

Today we celebrate St Francis Day. There are three things that I associate with St Francis:

- his connection with birds and animals
- his church reform movement which became the Franciscan order and included taking vows of poverty
- the understanding that Christ is in all of creation

You may remember the story of how Francis had a mystical vision in the forsaken country chapel of San Damiano, just outside Assisi, in which the Icon of Christ Crucified said to him, "Francis, Francis, go and repair My house which, as you can see, is falling into ruins." Francis took this to mean the ruined church in which he was praying, and so he took some cloth from his father's store and sold it to raise money for repairing the building. His father was not pleased, to put it mildly, and the priest in charge of San Damiano refused to have anything to do with money from stolen goods.

In the next few years, Francis begged for stones which he used to restore a number of churches in the Assisi area. One morning he was at eucharist in one of these rebuilt chapels when he heard the call to preach penance, peace and brotherly love, and to live a life of simplicity. Soon others joined him and this became the start of the Franciscan order.

It is said that when humans would not listen to him, Francis preached to the birds and any animals who would listen. He had a deep sense of kinship with all creation which he saw as a mirror or even an embodiment of God. This is well summed up in the experience of one of his followers, Angela of Foligno,

In a vision I beheld the fullness of God in which I beheld and comprehended the whole of creation,... And in everything that I saw I could perceive nothing except the presence of the power of God, and in a manner totally indescribable. And my soul in an excess of wonder cried out, 'This world is pregnant with God!'<sup>1</sup>

I wonder how Francis would hear and perceive God speaking in the world that we live in today.

A Science report last month found that bird populations in this country have fallen by 29% since 1970. On this continent there are 2.9 billion less birds now than there were 50 years ago and the figures for Europe are roughly comparable.<sup>2</sup>

That's on top of the decline of other species: 30% of amphibians, 30% of all known invertebrates and 20% of mammals, including 50% of primates are threatened with extinction.<sup>3</sup>

Mainly because of loss of habitat and the use of pesticides. Humankind has taken too much of the planet for themselves.

Perhaps God's words, "Francis, Francis, go and repair My house which, as you can see, is falling into ruins." might mean something quite different were he hearing them for the first time today. Perhaps he might hear, "Francis, Francis, go and repair my planet which, as you can see, is falling into ruins." I think we are hearing that loud and clear from the Holy Spirit.

Francis clearly had a mystical experience that day in San Damiano, but it was not the first time that God had spoken to him and his conversion

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.franciscans.org.uk/userfiles/pdf/May%202003%20Nicholas%20Alan%20SSF.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/19/science/bird-populations-america-canada.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.worldanimalfoundation.com/wild-earth/extinction-crisis/>

from wealthy soldier to friar committed to voluntary simplicity and reconciliation did not happen overnight. Our conversion from wealthy consumers to apostles of Christ dedicated to voluntary simplicity and reconciliation is not happening overnight either.

But it is happening.

My brothers and sisters, we are being called. We are being called to see the world in ruins and to rise to the occasion. Believe me I know it's hard. Someone told me that they probably wouldn't come to church during the Season of Creation because it is too painful. It is painful to see what is happening but we are ones who have been called to open our eyes. We are the ones who have been entrusted with this moment in history. WE are the ones who are asked to take courage and work with hope.

And as we get on board with the work that God is doing, others will join us. The Franciscan Order grew out of Francis' commitment to the gospel. The healing of the world grows out of our commitment to the gospel.

And we are not alone.

All across the planet, people are changing. All across the planet the Great Turning is happening.

Today, at the Vatican, the Pope is convening an unprecedented three week "Synod of the Amazon". This meeting draws together indigenous people and Catholic bishops to reflect on how the Roman Church can best respond to the cry of the Amazon and its people. The Synod's preparatory document<sup>4</sup> draws heavily upon *Laudato Si*, the encyclical

---

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.synod.va/content/synod/it/attualita/synod-for-the-amazon--preparatory-document--amazonia--new-paths-.html>

published in 2015 which became the springboard for our Earthcare group.

Although the press is focused on some proposals like allowing married men to be priests in the farther reaches of the Amazon, the Synod will mainly focus on integral ecology, defined by Pope Francis as one “that sees the interconnectedness of environmental, economic, political, social, cultural, and ethical issues. Such an ecology requires the vision to think about comprehensive solutions to what is both an environmental and human crisis.”<sup>5</sup>

We are called to practice integral ecology in our own lives and in our own community. We do this by the way we live and the way we love. We do it through our commitment to creating connection, to building bridges through the Abundance Shop, Laundry Love, People’s Kitchen and the projects of Los Osos Cares including the resource center, community dinners, safe parking and the warming shelter. We do it through using bamboo paper products instead of contributing to the destruction of trees, we do it through using real plates instead of paper ones, we do it through offsetting our unavoidable carbon impact.

We develop integral ecology by the decisions we make about how to use our resources and how to use our voices.

It seems to me that there are several things that St Francis might suggest we do if he were here today:

- commit to voluntary simplicity – reducing carbon footprint and the amount of the earth’s resources we use
- cherish the bit of creation we have been given – planting bird and critter friendly gardens, conserving water and minimizing our impact

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/faith-and-justice/integral-ecology-everything-connected>

- speak up in the public square – let our elected representatives and other decision makers know that the environment matter to us and to the generations to come
- make wise use of money; buy consciously, invest in companies that are good to the earth, donate to organizations that are making a difference
- pray – never underestimate the power of prayer

I am grateful for all those who have taken leadership in this congregation to help us begin to develop an integral ecology.

Over the last four years, Earthcare has consistently challenged this and other congregations to heed God’s call, “Go and repair my planet which is falling into ruins.” At the end of this month, on Saturday October 26, Earthcare will be holding a retreat to ponder how best we can continue to respond to God’s call – how we at St. Benedict’s can continue to be part of the Great Turning. I encourage you to consider joining us, to be part of the conversation of how we, like St. Francis, rejoice in the Christ in creation and work to repair the world.

Individually none of us can do much. Not using a plastic straw won’t make any difference on its own. But together we can make a big difference. Together with God, we can heal the planet.