

Francis of Assisi is attributed as saying, "Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words." Jesus quoted as the first of his two greatest commandments...

"You shall love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength... these words shall be seen as a sign on your hand and a badge on your forehead.

Both tell us the same thing: allow your actions to speak for you.

Our friend Leo is a walking example of that way of life, for indeed, he uses few words, but his actions speak loudly.

Leo is humble, and is forever searching for the next person in line that he can help.

Leo speaks of his ministry at the St. Francis shelter with quiet, grateful reverence. He says that the only reason that he is alive this day is because he is able to work at the shelter and practice his faith living every moment to serve his homeless brothers.

"I take one day at a time," he explains. "After four years at the St. Francis Shelter, I am more patient than I ever was. I am dedicated to this shelter and the men who come here in search of hope."

Born fifty years ago on October 13th, Leo grew up in Michigan with a half-brother and half-sister. "Family life as a kid was pretty good," he recalls, but he is reluctant to share more. He acknowledges without detail that he overdosed as a kid and was left to die. "After that experience, I don't trust anyone," he explains.

After his mother died from cancer in 1991, Leo made his way to Tucson to honor his mother's wish to go to Arizona.

Leo worked as a construction laborer and moved from job to job, some in Arizona, some in Las Vegas, even Florida – he even tried moving back to Michigan but concluded it was too cold.

He began to drink and as the years passed, he continued to drift and found himself working less and drinking more, flopping down on a friend's couch when the opportunity was there, but by 2000, Leo was homeless, alcoholic and jobless. Like many of his homeless brothers, for years, he moved from shelter to shelter to take his meals and find rest under a roof when he was too tired to spend another night in the wash.

That changed when he met Brother David at the Poverello House, then managed by Carl. Leo was quietly drawn to Brother David and Carl and found himself spending more and more time with them at the Poverello House. He could see that they served the homeless community in the purest sense of service, wanting nothing in return, only the knowledge that what they were doing was making a difference in the lives of men who society had long since abandoned.

Then came the defining moment in Leo's life...

The winter of 2015 was particularly cold in the desert and Brother David and Carl decided to extend the winter shelter for several more weeks, but Brother David was



called out of town and Carl had previous plans to visit his daughters out East. Brother David had noticed how helpful Leo had been during the opening weeks and how conscientious he was about every task he took responsibility for. Brother David and Carl decided to ask Leo if he would be willing to run the shelter in their absence.

We can only imagine how much that meant to Leo. The man who trusted no one was being entrusted with the responsibility of running the winter shelter and caring for 100 homeless men every night.

Leo accepted. When Brother David and Carl returned, the shelter was running as smoothly and efficiently as it had ever run. The rest, as they say, is history. Leo has been with the St. Francis Shelter from its inception in 2016. He is Carl's right hand man.

Leo has helped to build the shelter into what it is today, a bouquet of daily miracles, some small and rarely noticed by the casual eye.

Leo personifies the spirit of St. Francis Shelter. He is an example of 'men for others.' Some would look at him and say, "That poor man has nothing," but Leo lives his life gratefully as if he has everything and is the richest man on the planet. He has his belief in God and a love to serve his fellow man.

Leo IS the humble servant. His life has been lifted up, in service to the Lord. Leo is a pillar of strength and part of the backbone of all that is good at St. Francis shelter. Leo is quiet man humbly doing the hard work on the front lines of our church. He is a man of the cloth who needs no special clothing to prove it. He is a member of St. Francis Shelter's 'Community of Hope', and we are grateful for it.