

# IN THE SHADOW OF YOUR WINGS I SING FOR JOY

**Friar Bob Hutmacher, ofm**

This is an antiphon used in the Divine Office for Psalm 63 and I have loved it for over forty years. It captures the spirit of this classic morning psalm and also flows right out of our Franciscan spirituality. Anyone who sings this antiphon is challenged to find something to sing about with joy amid the pain and suffering of human life. The *wings* refer, of course, to the Cross of Christ. I'm writing this on September 17, our Franciscan Feast of the Stigmata of St. Francis, remembering an event in his life in the fall of 1224.

Francis wanted to prepare for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross and walked north (with Leo and a few others) into Tuscany to spend days atop Mt. La Verna, a large mountain given to him and the brothers by Count Orlando as a place of prayer. Before he experienced the Stigmata he expressed something marvelous: *My Lord Jesus Christ, I pray you grant me two graces before I die: the first is that during my life I may feel in my soul and in my body, as much as possible, that pain which You, dear Jesus, sustained in the hour of your most bitter passion. The second is that I may feel in my heart, as much as possible, that excessive love with which you, O Son of God, were inflamed in willingly enduring such suffering for us sinners.* (I Fioretti, part 2)

The double-edged sword of joy and pain. Each of us knows exactly what that is, if we're honest and surface our true feelings. I've lived with the challenge of non-Hodgkin's cutaneous T-cell lymphoma since diagnosed in 1994. It's rare. It's mine to live with till I die. In fact, it's been a part of my daily life for so long that my chief oncologist and I celebrated our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary together! We can also tell the history of treatment as we've seen it develop over the years. 20 years of intense phototherapy (light radiation) made for jokes about glowing in the dark and now, with do-it-yourself chemotherapy, we've joked about a body improvement program for HGTV similar to "Fixer Upper" or "The Property Brothers." Imagine an hour of "Blast It or Lose It" or "The Lymphocyte Renovators"! [Cancer survivors know that humor is strong medicine!] But one can choose to live **with** a cross and still find the great thrill of being alive each day as pure gift!

The coat of arms of the Franciscan Order is above; I captured this version on Santa Croce in Florence. The Cross of Christ is central; overlapping the Cross are an arm of Christ and an arm of Francis in his habit. There are many, many variations of this coat of arms but these three elements are always present. If you look closely you see that both hands have a wound in the center. Francis is portrayed as a mirror of the Crucified Christ, whom he emulated from his conversion till his death. This major sign of our international fraternity tells the world that our lives are guided by the Cross through the example of how Francis lived it. You will see the coat of arms everywhere in the sanctuary here. If there is a heart over the two arms, it's the coat of arms of our Province of the Most Sacred Heart; that is above Mary's shrine and on the front of the Altar of Sacrifice.

If you are raising or have raised children you know this dynamic Francis prayed for so long ago. Our newest family member, Madeline Marlene, brought joy to my niece and her husband but they also found out that, as "older" parents, a radical change in life is not something you learn in a few weeks of marriage preparation or one article in Ladies Home Journal. The Cross of Christ is ever present for everyone who believes in Jesus. The Cross is central in our lives because by his Cross Christ brought God's forgiveness and eternal life to all who believe. It is the doorway to Heaven because there is no crown without a cross. Look at a newborn and see him or her as a miracle; look at the same baby and realize what he or she faces in our complex world. Pain and joy.



Six of the seven provinces of Friars Minor in the United States have been working on uniting all six into one large province for years. Talks and concrete preparations have been and will continue for a few years. In all the change we're facing (as other provinces around the world are doing) the friars have an absolute need to see the goodness yet to come despite the uncomfortable feelings of the unknown, of being older and faced with radical changes, losing our 150+ year old identity as Province of the Most Sacred Heart. The lists go on and on! Yet we friars have vowed to bear the Cross of Jesus from Baptism on as our vowed way of life. Our Founder showed us that.

Francesco Bernadone broke with his family in dramatic fashion, which caused his parents tremendous public shame and pain. He himself was cruelly ridiculed by people in Assisi, even by his own friars! Read the early biographies and pay close attention to the final five or six years and you will see pain, rejection and yet great joy, knowing he was faithful to what God had asked him to do with his life and mission. He relinquished leadership of his own fraternity a few years before his death; friars had developed vastly different interpretations in Francis' ideals. What pain that must have caused him! Yet we must also understand what joy truly means.

