

GATHERED INSPIRED SENT



In the early years of the thirteenth century seven adult laymen in Florence, Italy, formed a small community where prayer, solitude and penance were practiced. The Seven Holy Founders, the title given to the seven men whose early communal experience lead to the foundation of the Order Friar Servants of Mary, (commonly known as the Servites), participated in the political, economic and social life of the rapidly growing city of Florence. They belonged to a lay community known as the Brothers of Penance/Servants of Saint Mary. As members of this group, they were actively involved in a movement

CALLED TO SERVE

ORDER OF FRIAR SERVANTS OF MARY

Vocation Newsletter

characterized by poverty and evangelical charity, as well as strict imitation of the life of Christ and His Mother.

From their association with this community, the Seven retreated to a life of solitude on a mountain outside of Florence known as Monte Senario. It was in the solitude of Monte Senario that the Seven Founders adopted a lifestyle befitting the desire to deepen their experience of God, the hallmarks of which were penance, service of the Virgin, and life in common.

The Seven Founders' life of penance consisted in observing special days of fast and abstinence, embracing poverty and engaging in contemplative prayer. Service to the Virgin was important for they saw the Mother of God as the prime example of discipleship of the Lord. The Mother of God was an intercessor to Christ, model of the evangelical life and an example of humble devotion to charity. The Seven honored Mary with liturgical and devotional services, and with assistance to the poor, the sick and suffering.

The spirituality of the Seven Founders is characterized as: 1) A life of penance, poverty and contemplative prayer. 2) Profound love of the poor and the sick. Among themselves this love was expressed as spiritual friendship, sharing of ideals, harmony in decision making and mutual encouragement. 3) Service to the Virgin. 4) An apostolate of witness to the values of the Gospel and the coming Kingdom of God.

Because of their life and witness to the Gospel, the Seven Founders began to attract followers. As the community began to grow, it eventually became what is now known as the Order of Friar Servants of Mary. The Servite Order was given definitive approval as a religious community by the Holy See in 1304 and the last of the Seven died in 1310. The Seven Holy Founders were canonized in 1888 and are buried at the Servite Priory of Monte Senario. Today, the Order consists of nearly 900 friar brothers and priests present on six continents with the General Curia located in Rome.





The charism of the Order is expressed in three ways: fraternity, service, Mary. The Seven Holy Founders expressed their love for God by fraternally loving and mutually supporting each other. Their desire to live Gospel values and so reflect the Kingdom of God was first witnessed within community. Community was not just a place to live, but the experience of God present in the lives of the brothers gathered together. Today, the friars place a high priority on building community. Now,

the foot of the Cross is the example of compassion. As Mary stood by the cross of Jesus, she offered a silent presence of loving concern for her dying son. Servites see this image of the Mother of God as a challenge to offer compassionate support to those who still feel the pain of the cross today, especially the poor, the oppressed and the sick.

The daily life of the Servite Friar is lived within community. Servites share in the

Questions for Prayer and Reflection:

1. What in the life of the Seven Holy Founders inspires me?
2. How might I live the charism of the Servants of Mary?
3. If I were a Servite, what ministry might I want to pursue to respond with compassion to others?

as then, Servites see community as being the experience of God shared through the lives of each other. This experience profoundly challenges Servites to extend their fraternity to others through ministry and service.

The Seven Holy Founders understood service as the witness to Gospel values and the coming Kingdom of God. As part of their living the Gospel value of love, the Seven Founders served the poor, the sick and the suffering. Today, Servites continue living this value of service by engaging in ministries that offer people the hope of God's love.

From the origins of the community until today, Mary has an honored place in the lives of Servites. Mary continues as the example of how discipleship in Christ is to be lived. This idea is found in the two ancient images of Mary within the Servite Order: Mary at the Annunciation and the Sorrowful Mother at the Foot of the Cross. In the Annunciation, Mary receives the Word of God with faith and a resolve to do what the Lord asks of her. Servites continually reflect on how they can best respond to God's will in their lives. Mary is the perfect example of trusting the movement of God in one's life. Mary at

communal praying of the Liturgy of the Hours, celebration of the Eucharist, devotions to Mary, common meals and conventual chapters, which afford the community time to discuss its life and witness of Christian love together. Servites work in apostolates where they can witness the love of God to others. Like our Seven Fathers, we profess the three evangelical vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. In addition to ministerial responsibilities, Servites also make time daily for meditation on God's word, personal prayer and study,

Wherever we are found, in whatever way we minister, Servites strive to serve all people in the example of the Mother of God, as Our Seven Fathers did, being open to doing whatever Jesus wants us to do.

We Servites are praying for you.

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ORDER OF FRIAR SERVANTS OF MARY