

SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI 2015
SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER JOHN ALTBERG
GALATIANS 6.14 MATTHEW 11.25

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ULTIMATE ENEMY OF INDIFFERENCE...AGENT OF CARE AND LOVE...DEFINING DESCRIPTION OF THE LIFE OF ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI. HIS MOTHER HAD HIM BAPTIZED GIOVANNI SHORTLY AFTER BIRTH IN ASSISI 1181/82...HIS FATHER, PIETRO, NICKNAMED HIM FRANCESCO...TODAY WE KNOW HIM AS SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI...!

The family origin of 'Francesco', as his father liked to call him, is telling though not often told. Pietro came from an extraordinarily wealthy Venitian family involved in fine cloth and spice importing - today's parlance, among the 'uber-rich'...his mother, Pica, came from a highly placed family of Provence in the S of France. They lived VERY well by any standard...

The 44-year life of St Francis is a story of stark contrasts. He was born into high prosperity...early years marked by raucous behavior...fighting in a regional war...taken prisoner...returning two years later to Assisi...diminished interest in former pursuits...illness lead to spiritual crisis...in brief, he reordered his life. He turned to helping lepers; made a pilgrimage to Rome...returned to Assisi, passionately embraced restoration of the Church of San Damiano and a life of poverty.

Did proud parents celebrate "our son the monk"...? NO. Readily imagined is Pietro roaring "you did WHAT...gave away your fine clothes to homeless people...what ARE you thinking Francesco...? Have you lost your mind...? YOU and I are meeting with the bishop. *Pica, Francesco is confused...the bishop and I will get him straightened out. Meanwhile...YOU are his mother...talk some sense into him...!* Francis was adamantly committed to his new path.

In 1209 with 11 others he founded the order that now, likely to his surprise, bears his name.

Francis died in peaceful poverty amongst a small group of monks fully engaged in spreading the love of God.

815 years later Saint Joseph Parish in which we celebrate his life is a legacy of his vision. Franciscans serve in every corner of the world...St Francis of Assisi is perhaps the most universally known saint in Christendom. People who would not even think of visiting a church have a statue of him in their garden!

Why such fame...? Not because of anything he sought...rather because of what his work accomplished...peace, quiet, respect, care and admiration of all God created...**rejection of indifference.**

Though readily available, Francis rejected fame and rejected fortune...both made readily available to him...he instead selected care...and caring...

Personal awareness of St Francis began 50 some years ago...someone gave me a small plastic statue of a monk in a brown habit holding a bird. I had no clue why they gave it to me, where Assisi was or anything about monks but I liked the statue. My family greatly admired birds, I grew up with a Boston Terrier named Trisha and regularly adopted homeless cats. Intuitively, I concluded the monk must be special. Never could I have imagined today's involvement with his legacy...

Francis was captivated by the whole of creation. What we do NOT do in his honor is anything of extravagance...it would not befit his legacy. On this Day of St Francis, we bless animals because they are an integral part of God's creation; we give thanks for their contribution and companionship. Francis taught that everything has a purpose in God's overall scheme...the affection we receive from the animals we will bless this morning is not just an accident of domestication! As we gather in Saint Francis Garden look to the statue of him...meditate upon his simple life and legacy.

St Paul assured that **ALL CREATION** waits with eager anticipation to see God...that full revelation is heaven...*"All Creation"* includes everything that was made...God made all creatures great and small and all other things and said **THERE...THIS IS GOOD**...refreshing assurance that eternity includes everything...fish, birds, bugs, cattle, sheep...yes pigs too...cats, dogs...imagine Noah's Ark...**NOT** a ship full of only humans!

Francis commenced his work in a humble manner with ultimately remarkable results...he sought no fame nor would he accept any...after many years serving God's people Francis accepted ordination as a deacon...by definition, the office of HELPER...

Of the many elements in the legacy of St Francis, that of unremitting CARE is imperative...work he commenced and of which we are the current custodians...right here, right today, right in the parish church of Saint Joseph...founded in the footsteps of [now] Saint Junipero Serra...

FRANCIS WAS A LIGHT NOT ONLY TO US WHO WERE CLOSE TO HIM, BUT ALSO TO OTHERS. HE WAS A LIGHT, SENT FROM THE TRUE LIGHT TO ENLIGHTEN THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS, THAT HE MIGHT GUIDE THEIR FEET INTO THE WAY OF PEACE...WORDS SPOKEN BY BROTHER ELIAS ON THE EVE OF OCTOBER 4, 1226 WHEN ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI DIED

Today's Epistle reveals much about Francis...*WHAT MATTERS IS BEING A NEW [CHANGED] CREATURE – REJECTING INDIFFERENCE, EMBRACING CARE - AS FOR THOSE WHO FOLLOW THIS RULE, MAY PEACE AND MERCY BE WITH THEM ALWAYS...*

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