beauty in this place. This is the tradition of the '*Canticle of the Sun*' composed by Francis and which he asked to be sung by his Brothers over and over again as he lay dying, and to which he added the verse about Sister Death on his death-bed. This canticle we have adopted in our worship. Passages from the canticle punctuate all our offices with St Francis' signature, honouring the gift to us of this place:

*Surely the Lord is in this place. This is none other than the House of God. This is the gate that opens into Heaven.*

## Jesus Visits Martha and Mary

As Jesus and his disciples went on their way, he came to a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him in her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat down at the feet of the Lord and listened to his teaching. Martha was upset over all the work she had to do; so she came and said, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to come and help me!" The Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha! You are worried and troubled over so many things, but just one is needed. Mary has chosen the right thing, and it will not be taken away from her."

Luke's Gospel 10: 38-42

## When the Well Runs Dry.

There are then, not only Marys and Marthas in the church, but also Martha-Marys. In fact, I would suspect that Martha has little chance of being truly happy in the home of the Lord unless she discovers that her middle name is Mary.

There is a real difference between the call to a life of contemplative prayer and the call to live in a contemplative community. The call to life in a contemplative community seems to be a sacrament, a sign and a reminder to the church of the universal call to all men and women to know God in prayer.

The call to contemplative prayer is at the heart of the vocation of Mary, of those called to live in a contemplative community. But, in his goodness, the invitation is also given to many who are Martha and they face a challenging task of being both Mary and Martha in one life. That of being 'busy about many things' for the sake of the Lord and yet at the same time allowing their lives to be centred on the 'one thing necessary' which Mary had found.

*Prayer Beyond the Beginnings*  
by Thomas H. Green S.J.

## FRATERNITY PRAYER

Father, in your love for us when we were still far off,  
you met us in your Son. Dying and living he  
declared your love and brought us home.

Come Holy Spirit help us to respond to his love by  
offering;

the Liturgy of the Hours and our times of prayer with  
attention and devotion,  
by our love and care for each other,  
and in all that we do today.

We ask this in the name of Jesus, our merciful  
Saviour and Friend. Amen.

### Bush Telegraph

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We are a recognised Contemplative Religious Order  
in the Anglican Church.