

## Finding a Divine Presence in a Cave: Sgt. Gary Biekirch and St. Francis of Assisi

A Franciscan Reflection led by Sister Mary Carroll

*Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress (shelter). Ps 71:3*

9:30—10:20

### Introduction:

A Japanese subway had a message scrawled across a wall that read: IF WE RETURN TO “NORMAL”, WE HAVE LEARNED NOTHING. What could we learn?

Being under the shelter-in-place mandate could have a “silver lining. Maybe our bedroom, basement, or attic is the new cave for us. Francis of Assisi and Ignatius Loyola found wisdom in their cave after returning from war. John of the Cross’ *Ascent of Mt Carmel* was formulated while imprisoned for months. Gary Biekirch, a Vietnam Medal of Honor winner, used a cave to find an inner divine presence that assisted in his healing. Your “cave-time” may reveal great treasures as well.

Using ten “guide posts” we will first consider the life of Sgt. Gary Biekirch to examine what led to his choice of a cave. We will then turn to St. Francis to discern his reasons for seeking a cave. Of course, isolation *per se* may be harmful for some people, but these two men emerged wiser and more compassionate. What accounts for the difference?

### Presentation Outline

Gary Biekirch: *A Blaze of Light* by Marcus Brotherton

1. Early life, moving, father leaving, involvement with culture of the 1960’s.
2. Military life, Green Beret medic, Vietnam battle (1970).
3. Recovery from wounds, learning to pray.
4. Commitment after reading Jesus’s words: “I chose you.”
5. Idealism: wanting to help people in the “hot spots” of the world but denied.
6. Education: left the university where he is considered a “baby killer.”
7. Finding a cave, entering a seminary, and receiving a Medal of Honor.

Francis of Assisi: *God’s Fool* by Julien Green

1. Generous party-goer, father’s out-fitting him in armor and providing a horse.
2. Military life in battle with Perugia, one year of imprisonment, ransomed.
3. Recovering and wandering the hills.
4. Commitment times.
5. Idealism: wanting to help.
6. Education:
7. Finding caves and hermitages.

MORE

## 10:20-11:00 Chat Room Sharing

1. Could your solitude signal a change in your life?
2. What has been the positive and negative experience of your own shelter-place-place? Has your spirituality taken a turn? What helps you pray?
3. What might be the benefits or losses for our society at this time?

## 11:00-11:30 Sgt. Gary Biekirch (continued)

8. Recognition: honors humbly received.
9. Mission and Wisdom: "success and significance are not the same."
10. Testimonial: Words at the Braves Game.

## St. Francis (continued)

8. Miracles and wisdom: "Preach and, if necessary, use words."
9. Mission: formation of three orders, words of direction, stigmata.
10. Testimonials: *Canticle of the Sun*.

## Suggested Activities

1. Meditative breaks during the day.
2. Resources
3. Franciscan Prayers