

ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI/XIX TRINITY 2018

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

GALATIANS 6.14-18 ST. MATTHEW 11.25-30



“All things bright and beautiful...all creatures great and small...the Lord God made them all...how great is God Almighty...who has made all things well.”

Saint Francis would have appreciated Cecil Frances Alexander’s charming hymn about God’s creation. He knew God loved everything he created...especially the animals he gave us to be our companions.

Father Jack Wintz, OFM, relates a wonderful story told by Saint Bonaventure (1221-1274)...a 13th century Franciscan Friar who joined the Franciscan Order about 20 years after Francis’ death. The story is called *Saint Francis and the Birds*...it’s about Saint Francis preaching to a flock of birds.

Bonaventure writes...

“He went right up to them and solicitously urged them to listen to the word of God, saying, ‘Oh birds, my brothers and sisters, you have a great obligation to praise your Creator, who clothed you in feathers and gave you wings to fly with, provided you with pure air and cares for you without any worry on your part.’...The birds showed their joy in a remarkable fashion: They began to stretch their necks, extend their wings, open their beaks and gaze at him attentively.

He went through their midst with amazing fervor of spirit, brushing against them with his tunic. Yet none of them moved from the spot until the man of God made the sign of the cross and gave them permission to leave; then they all flew away together. His companions waiting on the road saw all these things. When he returned to them, that pure and simple man began to accuse himself of negligence because he had not preached to the birds before.”

There is no reason to think Francis believed the birds actually understood what he was saying...but Francis had a keen sense all of God’s creation was connected...with humans beings having a special place of stewardship in caring for animals and the environment.

Father Wintz goes on to say...

“The more Saint Francis grew in wisdom and in his understanding that God’s love goes out to all creatures, the more he began to see that all creatures make up one family. The most important key to Francis’ understanding that all creatures form one family is the Incarnation. Francis had a great fascination for the feast of Christmas. He was deeply aware of that one moment in history in

which God entered creation and the Word became flesh. In his mind, this awesome event sent shockwaves through the whole fabric of creation. The Divine Word not only became human. The Word of God became flesh, entering not only the family of humanity but the whole family of creation, becoming one in a sense with the very dust out of which all things were made.”

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. His father was a wealthy cloth merchant and Francis stood to inherit a substantial amount of money. As a young man Francis was a wild child...engaged in all sorts of questionable behavior.

While he was recovering from a long illness, he began to question his former life. He set about putting his life back in order. He saw firsthand the homeless and sick disenfranchised by society and tried to make life more bearable for them. He gave away his clothes and walked away from his future inheritance...earning the anger of his parents. In 1209...Francis and 11 brothers founded the Franciscan Order dedicated to helping the poor.

Later this morning we will bless animals in honor of Saint Francis of Assisi. It is entirely appropriate we bless our cats and dogs and other creatures great and small 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...

“Praise the Lord from heaven, you that live in the heights above. Praise him, all his angels, and all his heavenly armies.

Praise him, sun and moon; praise him shining stars. Praise him highest heavens, and the waters above the sky.

Praise him, hills and mountains, fruit trees and forests; all animals, tame and wild, reptiles and birds.

Praise him, kings and all peoples, princes and all other rulers; girls and young men, old people and children too.”

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 like Saint Francis...serve him with great humility.

God has indeed...made all things well.

