

Jeremiah 22:13-16  
Psalm 148:7-14  
Galatians 6:14-18  
Matthew 11:25-30

Feast of St. Francis  
St. Benedict's, Los Osos  
Season of Creation  
Observed 10-1-2017

## “Go, Rebuild My House”

### I. Cantic of the Creatures

- A. **[Slide 1]** St. George's Chapel, Bishop's Ranch – Beautiful 150 acre preserve outside of Healdsburg – Retreat & Conference Ctr. for Episcopal Dio. of CA.
1. Prayer Resident, 5 wks in Mar./Apr. 2014 (just < St. Ben's)
    - a. **[Slide 2]** Each morning I opened the chapel in the dark at 7 am for Morning Prayer.
      - (1. About half the time I'd be alone/ and half others came.
      - b. I'd be sitting inside as the rising sun shone brilliantly through the windows on the east side of the Chapel.
        - (1. **Slide 3** – Inside view from balcony
      - c. Then each day at 5:30 pm we had Evening Prayer and the setting sun lit up the windows on the west side of the Chapel.
    2. Chapel windows portray verses from the *Cantic of the Sun*, a shortened form of Francis of Assisi's *Cantic of the Creatures*.
      - a. **Slide 4** - *Cantic of the Sun*
    3. There are 11 windows in all with beautiful icons as visual images of the different verses. I'll show you these images and add a few descriptive words from Francis' original cantic.
      - a. **Slide 5:** “*My Lord be praised through **Brother Sun.***”
        - (1. Francis adds, “*who is beautiful and radiant with great splendor.*”
      - b. “*My Lord be praised through **Sister Moon.***”
        - (1. “*in heaven you formed [her] clear and precious and beautiful.*”
      - c. **Slide 6:** “*My Lord be praised through our **Sister, Mother Earth.***”
        - (1. “*who sustains and governs us...[and produces]... ”*
      - d. “*Varied fruits, with colored flowers and herbs.*”
      - e. **Slide 7:** “*My Lord be praised through **brothers Wind and Air.***”
        - (1. “*...cloudy and serene and every kind of weather through whom you give sustenance to your creatures.*”

- f. *“My Lord be praised for the **bright stars**”*  
(1. *“clear and precious and beautiful.”*)
- g. **Slide 8:** *“My Lord be praised through **brother fire**.”*  
(1. *“...through whom you light the night, beautiful, playful, robust and strong.”*)
- h. *“My Lord be praised by **sister water**.”*  
(1. *“who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.”*)
- i. **Slide 9:** *“My Lord be praised through **sister death**.”*  
(1. *“from whom no one living can escape.”*)
- j. *“My Lord be praised through **those who dwell in peace**.”*  
(1. *“through those who give pardon for Your love, and bear infirmity and tribulation.”*)
- k. **Slide 10:** *“Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.”*  
(1. *“Praised be you my Lord with All your creatures.”*)

B. Francesco de Bernardone lived in Assisi, Italy from 1182 – 1226.

1. He may be the best known and most popular of all the people we call saints.
  - a. He has the longest single entry of any one person in the Library of Congress.
  - b. You can find many good biographies of him. So many are briefly familiar with his life.
2. It has been pointed out that Francis and Clare, two dropouts who totally spurned the entire success, war and economic agendas of 13<sup>th</sup> century Assisi,
  - a. have now for 800 years been fully sustaining its economy through the pilgrims and tourists who pour into this lovely medieval town. [Richard Rohr, Eager to Love: The Alternative Way of Francis of Assisi, 2015, p. xv ]

C. Many of us have heard at least parts of his ‘*Canticle of the Creatures*’ and the stories of Francis’ love of animals.

1. These strike us as lovely, a precious way to think of nature, sweet and consoling but in the end, harmless and often unreal.
  - a. The Canticle reads something like a good children’s story-book, but not something to take too seriously.
  - b. Francis is often taken as a good figure to post in our garden or bird bath. -----

2. It was Dorothy Day, who may be compared in some real ways to Francis, in her embrace of “Lady Poverty,” who said,
  - a. Making people official saints “*allows us to dismiss them too easily.*”

## II. Francis’s Conversion to Rebuild God’s House

- A. Francis has been called one of the first ‘*deep ecologists*’ in the Christian tradition but without ever trying to be one.

