

St. Francis Day Homily – October 4, 2020

Happy feast of St. Francis!

Besides our feast day, today we celebrate the fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time and the close of the Season of Creation, which began on September 1. The Season of Creation is a time when we are invited to conversion to transform the way we relate to our Creator, all of creation, and our most vulnerable sisters and brothers.

You probably noticed that the First Reading and the Gospel reading were from the Sunday lectionary; the second reading, from Galatians, is from the feast day.

As I reflect with you today on these three readings, I want to pull out two key messages that are central to the life of St. Francis and also speak to our call as Franciscans in Principle III of *Response in Faith*, to see “Christ as our bond as we strive for union with God, with each other, and with all that surrounds us and awaits transformation.”

The first theme is centrality of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, and especially its meaning in our lives as we try to live the Gospel. The second is the ongoing need for conversion that will lead us to union with God, with each other and with all of creation.

In the reading from Galatians, we hear the strong voice of the apostle Paul addressing the first theme: *May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.* The Paschal Mystery—the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—was at the heart of the worldview of St. Francis, so much so that he was one of the few persons in Christian history to be called “a second Christ.”

When Paul also says, “I bear on my body the marks of Jesus,” he is foreshadowing Francis who received the grace of the stigmata two years before his death during a vision he had on Mount Alverno where he had gone with two brothers to pray.

In the account of this event, Francis is said to have seen a vision of a seraph who had the marks of the crucifixion in its body. St. Bonaventure emphasizes that the wounds of the stigmata marked Francis only were given only at the conclusion of the vision. This made them a response of divine love to human love, transforming Francis into the likeness of the one whom he loved.

In the reading from Isaiah, we hear the story of the vineyard. The narrator of the story is the builder of the vineyard and stands for God. The vineyard represents the people of Israel. Despite all the builder has done, the vineyard has not prospered; it has yielded only bad fruit. These moving lines tell the story: “. . . he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness but heard cries of distress.”

When we think about this story in relationship to salvation history, we remember when the Israelites fell away from their covenant with God in the time of Ezekiel. They were conquered and exiled in Babylon, until eventually God brought them back to the land that God had given them.

When we think about this story in relationship to St. Francis, the words he heard in the church of San Damiano came to mind: “Francis, rebuild my church.” At first, he took those words literally and he undertook a renovation of the toppled down building. But then he understood that the church as God’s people had moved away from a focus on the Gospel and he strove to help move the hearts of all in the church back to renew their following of Christ.

There have been many times in the history of the church where the focus on the Gospel has been lost and we need a period of conversion. Today, especially in the encyclical *Laudato Si’*, there is a particular focus on our need for ecological conversion. That focus once again brings us back to St. Francis and his understanding of our second theme—that we must see and respect God in all creatures and all of creation.

The Gospel parable is again a story about a vineyard. And, again, the owner of the vineyard represents God. This time there is a good harvest, but the tenants don’t want to give the owner any of its fruits. First the owner sends his servants, who are mistreated or killed. And then he sends his son, who is also killed. The Pharisees, in response to a question from Jesus suggested that the owner of the vineyard “would bring those wretches to a wretched end.” He replaces them with other tenants who would be true to the relationship and the agreement.

With the Season of Creation as a backdrop, there is an important interpretation of the parable. We need to look both at ourselves and at the leaders of our world as the tenants of our earthly vineyard.

We have to admit that, as the human race, we have lost sight of our responsibility to be true stewards of our vineyard, Mother Earth. As a result all of us need conversion. And we, including our leaders, need to take action at all levels to address the urgent ecological needs of our common home. If we don’t, we can already sense the wretched end that will be our lot. In some ways, with fires in California and alternating drought and floods in India, we are already experiencing what that might be like.

Today, let us think about and pray over how we might fulfill our prophetic responsibility in love to demand that our political and economic leaders acknowledge the urgency of the climate crisis, and respond wisely and swiftly. We need to ask ourselves how we might collaborate on all levels so that our communities may adopt more sustainable ways of living for the healing and care of our earth.

It is fitting on the feast of St. Francis to remember how we are Gospel people, and how we are called to union with God, with each other, and with all of creation. And from that call flows the urgent need, today, to work for the healing and care of Mother Earth, our common home.

Once again, a very happy feast day to each of you!

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October 4, 2020