

Maureen Cotton

Ridiculous and Sublime

*This photo essay is selected from an in-progress still-image documentary film, **Ridiculous and Sublime: Life in an Inner-City Franciscan Monastery**, about the Little Brothers of Saint Francis, a small Catholic monastery in Boston's Mission Hill neighborhood.*

The Brothers live a balance of service and contemplation. They aim to receive God's love – through prayer, meditation, and a simplistic lifestyle – so they can then share it with their neighbors on the hill, and Boston's poor and homeless. “Preach by example” is their philosophy. Instead of taking to the streets to lead others in prayer, they offer friendship by listening to people's hardships and providing practical comforts such as socks, hats, and sandwiches.

Life for these six monks is filled with dichotomies as they live by the virtues of the medieval Saint Francis of Assisi within a modern and urban landscape. They have no personal money, rise to pray at 4:30 a.m., and wear a rope with three knots that represent their vows of Chastity, Poverty, and Obedience. But they also order pizza, ride the subway, and sometimes have trouble getting out of bed in the morning. One could hear a pin drop during their hour-long silent Eucharistic meditation, if not for the Roxbury Crossing subway train that rolls by and rattles the chapel windows.

Learn and see more at www.ridiculousandsublime.com.



"God has chosen me." -Brother Didacus



"Be content to have nothing. It's difficult, but it's a fun adventure." -Brother Giles



"I'm trying to give my all. Because he gives his all to me." -Brother Joseph



"Little kids are really cute because they're not afraid and they're very honest; they'll say to us 'It's Jesus, hi Jesus' or 'Hi God' ... We'll say 'No we're not Jesus, but we work for Jesus,' or 'We're friends of Jesus.'" -Brother Anthony



"Everything in the Life I find beautiful." -Brother Labre



"What we're doing is not spectacular. Anybody can do this. All we're doing is praying, living together, trying to share love with those that are suffering. We're not doing anything out of the ordinary. We're just doing it for Jesus, we're doing it together – praying, working, Brotherhood." –Brother Joseph



"We're called to preach by the example of our Life, and not so much by our words." – Brother Anthony



"Oh Lord, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console ... For it is in giving that we receive." -Prayer of Saint Francis



"We're here living in the neighborhood with the homeless poor, so that we've given our whole lives – in a real sense – being here 24/7." –Brother James



"Poverty is really about freedom." -Brother Didacus



"I always think [to God] enter in those dark areas of me and fill them with light, so that I can bring your light to others." -Brother Anthony



"How can I be a barer of God's light if I don't have His light within me?" – Brother Anthony



"It's just my response to His love." -Brother Didacus