

October 3, 2021, Feast of St. Francis
Micah 6:6-8
Psalm 100

The Rev. Susan Plucker
Galatians 6:14-18
Luke 12:22=34

This morning we remember St. Francis, who died this day in Assisi, Italy, in the year 1226.
Although we sometimes focus on animal blessings and creation care,
The primary ministry of Francis grew
to be all about the work of reconciliation.

Our reading from Micah points us in that direction
As the prophet asks us:

“What does the lord require of you
but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?”

Walking humbly with God is allowing God to lead, God to be first,
While acknowledging God’s great deed of reconciliation toward us
In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Christ.
It is keeping alive and bearing fruit in our world
God’s ongoing desire of reconciliation, forgiveness, and love,

Francis took the peace and reconciliation teachings
of the prophets and of Jesus to heart
and literally ran with them.

His was a tumultuous journey: from his conversion experience during the crusades,
to his returning home and literally throwing away comfort, security, acceptance,
and beginning the new journey of putting his heart, mind, life in God’s hands,
and then giving away what he was receiving from God.

The Franciscan Taming the Wolf Institute talks in simple phrases about Francis.
The Institute is a non-profit dedicated to Franciscan peacemaking

Their home web page tells us
That Saint Francis loved God and his “brothers and sisters.”
He saw the divine in all creatures.
His love and compassion drove him to reconcile feuding parties.
He consoled all he met with the gospel message “be not afraid.”
He delivered the sacred “look of love” that all people crave.
He preached the good news of the resurrected Christ, using words when necessary.
He maintained his own personal divine relationship with God,
drawing others into relationship with Christ.

The Institute's mission is to provide practical, faith-based tools
to bring the wisdom of Franciscan spirituality
to bear on the modern discipline of dispute resolution.

The legend of Saint Francis taming the fierce wolf of Gubbio
evokes this wisdom; thus their name, Taming the Wolf Institute.

This morning I invite you to listen to that legend
As published on the institutes' website.

Give your imagination free rein.
Let it wander, let it enjoy, be puzzled, get bored.
Like our gospel readings, these sacred stories
Live in us long after we take them in.

I will close with the words of an old spiritual friend, Carlo Carreto
From his Book, I Francis, as he speaks in the imagined voice of Francis

A final note: Today's sermon is on the church website.
The web address of the Taming the Wolf Institute is at the end of it
Along with a "Taming the Wolf Pledge",
a thorough list of actions we can practice as "Instruments of God's Peace".

The Legend of the Wolf of Gubbio:

There was in Italy the town of Gubbio, a prosperous village that had a great problem. A wolf was eating their livestock, and attacking the people. Nothing the townspeople did protected them from the wolf. He killed a shepherd, then the shepherd's brother and father when they went out to deal with this menace. The next morning the town was abuzz with the story told by the shepherd's mother and sisters.

The mayor of Gubbio announced he would send three of his best guards to find and slay the wolf that very afternoon. At dusk the townspeople could hear shouts and clashing of metal from the woods. Then it was quiet.

Late in the night the only survivor of the encounter struggled into the anxious town and collapsed. After he was revived, he told his tale of their fight with the fierce and powerful wolf. As the story rushed through town the wolf grew larger and more ferocious. Fear was in the eyes of everyone in Gubbio. Children were kept close by, weapons at the ready and the defenses of the town raised.



The mayor consulted with his advisors and decided to see if Francis of Assisi could help them. They had heard that he could talk to animals and that God talked to him.

Several brave messengers were sent to find Francis and ask him for his help. They had the good fortune to find him in Assisi at the house of Bernardo Quintivalle, his first follower. They begged the simple Holy man to help and implored him to come with them right away.

Francis was moved by their plight and wanted to do what he could. After dinner they prayed with Francis for a solution and slept that night with hope in their hearts.



Dawn found them walking down the hill from Assisi on their way to Gubbio.

The gate to the town was opened as they arrived and was quickly closed behind them. The entire town followed Francis to the town square where the Mayor eagerly met them. They went into the town hall to eat and discuss what Francis would do with the wolf.

The mayor hated that wolf. He knew the men who were killed and their families. Many wanted Francis to strike the wolf dead or send him to the town of Spoleto, their old enemy. Either would satisfy a need for revenge and stop the attacks.

Francis listened as the mayor described what had happened to their peaceful town. He had much empathy for the families of the victims and wanted to meet the wolf and hear his story, too. Francis stated that the next morning he would go the woods. That night he prayed for the wisdom to find a solution that would benefit everyone.

Early the next morning, refreshed and confident this would work out, Francis was accompanied by the townspeople to the gates of Gubbio. They wished him well and retreated to their homes.

As he neared the first stand of trees, the wolf appeared and began to stalk Francis. His slow, deliberate steps, the walk of a predator, announced his intention. He drew nearer and nearer, closing in a circle around the holy man from Assisi.

