

27th Sunday, October 4, 2015

1st Reading: Genesis 2:18-24 - *The two shall become one flesh.*

Responsorial Psalm 128 "May the Lord bless us all the days of our lives."

2nd Reading: Galatians 6:14-18 [from the Feast of St. Francis] - *All that matters is to be created anew*

Gospel: Mark 10:2-16 - *What God has united let no one separate.*

*♪ Sacred the Land, sacred the water, sacred the sky, holy and true.
Sacred all life, sacred each other, All reflect God who is good. ♪*

[Peter] Today is the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi. That song is a setting of his greatest prayer, the Canticle of Brother Sun, which he composed at the end of his life. It sums up his whole spirituality, his way of seeing and living life. Today we want to reflect on the readings we heard through the life and prayer of Francis, through his way of remembering the Good News of Jesus.

In the 1st reading, we heard the story of the creation of woman. Some people have misinterpreted that story as making women subordinate to men, but it needs to be heard along with the other creation story. Together they give us a deeper insight about the creation & meaning of the human person.

When Jesus quotes the book of Genesis, he takes one verse from the 1st story of Creation, and one from the second story. He says, "From the beginning of creation God made them male and female." That is from the first story, in **chapter 1**. Then he quotes from the second story, the one we heard in the first reading from **chapter 2**, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." Jesus chose to quote from both of these stories on purpose.

The Hebrew word which is translated "man" in the 1st reading does not refer to a male human. It is literally, "*Adam*" which means, a creature of the earth. In a way, there is no humanity until God transforms Adam from a being who is complete in itself, an "earthling," into a human *couple* which are the image of the creator as *both* male & female.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is teaching that man & woman are both full members of the human race, called to be partners in marriage who reflect the image of God for each other and the world.

That was not how the people of Jesus' time understood humanity. To them women were *property*, in law and culture. That attitude still exists in too many parts of our world.

Jesus gives women and men equal responsibility and dignity. When talking to his disciples after the Pharisees questioned him about a man's right to divorce his wife, Jesus responds about the responsibilities of both women and men concerning their relationship with their spouses. This was not the case in the law of Moses. According to the Jewish law, only a man could initiate a divorce. And the word of Jesus about committing adultery when there is divorce and remarriage need to be read in the light of how he forgave the woman taken in adultery.

Divisions are painful and destructive whether they are between individuals or between religions or nations or, or **even** between parishes or groups within parish communities. Marriage, as Jesus describes it, is a sacrament of God's ability to transform two into one, and to bring unity not only to one family but to the whole human family. Christian Marriage, then, is a sacrament of the unity that the whole human race is called to. St. Francis lived that truth & reminded us that we are brothers & sisters to each other and to all of creation.

[**Anna**] The final scene in the Gospel finds Jesus embracing the children, blessing them & placing his **hands on them, in spite of the disapproval of the disciples. They objected because children were non-persons** in the culture of Jesus' time. They were the "invisible ones" in that society. They had no rights, & were **usually ignored in any adult discussions. Yet in the middle of this very adult discussion of marriage & divorce, Jesus stops to bless children, & says that only those who accept the Kingdom of God the way children do will enter it.**

Today Jesus would be blessing & welcoming all children no matter what age they were: **those who are sick & those who are healthy; those who come from good family situations & those who have been neglected or abused. Can't you just see Pope Francis calling a child over to the pope-mobile, making the secret service & the other security people nervous the way the disciples of Jesus were upset?**

St. Francis believed & truly lived this truth that all life is sacred, reflecting a God who is good. **Francis believed that he received everything as a gift, as a blessing.** The poverty he is so known for was about receiving everything as a grace, like a child, **rather than trying to control or own things, living creatures and especially people.**

[**Peter**] Both Jesus and St. Francis refused to exclude anyone or to label people of another culture or religion as enemies. Yet that is what we have done for centuries - sometimes using it as a justification for violence & war.

To overcome the separation that exists in families, groups, communities & nations in our world today requires nothing less than being created anew, as we hear in the second reading - taken from the feast of St. Francis.

Paul makes it clear that what really matters is not whether one is a circumcised Jew or a pagan Greek. He refuses to impose his Jewish culture on the Gentiles of his time. In another part of this letter, he writes "There does not exist among you Jew or Greek, slave or free person, male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3:28).

