

ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI 2016
SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER JOHN ALTBERG
GALATIANS 6.14 MATTHEW 11.25
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SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI – WE READILY RECOGNIZE HIS VALUING ALL CREATURES GREAT AND SMALL PLUS THE SHEER BEAUTY OF THE UNIVERSE. HOWEVER, HIS LIFE WAS MORE COMPLEX...LESS FREQUENTLY CITED...THINK 'ENEMY OF INDIFFERENCE'...ADVOCATE FOR THE IMPAIRED AND IGNORED. A VIGNETTE OF HIS EARLY LIFE IS TELLING...

The family origin of *Francesco*, as his father Pietro liked to call him is not often told. His father came from a family of extraordinary wealth - today's parlance, among the 'uber-rich'...his mother, Pica, came from a highly placed family in the S of France. They lived well by any standard...

The 44-year life of St Francis is a story of stark contrasts. His early years were marked by raucous behavior...combatant in a regional war...taken prisoner...returning after two years to Assisi...his interest in former pursuits diminished...illness lead to spiritual crisis...in brief, he reordered his life. He turned to helping shunned lepers; made a pilgrimage to Rome...returned to Assisi, passionately embraced restoration of the Church of San Damiano and a life of monastic 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...Francesco...you have 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. He, like the Samaritan in the parable Jesus related, refused to ignore those in critical need and 'move on' as did so many then and still in our day...

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

816 years later Saint Joseph Parish in which we celebrate his life is a legacy of his vision. St Francis of Assisi is perhaps the most universally known saint in Christendom. People who might 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. In our lifetime we have witnessed such caring in the lives of Father Damien working in the leper colony of Molokai and Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

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. 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 **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 ourselves on Noah's Ark...**NOT** a ship only of 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 this parish church of Saint Joseph...founded in the footsteps of Franciscan Father [now] Saint Junipero Serra...

Francis defied convention – unyielding to the demands of his family, he set a course we are called to emulate...the absence of indifference to need. **ENEMY OF INDIFFERENCE** befits him...

FRANCIS 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 FRANCIS OF ASSISI DIED.

The essence of today's Epistle reveals much about Francis...**WHAT MATTERS IS BEING A NEW [CHANGED] CREATURE – REJECTING INDIFFERENCE, EMBRACING COMPASSION AND CARE IN ALL FACETS OF OUR LIFE - AS FOR THOSE WHO FOLLOW THIS RULE, PEACE AND MERCY DEFINE THEM ALWAYS...**

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