

04 October 2020 Luke 12:22-31

**Nikolai's Reflection
St Francis Day**

Simplicity, Family, Unity

*I am a member of the dispersed community of the Abbey on Raymond Island and I am exploring a calling to become a third Order Franciscan in the Roman Catholic tradition

*I was asked what attracts me to the Franciscan Way

1. Don't despise the little things, the simple things

*The tap on the window: my call to the priesthood: I could so easily have missed it

*The catch of the eye: my first sight of Annie: I could so easily have missed it

*The small cry of a child at night: Romans 8 'Abba Father'

*Annie jumping up to Leo Wimmer's icons of St Francis: when I was in doubt

2. Everyone and everything is family

*Sister moon, brother son

*While St Francis was engaged in the serious business of preaching the good news—the birds made such a lot of noise...he could easily have shooed them away

*He didn't... he stopped went over to them and preached to them,

*and only when he had spoken to them, did he go back to his audience of forgotten people

3. Everyone and everything is one

*The whole creation is groaning for the revealing of the children of God

*animals too grieve: Indian Miner story: in a perfect circle: the symbol of unity (the wedding ring)

***Is Jesus knocking on your door? Story of Greta (a St Clare) ...serving God for 50 more years rather than ending her life**

***The very soft knock on the door** *Boris Pasternak*: don't miss it because it's so tiny and soft: it's the knock of opportunity

Susanna's Reflection

Today we remember St Francis of Assisi, thirteenth century saint. I first visited Assisi in 1989, just before I was ordained deacon. And I have been back several times since.

It was six years ago in July, at a time when we were able to travel overseas, that I was on an interfaith retreat in Assisi. I love Assisi with its Basilica of Saint Francis, and its Santa Chiara church where St Francis and Saint Clare's bodies respectively are embalmed and on display. I love the cobbled streets and the sense of eternity. Wandering the streets of Assisi, listening, I bumped into friends from Australia discerning a calling.

I wrote, “St Chiara, I gaze on your mortal body. Reverence, a bit strange. Why are you here when your work is done? A reminder to me 800 years later of your adolescent rebellion from Family to follow God and this way of Saint Francis, always your friend. A leader of women, you wrote the first set of monastic guidelines known to have been written by a woman, passionate still.” Back on retreat, in the mountains outside the town, where St Francis often retreated, I sit inside and meditate, back against the wall, listening to the bells of Assisi, opening to God, twice a day, morning and evening, with a movement prayer in the middle of the day, being.

I found it quite confronting on retreat, surprisingly, to have images of Saint Francis alongside Buddha and Ganesh. It was a synchronistic worldview, but for me it was a silent time of prayer. I read of Saint Francis and St Clair and drew close to them and to God. Yet Francis broke new ground. He spoke with Moslem leaders..

I heard of lady poverty, and of Francis' humanity, going crook on his brothers after he came back to them after retreating. I heard of God's call to him to “rebuild my church“, and him stripping off and leaving everything behind.

What do I learn from this thirteenth century man? Why do we remember him today?

Maybe it is the simplicity, the poverty, maybe it is his sensibility and relationship to all of creation, a call of our time too?

I'm not sure, but I am drawn to Francis and Clare and their teaching, and the dispersed community of the Abbey here in Gippsland also takes its inspiration from St Francis and St Clare.

Listening today, again, I, consider the lilies, the birds of the air – , this spring time. I notice the abundance of blossom on the fruit trees, the budding leaves of the figs. Ducklings on the pond, swamp hen chicks, cygnets. And after prolonged drought, and fires, we've had good rain, good crops and almost full dams. The farmers I've talked to are happy.

There is always hope, as temperature warms. Hope for what? For more, more life, more love, more even when there's less less busyness, less crowded soul. The pandemic has introduced lady poverty. Spaciousness and reality, less pay, less jobs. Yet, we build the church like St Francis, out there under the stars, or at home in cyberspace.

