

Today we complete the Season of Creation as we celebrate the feast of St. Francis. As a young man, Francis rejected his wealthy family and took seriously, and literally, Jesus' instruction to his disciples to take nothing extra for the journey when he sent them into the villages to preach. He began his ministry in 1209, wearing the clothes of a peasant and preaching repentance. Soon others joined him, and they lived in a deserted leper colony outside Assisi. Unlike our patron saint, Benedict, who we will celebrate next week, Francis did not establish a settled order of monks living together. The Franciscans were established as a mendicant order, intended to live in complete poverty with no possessions, only eating food that they were given. Rather like religious pan-handlers.

The Franciscans were embraced by the Catholic church but were always a little separate, always a little odd. This enabled their interpretation of Scripture and the reign of God to remain somewhat different from orthodox Catholic doctrine. They never lost the sense of God in Creation, and did not subscribe to the idea that Jesus died as a substitute for us.

St Francis himself went to Egypt with the 5th Crusade and formed a friendship with the Sultan ruler of Egypt, thus initiating dialogue with Islam, at a time when most Christians seemed intent on killing Moslems. He is of course also known for treating the wild creatures whom he met on his travels as his equals. Clearly, Francis was a man who formed relationships across difference.

Our readings this morning all reflect the quality of humility. This is not a popular quality in contemporary American society. But it is a quality that enables us to build relationship. When I remember that I am no more important than you, that your opinions are yours to share, and that God loves you totally and completely then I will offer a relationship

with you based on love and respect. When we approach one another with humility then we are not on the offensive, we are not trying to score points or to win, we are able to be more fully, more wholeheartedly ourselves.

Let's be very clear that humility is not about groveling. Groveling can be a form of inverted pride or the result of desperation, but it is not humility. Humility is a clear-eyed seeing - a willingness to see the truth in all its difficulty as well as its glory – the truth about who we are and about the situation in which we find ourselves.

For example, humility knows that I Caro make mistakes, that my perception is not always the best, but it also knows that, as Rector, in some situations I am the one who has to make decisions on behalf of the faith community. It would not help any of us if I thought that being humble meant not making those decisions. But when I make them with humility, I do so prayerfully and in consultation with others unless it is an immediate emergency, and I do so with an awareness that another approach might be better. I am not always right.

So, I wonder, how does the development of the spiritual quality of humility help as we face the environmental crisis of our times?

It seems to me that the human component of the crisis comes from a combination of ignorance and hubris. Which is a good description of the opposite of humility.

Hubris, because humanity forgot that we are part of creation, not separate from or superior to it. We are as affected by our environment as we affect it. Our desire to wrest more crops from the land have led to the use of fertilizers which have then leached into our waterways, causing pollution and contributing to problems like the toxic red tide now killing fish and other life in the Florida coastal waters; it has led to larger fields

which reduce the habitat for wild life including bees and other pollinators; it has led to depletion of the top soil which then leads to the need for more fertilizers and so on. Our desire for an easy lifestyle and the belief in a right to increasing standards of living has led to rapid depletion of oil reserves and pollution of the atmosphere.

We did not know what we were doing- we were ignorant of the impact of our behaviors. But now that we know, the rate at which we are changing is very slow. Because we want to go on having what we want. We want to go on having a comfortable lifestyle. We want what we want when we want it. The organic strawberry crop failed this week because of rain damage. But I had expected to buy strawberries yesterday, and so I did. The plants had not been sprayed with pesticide, but the land was, so beneficial bugs of all sorts were killed just so that I might have the strawberries I had come to expect. I repent of buying those strawberries and intend next time to live without fresh strawberries.

Hubris tells us that we can have what we want. Indeed that it is our right, or that we deserve it, regardless of the effects of our wanting on other humans, creatures or the soil and air of the planet itself. We can hide behind ignorance, but if we are willing to know, plenty of information is available to guide the decisions we make.

Humility does not need to hide from the truth because humility knows that there is great good and there is also great pain and suffering in the world. Humility also knows that we are in some mysterious way, held in the love of God, and that as we offer our lives and our intentions to God so we will be guided and supported and directed.

Francis is the great example of humble and simple living. In the lifestyle of a beggar, he did not seek any improvement in his standard of living, accepting that some days he would feast and some days he would fast,

with little or no control over which it would be, but trusting that his needs would be met. That is not the life to which we are all called. Not surprisingly, Francis' followers varied in their interpretation of his rule, some of them remaining strictly beggars, others receiving gifts of homes and land.

But I believe that we are called to live simply so that others may simply live. We do not need all the stuff that we accumulate and store and move from one place to another. We do not need to eat at the top of the food chain every day. Eating the beans and the grain that come straight from the plant is far more efficient and sustainable than eating the cow that ate the beans and the grain after they had already been processed. I find it is possible to walk between the Grocery Outlet and Starbucks, and yes it is possible to remember to take one's own mug or one's own reusable straw. Or even not to drink so much coffee.

We all have different challenges as we try to live in the footsteps of St. Francis, living simply, walking our spiritual path and serving others. In some ways the path of humility is a relief because it gives us a reason to get off the treadmill of acquisition and keeping up with others. It allows us to explore who we authentically are, without the demands and expectations of our secular society. Which is perhaps why Jesus said, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."