

Message from Robin+

Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. "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."
Matthew 11:25-30

The passage above is not the one appointed this Sunday, but the one appointed for the Feast of St. Francis, which is also this Sunday. Most of us know something about Francis, the patron saint of animals. You can find statues of Francis in gardens everywhere, often holding a bowl for seed or water for the birds, and usually there is a bird perched on his shoulder. Francis founded the Franciscans, a monastic order for men who lived in strict and absolute poverty. He also founded an order for women, the Order of St. Clare.

He began his life as the son of a wealthy cloth merchant in Assisi. Once, while on a pilgrimage to Rome, he spent some time begging with the beggars at St. Peter's and the experience moved him to leave the family wealth and live in poverty.

He believed that nature itself was the mirror of God. It is said that, one day, while Francis was traveling with some companions, he stopped at a place in the road and preached a sermon to the birds in the trees. The birds were intrigued by the power of his voice, and not one of them flew away.

Francis was the first person recorded to have received the stigmata, or bodily marks corresponding to the crucifixion wounds of Jesus Christ. And Francis is also believed to have set up the first known three-dimensional crèche or nativity scene. He used real animals to create a living scene so that the worshipers could contemplate the birth of the child Jesus in a direct way, making use of the senses. Until his death, Francis totally identified with the poverty and suffering of Christ.

In most paintings of people waiting for the Holy Spirit they are looking upward, with their hands outstretched or raised up, the assumption being that the Holy Spirit will descend from "up" above. In the Great Basilica in Assisi where St. Francis is buried, there is a bronze statue of him honoring the Holy Spirit. His posture and perspective are completely different from what we have come to expect. He's looking down into the earth with expectation and desire! This is the change of perspective that Christ's humanity gives us. It shows us that God sees us here, with whatever burdens we bear.

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."

May we be like Francis, and instead of only looking up, look down and all around us for the evidence that God is with us, here and now.

We will celebrate the Feast of St. Francis this Sunday. Bring your pets at 1 pm and join us in the parking lot for a brief time of scripture and prayer and blessing. You and your pet can remain in your parked car if you like, or get out and stretch all those legs. There will also be an option to receive a drive through blessing in the front circle on Sycamore street from 1:30 – 2:00 pm. We invite you to bring a donation for the Petersburg animal shelter – food, treats, supplies, old towels or bedding.