

## St Francis Day 2020

*Gal 6:14-18; Matt 11:25-30*

St Francis is one of the saints we cherish most on our calendar. We love him for his simple and straightforward faith, for his passionate devotion to God and to humanity – especially the poor and the sick – for his love of nature, and for his deep humility. In all of these, he gives us examples to follow, whatever our walk of life.

Most of all, when I think about Francis, what I find both attracts me and challenges me is the way that all these different aspects of his character come together in a single whole, reflecting the way he sees God's hand at work everywhere, and in everything. There is no part of God's creation in which we cannot see God's fingerprints, and in which God is not at work in some way. Francis knew this, whether he was embracing a leper, or opening up dialogue between Christians and Muslims, or in writing his famous hymn to Brother Sun and Sister Moon. God is everywhere – and, no matter where we are, no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in, he invites us to open our eyes and be part of his purposes there: being part of sharing the good news of the Gospel, part of building his kingdom, part of the offering of praise and glory to his holy name!

The key message from Francis' embrace of the whole of life, is that there is no situation in which God cannot bring about a new creation. Faith is not just for Sundays. It is not just for church. It is not just for our private lives. It is not just for respectable people with tidy, organised, moral lives. Faith is for everyone, everywhere, at all times, and in all circumstances. As Jesus tells his disciples 'All things have been handed over to me by my Father.' Do you remember the Sunday School chorus?? 'He's got the whole world in his hands' [sing!!!]. Everything IS in his hands, from this planet earth to the uttermost ends of the universe. His invitation to us is to recognise the truth of this, and to accept his Lordship – to acknowledge through the way that we live our lives, that actually, he is the one who is in control and understands what is going on, in ways that are beyond our ability to comprehend. And it hard as we as he world seems to be stepping deeper and deeper into tragedy to hold on to that faith. 'Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief'

This is at the heart of his invitation 'come to me, all you that are weary, and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest'. Jesus knows that life can be draining, it can be hard work – at times it can feel like

more than we can cope with. Come to me, says Jesus – let me take the strain, because I understand what is going on here!

WE know this life is full of joy and delight and pain and suffering. Don't know it as we look around our world and in our own lives. Life is simply unfair. But as Mother Julian said 'God did not say: 'You shall not be tempest-tossed, you shall not be work weary, you shall not be discomforted'. But He said: 'You shall not be overcome'. God wants us to heed those words so that we shall always be strong in trust, both in sorrow and in joy'. Jesus – rest in me, draw your strength from me, let me support you through whatever life brings to you. Live life with your hand in mine, because you can trust me, and my love will never let you go. And we know that this is so, because even in death Jesus has gone before us, and knows the path, and promises to lead us safely home.

We do not need to fret – he has done the hard work for us, through the cross and resurrection. This is why, as we heard in today's epistle reading, we need only boast in the cross and nothing else. An instrument of torture, of humiliation, of slow and painful death, has become for us the guarantee that no suffering, no oppression, not even death itself, can separate us from the love of God that is ours in Jesus Christ, as St Paul writes to the Romans (Rom 8:38). He also says that nothing in life can separate us from God's love – and we need to remember this when we are faced with hard, tough situations – whether in our own lives or in the world around us

. By choosing poverty, Francis rejected his previous worldly patterns of living in favour of life according to the Gospel. And this meant no morbid, life-denying spirituality. For Francis, poverty made possible a profound joy in God and creation. Indeed, he celebrated the goodness of all God's creatures, which he called sister or brother. And he praised God for them in song. By refusing to call anything his own, Francis became free to accept everything as God's good gift.

Few of us are called to the radical poverty that Francis embraced. But his example challenges us to consider the ways in which our possessiveness distorts our relationships—with God, with each other, and with the earth.

Francis invites us to ask ourselves some hard questions. Do we value money and things more than human community and the common good? Are we so tight-fisted that we fail to share with those in need? Are we dishonest in ways that lead to personal advantage but harm others? Do our patterns of consumption damage God's

creation? Does our pursuit of wealth and status lead us to neglect our relationship with God? Are we more concerned with our personal agendas or privileges than the claims of justice and truth? I suspect that the answer to at least some of these questions at least some of the time is “yes” for all of us.

Francis invites us to identify the possessions, attitudes, and behaviours that prevent us from living as brothers and sisters, as followers of Jesus and beloved children of God. He invites us to live lives of love and solidarity with the earth and its creatures—and with every single human being. By God’s grace, we can renounce every obstacle to following Jesus in the ways of love. With Francis, we can begin to simplify our life, so that we might be more open to God. Like him, in the power of the Spirit, we can become little ones to whom God is pleased to reveal the Kingdom

A prayer of Thomas Merton

My Lord God,  
I have no idea where I am going.  
I do not see the road ahead of me.  
I cannot know for certain where it will end.  
nor do I really know myself,  
and the fact that I think I am following your will  
does not mean that I am actually doing so.  
But I believe that the desire to please you  
does in fact please you.  
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.  
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.  
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,  
though I may know nothing about it.  
Therefore will I trust you always though  
I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.  
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,  
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.