

Sermon for Season of Creation and Feast of Saint Francis, October 6, 2019
Church of Reconciliation, San Antonio, Maureen Leach, OSF

It is good. It is very good. It is benissimo...

May God be in our minds, upon our lips and in our hearts as we seek to live the Word in right relationship with all creation. Let us invite the spirit of Saint Francis of Assisi to guide as we respond to the challenge to continue living the season of creation throughout the year.

I will begin with a song that is based on a prayer by Saint Francis. (*Prayer for Guidance by John Michael Talbot, plural added*)

Most High and glorious God
Bring light to the darkness of my heart (our hearts)
Give me (us) right faith, certain hope
And perfect charity
Lord, give me (us) insight and wisdom
So I (we) might always discern
Your holy and true will.

Francis began so much of his life with prayer. He chose to go to the caves or other places in nature to be alone with the Divine. Prayer is what led him to conversion from running away from people with leprosy to breaking all cultural norms and going to live among them. Prayer is what gave him such joy that he is often depicted playing a stick like a violin. Prayer is what attracted others to him and helped build the community. Prayer and a deep relationship with God is what led him to action.

At the heart of Franciscan spirituality is Saint Francis's Cantic of the Creatures.

It is fitting that we look at it this week as we celebrate Saint Francis Day.

Franciscan spirituality has touched Episcopalians, Lutherans, Catholics, ecumenical groups as well as any who have no church affiliation. So it is fitting to look to Francis on this Sunday when we have been invited to focus on celebrating the great diversity of animals, plants, and the Divine mystery of creation.

In the Canticle of Creatures Francis said, "All praise be Yours..." at least 8 times. I think Francis would have related well to Psalm 8. Some of the same amazement at the wonders can be found in both these poems/prayers. Francis named each expression of creation as brother or sister. All creation is a kinship through which we can grow in deeper relationship with our Creator. Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Brother wind and air, Sister Water, Brother Fire, Sister Earth, those who grant pardon, and even Sister Death.

Francis was a superlative type of guy. He was not the type to do anything half way. As a young man he poured himself completely into partying, and then he poured himself completely into being a soldier, and then he poured himself completely into living simply a life of faith in kinship with creation. We can learn from his passion and his poetry.

Our gospel today is also poetry. It reminds us that in the beginning was the Word. The Word of God is the beginning middle and end of all creation. The Spanish translation uses the word "Verbo", Verb, not a noun but an active and living verb.

Francis saw the Word of God come alive as he preached to the birds and the flowers. Francis felt God present in all of creation, especially the most vulnerable..

Francis looked at life and said it is good. It is very good. It is benissimo.
Let us try it on for size. Repeat after me, It is good. It is very good. It is benissimo.

In the beginning was the Word, and today is **still** el Verbo, the Word. ..
It is good. It is very good. It is benissimo.

Light is the life of all people...The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it.

It is good. It is very good. It is benissimo.

The Word says that the light shines in the darkness. It is easy to look at the mountains, rivers, oceans, plants, trees, and see beauty and say it is good. It is an entirely different thing to look at what is dark in our lives and say it is good and to figure out how something good can come of it.

Take a moment to think of a way you noticed God in something unexpected this week. I invite you to hold it. See if there is room for gratitude in that experience. Can we believe...It is good. It is very good. It is benissimo?

“Francis used to pick worms up from the road and put them in a safe place so that they would not be crushed by the footsteps of passersby.” (Ilia Delio, *Care of Creation, A Franciscan Spirituality of the Earth*) Two weeks ago in her sermon, Jennifer Murphy told us that she even picked up a worm in Colorado. Definitely, the spirit of Saint Francis is alive in this parish.

So how do we translate this message of Francis into today’s world? A number of the songs today speak of having dominion over creation. This is often a misunderstood concept. What I believe it means is to have a relationship of responsibility, care and kinship with creation. The old world view of humans at the center in control of the Earth is being replaced with a spirituality that sees God as center with humans as a part of creation in kinship with plants and animals.

The Rev. Sally Bingham said in one of her sermons, “If our hearts can be transformed to love what God has given us, we will become caretakers of the earth... We will want to protect our air, land and water and we will become informed as to how to do that. (The Rev. Sally G. Bingham 4/27/ 2003 Grace Cathedral)

Let us conclude in the theme of *inseparable* introduced by the Rev. Judy Rhoades last week.

Contemplation, Conversion, Community, Care for Creation - inseparable.