I often tell people that Christian joy does not mean happily jumping up and down all day long. The joy we live with comes from a deep down knowledge that we are loved by God and share the Spirit of Christ among us. Philippians 2:1-2 ~ *If there is any encouragement in Christ, any solace in love, any participation in the Spirit, any compassion and mercy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing.*



**This is our coat of arms above the shrine of St. Joseph here at St. Peter's.**

Today we see image after image of families who walk thousands of miles to escape terror and encounter dangers in the search for freedom. What does it feel like to arrive in the shadow of a new life and then be incarcerated and have your children taken

to a different place, even a different city? How does one find hope and joy in the present atmosphere of profiling and unmitigated hate? Did my ancestors experience fear when fleeing the Kulturkampf in Germany or starvation in Ireland? I know they did! This is a cross I will never know, and let us hope none of will.

Let's go back to *In the Shadow of Your Wings I Sing for Joy*. I've learned through this image that the Crucified Christ in a loving way, looms over me. Jesus is constantly with me, protecting, guiding, uplifting, even holding me when everything hurts and is dark and hopeless. He is the one who lets me know I'm not alone in suffering or loneliness or uncertainty. And that is where this concrete sense of joy enters my heart – our hearts! The crucifixion scene here at St. Peter's on the reredos is carved in 18 feet of Carrara marble and we pray beneath those wings of protective grace and boundless love every single day. Look at the image of the Crucified as one present to you, not just an image of long ago. See Christ as reaching out to embrace you and our world now, and you will find peace of mind. Sometimes it takes a huge leap of faith to surrender into his embrace and trust that suffering will be relieved or that I will find a way out of bankruptcy or attain freedom in a new country that proclaims liberty and justice for all. Remember the Holy Family? Read the first two chapters of Luke's Gospel and you will see people like ourselves who left all, trusted and hoped and found a new life. This is not some medieval fairy tale or crusty story from 2,000 years ago. Embracing the Cross leads to joy simply because no one can take away our faith. Read *Night* by Elie Wiesel and you see the human spirit that cannot be destroyed. Look at Jesus and find your Source of joy in pain.

Psalm 63 is a prayer of great faith. *I think of you on my bed and remember you throughout*

*the night. You are my savior and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy. Constantly with us, our Christ knows well what it means to suffer, to be cast aside, mocked, embarrassed and rejected. Christ knows what we suffer. This is the Jesus I wanted years ago when I thought cancer might kill me. Ha! I have cancer. It doesn't have me! We can embrace this Jesus each day, the Lord who enables us to live confidently and joyfully. We are able to love others and life itself with everything that God has given us.*

Years ago I learned a great, great life lesson from our father, Francis. Here's the story we can all claim as our own in the journey of life through the Cross to the Eternal Banquet. It's from **The Assisi Compilation [1311]** ~

*One night as blessed Francis was reflecting on all the troubles he was enduring, he was moved by pity for himself. "Lord," he said to himself, "make haste to help me in my illnesses, so I'm able to bear them patiently." And suddenly he was told in spirit: "Tell me, Francis, what if, in exchange for your illnesses and troubles, someone were to give you a treasure? And it would be so great and precious that, even if the whole earth were changed to pure gold, all stones to precious stones, and all water to balsam, you would still judge and hold all these things as nothing, as if they were earth, stones and water, in comparison to the great and precious treasure which was given you. Wouldn't you greatly rejoice?"*

*"Lord," Francis answered, "this would indeed be great, worth seeking, very precious, and desirable." "Then brother, be glad and rejoice in your illnesses and troubles, because as of now, you are as secure as if you were already in my kingdom."*

*The next morning Francis said to his companions: "I must rejoice greatly in my illnesses and troubles and be consoled in the Lord, giving thanks always to God the Father, to His only Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the Holy Spirit for such a great grace and blessing. In His mercy God has given me, His unworthy little servant still living in the flesh, the promise of His Kingdom."*

So you see how Francis continues to influence us? This story has encouraged me so often and now it's yours - my feast day gift to you

this year. And please plan to join us for our festive celebrations October 3 and 4 and beyond.

**Thursday, October 3, 7:00 p.m.**  
**Transitus (we remember his death)**

**Friday, October 4**  
**11:40 a.m. ~ Solemn Eucharist**  
**followed by a reception for all**  
**5:40 p.m. ~ Solemn Vespers**

**Sunday, October 6**  
**2:00 p.m. ~ Blessing of pets**  
**in front of church**

May God fill you with peace, with all that is good, holy and beautiful. Thank you for your yearlong support of our ministry at St. Peter's!

*Friar Bob Hutmacher, ofm*



**MESSENGER OF PEACE**  
a portrait of Francis in music, story and imagery

**Monday, October 14, 7:00 p.m.**  
**St. Francis Solanus Church**  
**Quincy, IL**

**Wednesday, October 16, 7:00 p.m.**  
**Ascension Church**  
**Oak Park, IL**

**Thursday, October 17, 7:00 p.m.**  
**Mundelein Seminary**  
**Mundelein, IL**

**Saturday, Oct. 19, 8:00 p.m.**  
**Catholic Theological Union**  
**Chicago, IL**

**Tickets \$25 at Eventbrite.com or at the door**