

October 6, 2024

Pr. Steve

Texts: Philippians 2: 1-5; Psalm 8; Matthew 6: 25-34

In the name of God, Abba/Imma, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

To become simple—a lifetime of challenges.

I recognize that the Gospel for today [Matthew 6:25- 'That is why I am telling you not to worry about your life and what you are to eat, nor about your body and what you are to wear.'] is incredibly irritating. I hear the grumblings and the groanings already in the congregation. *'You can't live that way. There's so much to worry about; there's so much to be anxious about. Why is Jesus even talking like that to us?'* And what's he say? *'Look at the birds. How are they doing?'* [Matthew 6:26] Watch the birds for a while, huh? And the flowers in the field—even *Solomon at the height of his empire wasn't dressed like one flower* you've seen in our garden. [Matthew 6: 29] Wow!

And still we object. Okay.

Well, St. Francis when he traveled, when it came come to nighttime, he'd just crawl in a ditch and brush some leaves over himself, and then he'd go to sleep. And I recognize that's a little more difficult with a family of four or five. But still, it's in the Bible! So, absorb what you can from it.

Francis was madly in love with the whole of Creation, because for him it was these endless gifts of God and intimacy. He felt he was inside of the compassion of God, constantly nourishing him through all of these Friends. For Francis it was personal and relational, and he does exactly what indigenous people have been doing for centuries. He says, *'Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Brother Fire, Sister Water'*. They're all relatives, all relations—and we need this desperately today. (Sister Chickens, 'Are you happy?' [A reference to a chicken clucking in church on Blessing of the Animals Day] So the indigenous as well say, 'Chicken People', 'Tree People', 'Rock People'. Yes, the connections are what's essential, because we, too, are a part of Creation. We are here to protect and nourish and delight in the Creation. So, whatever brings peace to all of our Friends in every regard, and what honors their dignity, this is what we've been called to from the beginning of the Creation story.

Francis would go on retreat often to contemplate the town of Assisi, the ancient walled medieval city. (Some of you have been there? Yes, some?) And it sits at the base of Mount Subasio. Francis and his friends would go up to the top. There are several caves up there—grottoes— where they would retreat, and Francis had just a very small little place where he'd sit and pray and meditate and sleep. Today, a whole complex of buildings have now been built around it, and so lots of people come there to visit. I got the advice when I went there's some years ago— *'Go early in the morning, beat the*

tourists.’ Okay, so I did. And I’d been there a couple of hours when the first tour group came through, and I could hear the tour guide:

‘Watch your heads, ladies and gentlemen. We’re going down the stairs—they’re very narrow. Try not to bump anybody else. Here we are. Now this is the cave where St. Francis would pray. He would sleep and eat here. And some of his best visions occurred while he was here in this cave. Has everybody gotten their photos? Very good, we’ll be exiting through the side door. There’s a man sitting in the corner praying [Pr. Steve]. Try not to bump him. All right, let’s go.’

It was hilarious. And it’s the way most of us are living our lives. You know—*‘Bucket list. Check: Saw Francis.’* It’s really something. This is just so precious an all-net moment.

This *‘Pace e Bene’* is sort of the chief (I’ll call it) phrase/formula, that Francis and Franciscans have used for eight centuries now—literally translated *“Peace and Good.”* But in our time, I think the preferred phrase is *‘Everything Good.’* *‘Everything Good.’* Isn’t that just wonderful? (Ric, *‘Everything Good’*. Lori, *‘Everything Good’* for you, around you, with you, and all of your days. *‘Everything Good’*, Arlene.) *‘Everything Good’*. Isn’t that wonderful?

What if we began to practice that? You know, you don’t even have to know people, [you] could be standing in line at Safeway. *‘Everything Good’* to you. *‘You shop here often?’* Right? Try it for this next week on family members. Anybody you meet on the phone, *‘Everything Good’* to you.’ It’ll change your life. It’ll change your life.

Francis prayed at a particular small little chapel down in the Valley, so you have to leave the town of Assisi, and walk down this pathway which has been covered with bricks, and every brick has on it, *‘Pace e Bene’*. So you’re walking along thousands of bricks, and every step is *‘Everything Good’*. Everything good, everything good, everything good, and you are a changed person by the time you come to the Chapel.

So, you can join us this afternoon at 4:00 for the Peace Labyrinth walk. It’s what it’s all about every step—*‘everything good, everything good, everything good’*. At least try it once. Try it. This is the toughest thing about spiritual practices is [that] the first time you go, *‘Nah, that can’t work.’*

Try it—*‘Everything Good’*—say to the people around you right now. Just look at them in the eyes and tell them, *‘Everything Good’*. Look at a person. Wow, it’s nice to receive it too, isn’t it? Yeah, *‘Everything Good’*.

My favorite church in Assisi is Saint Stephen’s. It’s a 9th-century all brick church, the most simple church I’ve ever seen in my life—just bricks. It was really, almost off-putting at first to go in there. And I love the legend, which says that at the moment of his [Francis] death, the bells at St. Stephen’s began to toll spontaneously—nobody ringing them. They just rang for themselves, hours upon hours upon hours at the death of Francis, reminding people, *‘Will we ever, ever, have someone among us like this again?’*

And in the Piazza, they have lots of art at Assisi. It's been going on for years indoors, then outdoors. And my favorite was a sculpture appearing as alabaster, or even marble, of a woman life-size standing in the courtyard who is pregnant. Just was really well done. But I happened to pass through that evening, and saw that she was actually illuminated from within— just a beautiful, golden light of this woman standing there pregnant. It's just glorious—and her belly was the Earth. (You know that moonshot, right?) She's carrying the Earth in her belly. It was glorious—new life, renewed life. All about life.

As Paul said to the Philippians [Philippians 2: 2-4], just try to love each other as best you can.

Everything good.

Everything good.

Amen.

The peace, which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.