The thought for this week is **Empathy**. It has been said, “People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

Empathy is the ability to imagine oneself in another's place and understand the other's feelings, desires, ideas, and actions; putting yourself in the shoes of the other. Instead of empathy, we tend instead to have a strong urge to give advice or reassurance and to explain our own position or feeling. Empathy, on the other hand, requires focusing full attention on the other person’s message. We give to others the time and space they need to express themselves fully and to feel understood.

There was a time at the very beginning when Francis and his brothers lived at a place near Assisi called Rivo Torto. At Rivo Torto they fasted and did penance with all the enthusiasm and sometimes the imprudence of novices in the life of the Spirit, as the following story shows. One night, as they all lay sleeping soundly, a loud cry broke into their dreams: "I am dying! I am dying! Help me!" And the brothers, startled from their sleep, saw St. Francis already at the side of the terrified brother. "What is it, brother? Tell me." And though he was now embarrassed, the brother overcame shame and said: "Forgive me, Father Francis; but I am dying of hunger."

Then St. Francis immediately ordered the brothers to light a torch and go out and gather some herbs and vegetables and whatever else they could find for all of them to have a good, nourishing meal. He said this so that the poor brother would not have to be humiliated by eating alone. And so, all the brothers set themselves eagerly to the task of preparing a meal and then they all sat down with the hungry brother and ate a midnight supper.

[From Tales of St. Francis by Murray Bodo, OFM]

The key ingredient of empathy is presence: we are wholly present with the other party and what they are experiencing. This quality of presence distinguishes empathy from either mental understanding or sympathy.

Francis was not just sympathetic, but he empathized with the brother and gathered all the brothers so as not to let this hungry brother be humiliated by eating alone.

**Psalm Fragment:**
“You will show me the path of life;
In Your presence is fullness of joy;

**Reflection Question:**
When someone is in need, do you offer them your presence or your advice?
**Action for this week:**  
Offer to be a minister of presence to someone who is hurting or in need and seek first to understand them.

**Prayer for the Week:**  
Lord Jesus,  
so many people approach you for comfort and healing.  
You touch each one with your words and healing grace.  
Increase my capacity for empathy.  
Let me see each person’s suffering as you would.  
Help me to overcome my fears or revulsion in order  
To be a source of comfort and hope.  
In your sacred name, I prayer.  
Amen

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