[Ilia Delio, *Care For Creation: A Franciscan Spirituality of the Earth*, 2008, p. 38]

1. “*Deep Ecology*” was a name given to the movement that arose in the 1970’s in response to the environmental crisis.
  - a. It highlighted the fact that we humans stand “*in*” the web of life and not above it or beyond it.
2. Some of the historical context of Francis’ life sheds light on this.
  - a. First, he was born into a merchant’s family; his father was a cloth merchant.
    - (1. As Francis worked in his father’s shop in Assisi, buying and selling cloth, he came into contact with many different types of people ----.
    - (2. farmers, craftsmen, artists – people who worked with their hands and valued the material things of the earth. ----
  - b. He received a basic education in reading and writing in the local church school.
    - (1. He was not trained as an intellectual and never absorbed the popular Neo-Platonism of the day.
    - (2. That was a hierarchical way of seeing God and the world, with an emphasis of spirit over matter which occupied students at the University of Paris.
  - c. Coming from a moneyed class, Francis seems to have avoided the very popular Cathar heresy that spread in places of economic depression, including northern and central Italy & southern France.
    - (1. For the populations who experienced profound suffering on many different levels, this teaching taught that matter was created by an evil god -- and spirit by a good god.
    - (2. The Cathar heresy offered a path to salvation by escaping the evil of matter and suffering -- by entering the realm of light through knowledge alone.

- B. Francis’ first biographer, Thomas of Celano, just two years after Francis’ death, tells us that as a young man, Francis was a libertine,

- a spendthrift / and rather vain.
1. He loved fine parties, / foolish talk / and the esteem of others.
    - a. The young Francis probably had little care or concern for the world of nature.
    - b. His attention seemed to be himself.
  2. Trying to come to some sense of personal identity he set off on a quest for glory, thinking he could become a knight and a hero in battle.
    - a. But instead he was wounded in battle -- and while he was convalescing in a soldier's hospital he began to ponder the meaning of his life.
    - b. It was the beginning of his conversion.
  3. His search for meaning led him to abandon his circle of friends and search out abandoned places in order to pray.
    - a. One day he wandered into the dilapidated church of *San Damiano* on the outskirts of Assisi.
    - b. Upon entering the church he saw a large Byzantine cross of the crucified and risen Christ.
    - c. While praying before the cross, he heard the words,
      - (1. "*Francis, go rebuild My house; as you see it is all being destroyed.*" [Delio, p. 40]
      - (2. He took the words literally and started rebuilding that particular church, stone by stone.
      - (3. Thomas writes, from that time "*compassion for the Crucified was impressed into his holy soul.*"
  3. It was a love that seized him in the core of his being.
    - a. Bonaventure, in his account of Francis says, this "*heart-centered*" encounter with the crucified Christ touched the core of his personhood.
    - b. His experience of God's overwhelming love turned him in a new direction and changed his life forever.
- C. Over time, Francis began to reflect more on the words he heard, praying before the cross of Christ, "*Go rebuild My house.*"
1. What is the house of God?
    - a. His devotion to Mary, the mother of God, led him to realize that the house of God is first, the human person.
      - (1. The *Word*, dwells in human flesh, not in stone buildings.
    - b. As the *Word* dwells in the human person, so too the same *Word* dwells in creation.
    - c. The *Word* who is made flesh in the person of Jesus Christ is the same *Word* through whom all things are made,

- (1. Fish, water, trees, birds, air, wind, fire ---
- (2. All are created through the *Word of God*.
2. What Francis heard originally, “*Go and rebuild my house.*” became much larger.
  - a. Ilia Delio writes, “It became the entire ‘*oikos.*’” (Gk. House)
  - b. The Incarnation of God opened up the eyes of Francis to the inner truth of creation as the very place where God is revealed,
    - (1. As Jacob said following his dream, “*This is none other than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven.*” Gen. 28:17-19
    - (2. Or this from our Prayer Book, This “*precious Earth, our island home*” may be where God is concealed -- when humans fail to see God humbly present in the magnificent diversity of creation.  
(Delio, p. 41)
3. We have to be so brief this morning but a “take-away” question could be,
  - a. Might the life of Francis, and not just his own life, but the whole Franciscan tradition that followed him,
  - b. be a God-given pointer to us of what we must and can do,
    - (1. “*Go rebuild My house.*”