

Reflection

*Offered by Sr. Glenna Czachor
October 4, 2015*

Reflection for the Feast of St. Francis

I greet you this feast day of our patron St. Francis of Assisi with the greeting he used at the beginning of all his sermons, "Sisters and Brothers, May the Lord give you peace." I learned this from a Franciscan Friar, who probably learned this from someone else, and so on. This is how family stories are shared. They are told, and sometimes written down, and shared on and on through the generations.

A feast day such as this gives us the opportunity to reflect on the stories of this extraordinary man, who after 789 years since his death remains a source of inspiration, encouragement, and wisdom. His way of life serves as a model for countless followers – most notably of course these days – our Holy Father, Pope Francis.

The stories of the life of St. Francis come to us in a number of sources. For example, his first official biography written by St. Thomas of Celano, and another more scholarly, theological biography by St. Bonaventure. We have the "Legend of the Three Companions", the recollections of Francis' closest friends who knew him so well. And one of my favorite sources which is a small collection of tales called "The Fioretti" – in English we call them "The Little Flowers of St. Francis. "

The Fioretti are charming remembrances of those who knew Francis or encountered him during his lifetime; small tales that give us a flavor, an essence of who he was...a small glimpse into the life and person that was Francis of Assisi. They are the kind of stories we tell at the memory services for our deceased sisters. The kind of stories that endear us to the person by recalling the simple, yet extraordinary ways they lived their lives.

The Little Flowers have titles such as,

- "How while St. Francis and Friar Leo were on a journey, he expounded unto him those things which are perfect joy";
- "Of the marvelous Chapter which St. Francis held at Santa Maria degli Angeli"; "How St. Francis converted three robbers" ;
- "How St. Francis tamed wild turtle doves";
- and "Of the Beautiful Sermon which St. Francis preached in Assisi" .

For more than seven centuries, people continue to find something in these

official biographies and simple stories that inspires them, and gives them hope and courage. Like Francis, we find ourselves called to conversion after encountering Christ. Perhaps we too are called to “rebuild the Church” , to live in simplicity, or preach peace and fellowship with the actions of our lives. Francis lives on in the countless Franciscans that have come after him. Those of us who take his very name to describe the kind of life we endeavor to lead.

We are all familiar with the quotation of St. Francis, “preach the Gospel always, when necessary use words.” And Those of us who were here last Sunday will recall Fr. Tom’s homily – when he beautifully reminded us that when Jesus sends his disciples out to preach the gospel – he didn’t necessarily mean that literally. We were reminded that “gospel” means “Good News”.

So, we aren’t necessarily instructed to go to the street corner, open up the Bible and read from Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Rather, go forth and express with your lives the Good News! It is by the very way we live our lives that gives life to the Gospel. The choices we make, the way we spend our time, talent and treasure, the relationships we cultivate, the care we with which we use resources such as water and energy – this is how we express Good News!. This brings the Gospel to life; the stories which are still unfolding in our midst. Word by word, action by action, by the story of our lives – the Gospel of Jesus the Christ – is being written as we go.

Steve Hartman of the CBS news team used to host a segment called “Everyone has a Story.” He would travel to a random small town in the U.S. , find a phone booth (when there were still such things), pick a random name from the phone book and call them to arrange an interview. His premise was that everyone – no matter who they were, what they did, what kind of education they had – everyone had an interesting story to share. And in the sharing of these stories, we come to recognize that we are all mothers and fathers, we are friends, coworkers, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters – we are united in our humanity.

In a sense, their stories are our stories, because for the most part, we all have joys and sorrows, good days and bad days, hardships and windfalls. What we think are simple actions of our everyday life, may seem to someone else amazing and extraordinary.

I’m sure that’s how St. Francis felt. He was just doing his thing – doing what God called him to do. He didn’t intend for others to follow him, or to create a whole movement.

St. Francis had a vision of unity and relationship that extended beyond the human family. For him it wasn’t just that everyONE had a story – but that every THING had a story. All of creation – has, or rather IS a story. Creation

is a story, which also continues to unfold – the last chapter has yet to be written.

You know how some family stories get told over and over again – and when someone begins, we think or say, “Oh, I’ve heard that one before” and sometimes we tune out. Likewise, we have become so familiar with the Cosmic Story that we sometimes take it for granted. Through science we now know that Francis was right – indeed, everything IS related. All of creation is composed of the same cosmic ingredients, brought forth by a miraculous force in the universe – a cosmic event that put all life into motion.

St. Francis didn’t need to know the science to prove his theory. He experienced it – lived it – breathed it – walked amidst creation and encountered in his very being a God of Love that created him, created you, created me – created all the universe – in which we are all one. And this is a message worth repeating.

Pope Francis is giving us another canon of stories. I already imagine someone writing “The Little Flowers of Pope Francis.” We all remember and tell the tales:

- “How after being elected, Pope Francis rode the bus with his fellow bishops” ; “The time when Pope Francis went to the hotel to pay his bill” ;
- “How Pope Francis addressed the United States Congress” ;
- “The time when Pope Francis ordered his car to stop so he could get out and bless a boy in a wheelchair.”

For years to come, we will ask one another, “where were you when you watched the TV when the new Pope appeared on the balcony at St. Peter’s and we heard him ask for our prayers?”

And we will recall the story, “The time when Pope Francis wrote his first encyclical” It was called *Laudato Si – Praised Be!* In which the Pope honored his patron St. Francis and the *Canticle of Creation*. Pope Francis himself describes the encyclical as “both dramatic and cheerful” and calls for us to care for creation and not ignore the wounds of Mother Nature.

We know the harsh truths about global climate change, the harmful effects of pollution and the overuse and misuse of precious natural resources, and the social and justice issues connected to the degradation of Earth, and it would be easy for us to say – “oh, I’ve heard this before” and tune it out.

However, in his address to Congress, Pope Francis reminds us, “Our response must instead be one of hope and healing; of peace and justice. We are asked to summon the courage and the intelligence to resolve today’s many

geopolitical and economic crises.”

The answers to these crises aren't going to be easy and they're not going to be solved in a day. The story is still unfolding. Word by word, action by action, by the story of our lives – the Gospel of Creation – is being written as we go.

Let our response here today be one of peace, fellowship and prayer for the life of world.

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