Both in the time of Francis and in our own day, we suffer from the tendency to brand others as bad because they are different from us, because they are "*the other*" whether they are a different race, ethnic group, gender, sexual orientation or religion. St. Francis died to the fears and hatreds of his culture. Shortly before he died, he recalled an event which marked the very beginning of his new life as a follower of the Gospel.

Lepers were feared and avoided at the time St. Francis lived. They were the epitome of "the other." [like our friend Sam the skunk] Francis would usually stay far away from them, but one day he was riding outside of Assisi when a leper approached. He wanted to throw some money at him and run away, but something stopped him. He got off his horse, went to the leper and embraced him. Immediately Francis felt compassion and joy, and what had been disgusting became sweet. He recognized a sick person as a child of God, and saw the image of Christ himself in one of the least of his brothers & sisters.

St Francis lived the words of Paul, and boasted of the cross which revealed the love of Christ for *every* human being. Each age has its own "lepers". What are yours?

The lepers of the time of Francis were invisible to the rich and powerful. Pope Francis called the attention of the world to the most needy of our human family. He talked about another group of contemporary "lepers" - those who are fleeing from war and oppression in Syria and in other places in our world. They are in the news today, but may be forgotten all too soon. We are called to take whatever action we can to respond to their grievous need. As Pope Francis wrote in his latest Encyclical,

“Everything is connected... Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters... woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother rivers, and mother earth.” (#91). **And even brother skunk!**

The blessing of love, the blessing of life, the blessing of forgiveness will not really touch us unless we both receive it as a gift, like a child, and pass it on to one another, as St. Francis did by the way he lived and died.

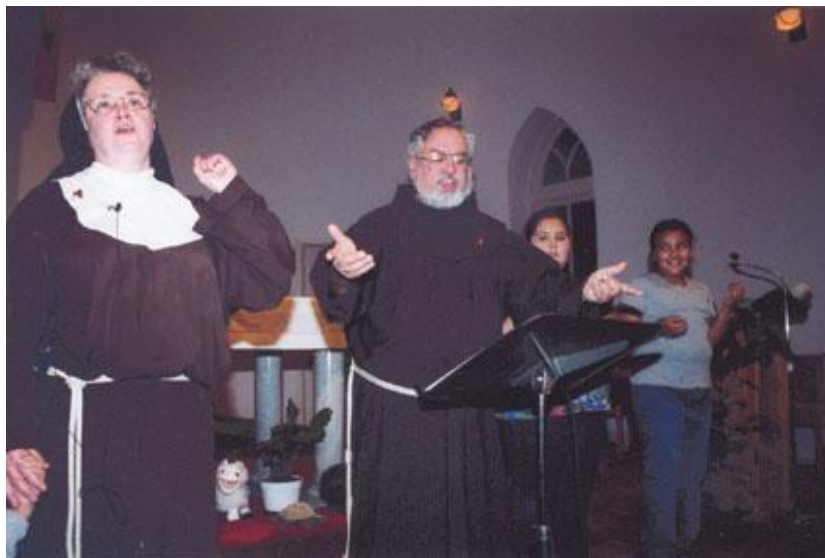
St. Junipero Serra -had a passion to share these blessings with the people of Mexico & California. In the homily for his canonization on September 23, Pope Francis called Serra *"the embodiment of a church which goes forth ..to bring everywhere the reconciling tenderness of God ...making those he met his brothers & sisters."*

We can do the same in our families, by reverencing the gift of each other, as husband and wife, as child and parent, as brother and sister. We can do this as members of one parish family by listening deeply to the young and the old & those in between.

We can do this in our world by reverencing every person as a child of the same Father, by changing the habits and laws that are destructive to the sacredness of life and by working to eliminate any form of racism. We can do this in creation itself by recognizing that we are all connected in a web of relationships with the water, the air, the earth and all living creatures, by working to preserve the environment which sustains our life.

That's what we think St. Francis would say to us today. The song we began with, created out of the vision of Francis and his union with Christ crucified and risen, celebrates both the gift we have received and the gift we are called to pass on.

♪ Sacred the Land, sacred the water, sacred the sky, holy and true.
Sacred all life, sacred each other, All reflect God who is good. ♪



Fr Peter & Sr Anna as Francis & Clare during a presentation of “Sacred Creation” at a Choctaw Reservation.