

Feast of St Francis of Assisi 2023 - **CHOICES**

We can read the word of God, we can study the word of God, we can preach the word of God, however the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us and that's the challenge. How do we do this?

Two people are in the same accident and badly injured. They did not choose to be in the accident. It happened to them. But one of them chose to live the experience in bitterness, the other in gratitude. These choices radically influenced their lives and the lives of their families and friends. We have very little control over what happens in our lives, but we have a lot of control over how we integrate and remember what happens. It is precisely these spiritual choices that determine whether we live our lives with great dignity.

We become what we love, and who we love shapes what we become. St Clare of Assisi. "Everything belongs," both the good and the bad, and it takes discernment to learn how to hold the paradox:

Discernment is about listening and responding to that place within us where our deepest desires align with God's desire. As discerning people, we sift through our impulses, motives, and options, agendas, to discover which ones lead us closer to God's love and compassion for ourselves and other people, and which ones lead us further away.

The biography of St. Francis by G.K. Chesterton (highly recommend it)

It highlights St. Francis of Assisi as so much more than just some guy that talked to animals. Yes, Francis loved animals not first for themselves, but because God created them too. He really loved the ones that pointed him to the bigness and beauty of God.

So how did our Brother Francis come to this deep awareness of the eternal and inextinguishable presence of the love and mercy of God in the world, in the hearts of each and every one of us, in his own life, and in the created universe?

And let us not forget that Francis did not change his life once and for all when he divested himself of his father's rich legacy and wrapped himself in the cloth of the poor. He had to make a choice...

Because He knew that deep within himself lives a leper and a wolf. These stories did happen historically with Francis, but first they operate in the soul. We must first encounter and befriend the leper (those areas of our lives that are holding us back from making good choices) and tame the wolf inside ourselves (removing anger and bitterness). Then God's word has room to move through us and out to others.

Because like us human beings, Francis continually was brought to a moment of decision where he had to make a choice for the God of our embracing humanity and Creation or for his own egotistical pursuits.

Rather than close himself off and protect himself, Francis chose to jump into the heart of the world, embracing and accompanying humanity, offering love, mercy, compassion, hope to all he encountered, just as Jesus did in his life and mission.

One day, in a singular moment of personal conversion, Francis encountered a leper. In his age, lepers were forced to ring a bell wherever they went and to cry out the warning: "Unclean!" What humiliation...

Society had conditioned in Francis an incomparable loathing for persons afflicted with this class of illness. He had always feared both the disease itself and the horrible disfigurement it wrought.

Nonetheless, in a decisive moment of choice, Francis suddenly perceived in this leper the embodiment of God's beauty, a human being to be loved and cared for tenderly. By embracing the leper, Francis learned to embrace all people just as Jesus did. Totally inclusive, particularly to those who don't fit our expectations or our little boxes of judgement.

At times in our lives, there are people we are so grateful for. Not so much for advice or having all the answers to our solutions and cures, But the person who listens to our struggles, illnesses, addictions our pain and has the ability to touch our wounds with a warm and gentle presence, allowing compassion to flow, and for whatever reason wounds are bandaged—both theirs and ours. We will never bandage them all, nor do we need to, but we do need to get close to the wounds of humanity.

That's our faith! The only way for this to become a reality in our lives is for us to make the daily choice to act as messengers of love, mercy, and hope. By choosing to embrace the way of compassion and love then we are brought to fulfilment in the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus. This is our faith, and we need to be proud to profess it and live it as Francis has shown us.

"We have been called to heal wounds, to unite what has fallen apart, and to invite home those who are searching and seeking for something more - God's immeasurable Love. St F

I am reminded of the story of the teacher who tears to pieces a map of the world and, thinking it an impossible task, gives it to a very uncooperative student to put together. Within ten minutes the student is back, the task completed. Astounded, the teacher asks, how did you do it. The student replies, "When I turned the pieces over, I found a torn-up person. I put that person together and when I looked at the other side, the world was whole again.