Seeing the wolf, Francis felt a connection. He made the sign of the cross and called the wolf to meet him in peace under the grace of the Lord. The wolf watched as Francis came closer. "Come Brother Wolf, I will not hurt you. Let us talk in peace." The wolf froze in mid step. The wolf struggled with doubt and uncertainty. Finally, understanding that Francis meant him no harm, the wolf walked to Francis and sat back on his haunches, ready to listen.



Francis told the wolf that he had come from Gubbio and described what the townspeople were experiencing because of the wolf's actions. He described the pain and resentment they held toward the wolf. "How did this come to happen?" Francis asked the wolf. "Why did you kill the livestock and people?"

The wolf told Francis his story. He had been left behind by his pack because he was injured and couldn't keep up. He could only catch prey that didn't run fast, like sheep and goats. He explained to Francis that all he wanted was to eat when he was hungry.

Francis implored him to explain his actions. The wolf continued. He was defending himself when he fought the shepherd and other men.

Through Francis the wolf was able to feel the pain of the people in Gubbio and he felt remorse. He was sorry for the pain he had caused, but he needed to eat. What could he do?

Hours passed as Francis prayed. The wolf watched closely, not fully understanding what was taking place. When Francis emerged from his contemplation, he quietly suggested an answer to the dilemma. He proposed to the wolf that the townspeople could feed him and, in return, the wolf would stop killing the people and their livestock.

The wolf thought this would work well for him, but worried the people would still want to kill him. Francis assured him he would present the idea to the townspeople in such a way that he would be forgiven and welcomed into the town. The Wolf showed agreement by placing his paw in Francis' hand. Saint Francis and the wolf walked back to Gubbio.



As they neared the gate, the citizens could not believe their eyes. Francis and the wolf continued to the town square. The wolf had to keep his eyes on Francis to still his fear.

Francis called out, “Come countrymen, the wolf will not hurt you. Let us talk in peace. I have spoken with the wolf and he apologizes for his actions and wants to make amends.”

Francis told them the wolf’s story. “He has the same needs as you and only wants to eat and not go hungry. Can the people of Gubbio feed him if he promises to never again take the lives of the people and their animals? Remember, our Savior taught forgiveness. He taught us to love our enemies.”

The citizens returned skeptical stares. Francis continued, “This will be your wolf. He can’t be killed or passed off to Spoleto or Perugia. He will serve the town as a defender as long as he will live.”

The citizens of Gubbio asked Francis to talk privately with them, to help them understand. The Mayor guaranteed no one would hurt the wolf while they conferred.

The people of Gubbio talked with each other for hours. Francis wept with them and touched them in a way that softened their hearts. Finally, after many tears, they found compassion for the wolf. At Francis’ suggestion, they addressed him as Brother Wolf.

Francis asked the Mayor and Brother Wolf to declare a pact. The people would be safe from the wolf. The wolf would be safe from them. Everyone expressed joy that the shadow of fear had been lifted from their town.

The wife of the shepherd, the man who was the first to fall, brought out food to feed Brother Wolf. She was crying in relief to have the burden of hate lifted from her spirit. Brother Wolf was humbled when he found his apology accepted. More food was brought out and soon everyone was eating together.

Not long afterwards, the people of Gubbio were proclaiming proudly that they had a special wolf, Brother Wolf. He lived another two years like that until he died, cared for by the generous and forgiving town of Gubbio.

From Carlo Carretto, in the voice of Francis.

"What is extraordinary in the incident of the wolf of Gubbio is not that the wolf grew tame, but that the people of Gubbio grew tame —

"Here is the miracle of love:

"To believe in the possibility of the impossible.

"To hope in things against all hope.

"TO love what does not seem lovable.

"Remove the fear, and you shall reestablish trust. And you shall have peace."

Saint Francis, pray that God may make us, the people of God, artisans of peace.

Resources:

Taming the Wolf Institute for Franciscan Peacemaking – www.tamingthewolf.com

I Francis by Carlo Caretto – still available through several on-line bookstores, including Amazon

Lord, in Order that I Might be an Instrument of your Peace,

I PLEDGE

I will seek to resolve conflict whenever possible.

I will seek to discover the image of God in others.

I will seek to understand and satisfy the needs of others.

I will seek to diminish my biases and prejudices.

I will seek to see others as my brothers and sisters.

I will resist the urge to threaten or ridicule others.

I will avoid destructive hidden influences and gossips.

I will seek to understand my role in causing conflict.

I will apologize for any transgressions.

I will seek to understand Divine forgiveness.

I will examine my conscience and seek forgiveness.

I will set aside the desire for revenge.

I will seek to forgive others.

I will show empathy for those who oppose me.

I will be alert to false attributions of evil and correct the record.

I will work to oppose evil that harms others.

I will provide aid to those targeted by evil.

I will assist all who seek spiritual transformation.

I will acknowledge the kindness of others.

I will be fair in my dealings.

I will endeavor to collaborate in seeking resolution to conflict.

I will not cling to pride, possessions, prestige and position.

I will share the good news of Your love.

www.tamingthewolf.com

Taming the Wolf Institute