What does that mean for us? Faithfulness, simplicity, poverty, kinship with creation?. For me, spiritual direction, and interplay, quiet days, and community hub, Small groups, Advent study, care packages, stewardship of creation, Prayer.

God says to Job, look at creation, can you explain it? I was there at the beginning and I' still here.

And Jesus says to us, and to his community suffering under Roman law, and Matthew's community being killed and excluded:

“Do not worry about your life. Do not worry about your body. Can any of you, for all your worrying add a single hour to your life?” Look at the birds! Look at the flowers! Stop worrying!

Look around¹.

“Don't worry”, he says. Don't worry, look at the rest of creation. Don't worry, he says, how can we not worry, with covid 19 and social distancing and masks and people dying, and worrying politics around the world. How can we not worry?

Look to the earth, the book of nature to teach us of God.

I don't know whether you have noticed, but there are many more pictures of the natural world on Facebook these days, flowers, the bush, the ocean. And I wonder, what can earth teach us, and the animals and the birds and the flowers and the trees teach us of God? What if we were to walk as earth? Maybe this is what Jesus, and St Francis are both saying, listen to the birds, observe the animals, look at the flowers, spend time with the ocean, and if you are still, they will teach you everything there is to know about God our creator. So I sit by the water, it's rhythm soothes and challenges me and speaks of birthing and creation. I walk by the lake and notice the tiny ducklings, and the two plovers outside the registry so vulnerable, yet their mother fiercely protecting them. In another time and place I look at the pomegranate fruit ripe and juicy and overflowing and I learn about God's generosity in season. And I watch the leaves unfurl on the fig tree, and tiny figs appearing, speaking of new life, of possibility and hope in this uncertain time. I sit still. I look. I listen. I notice, and I do not worry because I'm totally immersed in prayer. Try it.

We know St. Francis in large part for The Cantic of the Creatures, which he began during a time of intense illness. Of his desire to write the cantic, he said to his brothers,

I wish to compose a new hymn about the Lord's creatures, of which we make daily use, without which we cannot live, and with which the human race greatly offends its Creator.”

His praises include, famously, “Sir Brother Sun” and “Sister Moon and the stars” as well as “Brother Wind,” “Sister Water,” and “Brother Fire.” He counted mortality among God's familiar and familial creatures; on his deathbed, Francis added verses that included the line, “Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death, from whom no one living can escape.”²

Francis left behind a handful of other writings that testify to his deep and simple love of God.

¹ <https://pastordawn.com/tag/progressive-sermon-luke-1222-31/>

² (Quotations from Francis of Assisi: The Saint, ed. by Regis Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap., et al.)
<http://paintedprayerbook.com/2008/10/04/feast-of-st-francis/>

In his Earlier Rule that Francis wrote for his community, he pleaded,
Therefore,
let us desire nothing else,
let us want nothing else,
let nothing else please us and cause us delight
except our Creator, Redeemer and Saviour,
the only true God,
Who is the fullness of good....
Therefore,
let nothing hinder us,
nothing separate us,
nothing come between us.³

Here is a portion from A Letter to the Entire Order, which Francis wrote in 1225-1226:

Let everyone be struck with fear,
let the whole world tremble,
and let the heavens exult
when Christ, the Son of the living God,
is present on the altar in the hands of a priest!
O wonderful loftiness and stupendous dignity!
O sublime humility!
O humble sublimity!
The Lord of the universe,
God and the Son of God,
so humbles Himself
that for our salvation
He hides Himself
under an ordinary piece of bread!
Brothers, look at the humility of God,
and pour out your hearts before Him!
Humble yourselves
that you may be exalted by Him!
Hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves,
that He Who gives Himself totally to you
may receive you totally!⁴

Susanna Pain

³ (Quotations from Francis of Assisi: The Saint, ed. by Regis Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap., et al.)
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⁴ (Quotations from Francis of Assisi: The Saint, ed. by Regis Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap., et al.)
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