

## Love instead of condemnation

In The Little Flowers of St. Francis we find the story of the three robbers who were chased away by the guardian of the house. Francis took the guardian severely to task for this action, as expressed in the following lines:

So, since you acted against charity and against the example of Jesus Christ, I order you under holy obedience to take right now this sack of bread and jug of wine which I begged. Go and look carefully for those robbers over the mountains and valleys until you find them. And offer them all this bread and this wine for me. And then kneel down before them and humbly accuse yourself of your sin of cruelty. And then ask them in my name not to do those evil things anymore, but to fear God, and not to offend their neighbours. And if they do so, I promise them that I will supply them with provisions for their needs and I will give them food and drink all the time (LFI 26).

The theme of this story had already become a Franciscan principle encoded in the Rule: "Everyone who comes to them, friends or foes, thief or robber, must be made welcome" (ER 7:14).

No doubt this principle has something to do with Francis' concept of poverty: whoever has no possessions cannot turn his back on others. However, over and above the poverty concept, Francis' behaviour is a proof of the fundamental goodness of the heart that embraces all humanity and discovers, even in guilt and wrong behaviour, the human person who needs nothing more than loving kindness.

Here, one cannot help to be reminded of the parable of the "Lost Sheep". More than anybody else, the outcast, who is not integrated into society, is the person who needs special attention and love, not condemnation.

CCFMC Lesson Unit 25, C 1.3