

ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI/XVI TRINITY 2017

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

GALATIANS 6.14 ST. MATTHEW 11.25



“Most High, all powerful, good Lord, yours are the praises, the glory, the honor, and all blessing...to you alone, most High, do they belong...and no man is worthy to mention your name...praise and bless my Lord, and give him thanks and serve him with great humility.”

The Canticle of the Sun was composed by Saint Francis of Assisi in 1224...two years before he died. Francis...almost blind from an eye disease...dictated it to his companion friar Brother Elias. Our opening hymn today is based on the Canticle.

Father Eric Doyle, OFM (1938-1984) wrote:

“Though physically blind, he was able to see more clearly than ever with the inner eye of his mind. With unparalleled clarity he perceived the basic unity of all creation and his own place as a friar in the midst of God’s creatures. His unqualified love of all creatures, great and small, had grown into unity in his own heart. He was so open to reality that it found a place to be at home in his heart and he was at home everywhere and anywhere. He was a center of communion with all creatures.”

Later this morning we will bless animals in honor of Saint Francis of Assisi...although it took some doing to get my cat Satchmo into his carrier. It is entirely appropriate we bless animals on Saint Francis Day...they are God’s gift to us to take care of and cherish...we praise God for them...in fact...Psalm 148 calls for the entire Universe to praise God.

We know much about the life and work of Francis...for much has been written about him. He was born in 1181/82 in the town of Assisi...in central Italy...to Pietro and Pica di Bernardone. His father was a wealthy cloth merchant and Francis stood to inherit a substantial amount of money.

As a young man...Francis can best be described as an out of control spoiled rich brat...engaged in all sorts of questionable behavior. He was a soldier who fought in a foreign war...he was injured...and during a prolonged illness began to question his former life. He set about putting his life back in order.

Francis was deeply moved when he saw people with diseases like leprosy who were shunned by society...he wanted to do what he could to make life for them more bearable. He gave his clothes to the poor and homeless. Francis would not back down when his parents criticized him...they eventually disowned him. In 1209, Francis and 11 companions founded the order that bears his name...the Franciscans.

There is a wonderful story about a wolf terrorizing the town of Gubbio...eating both people and animals. Francis went out to meet the wolf and making the sign of the cross over him...got the wolf to lie down at his feet. He called the wolf “my brother” and told him to stop terrorizing the people...and he told the people to leave food out for the wolf. And the wolf and the people lived in peace.

Father Jack Wintz, OFM, writes we should not concern ourselves with the story of Francis and the Wolf being historically true or not. It accurately reflects Francis’ dedication to serving others...and his commitment to peace...the peace Isaiah wrote about:

“Wolves and sheep will live together in peace, and leopards will lie down with young goats. Calves and lion cubs will feed together, and little children will take care of them.” (Isaiah 11.6)

The story of Francis and the Wolf is about the restoration of not just humanity but all of creation...to the state of peace and harmony that existed before humankind’s disobedience and sin. Saint Paul tells us ALL creation waits for that day...ALL of creation means everything God made!

Francis is credited with setting up the first Manger...the first Crèche...and it was a living Nativity Scene. In 1223, three years before he died, Francis celebrated Christmas in the town of Greccio, also in central Italy. The local chapel was too small to accommodate the Christmas Eve crowd. Francis found a cave nearby...local townsfolk played the roles of Mary and Joseph...someone brought a wax figure of Jesus...farmers brought sheep and lambs and oxen. It was to be...in Francis’ own words...a Christmas like no other...Jesus was the meaning of Christmas...not material things.

Francis’ last two years of life were marked by much pain...he could no longer walk from place to place...he had to rely on his donkey to carry him. Francis’ successor, Brother Elias, wrote that from his deathbed, Francis thanked the donkey that had carried him...and reported the donkey cried.

Saint Francis of Assisi was a lover of all of God’s creation...especially the animals he called his friends. He never sought fame...yet he is perhaps the best known of all of the Saints of God...even among those who do not believe on God.

Today we join with Francis and all of the Angels and Saints and thank God and praise him for everything he has created...for us to enjoy...for us to care for...as good stewards of his gifts...and serve him with great humility.

