

A reading from the Book of Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church. **Thanks be to God.**

Reflection

Francis of Assisi is known for his care of Creation. There are garden statues depicting him with birds and animals. Every year, we hold the blessing of the animals as close as possible to his feast day in honour of this connection to Creation. Many cherish his love for creatures. Still, there is far more to this thirteenth-century Italian. What makes Francis a particularly Hazardous Saint, was the way he challenged the socio-economic realities of the Europe of his time!

In fact, Francis was born into a wealthy family. For a time, he didn't have a care in the world. Then a chance encounter with a leper left him appalled by his own uselessness. As he prayed, he heard God calling to him from the image of a crucifix above the altar of a local church. In response, he chose to renounce the power and wealth of his family in a rather literal way. He stripped off his clothes in front of a bishop, and turned to caring for the poor and disabled.

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The passage shared today from the Book of Acts offers a reminder that the first Christian community was a different kind of community. This new kind of Church family cared for each other by ensuring that wealth was distributed equally, people had what they needed, and the wellbeing of all was a priority. Many have looked back on that description as a kind of utopia that seems rather impossible in our capitalistic world where value and worth are so intimately tied to wealth.

For Francis, however, this way of being was an authentic reflection of what we are called to do and be through Jesus Christ. He took the challenge to go and proclaim the Good News, bringing no gold, or silver, and trusting in the goodness of those who hear (see Matthew 10:7-19) literally. His journey led him to compose a Rule of Life for himself and several followers that would become the foundation for the Order of Friars Minor, or what we now know as the Franciscan Order.

His sister, Clare, would likewise renounce her wealth and, with his help, established the Poor Clares in 1212, an order of nuns who similarly embrace poverty and live and work in monasteries. Eventually, Francis would create the basic rule for a Third Order, thus including lay people in this journey to poverty and community.

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How do we feel when we hear about these communities that so literally embrace the challenges of Jesus to let go of the distractions of wealth in the name of following him? What would it take for us to strip off our privileges to ensure that all people have what they need? To what extent can we say people today would be willing to embrace the ideals of poverty and community illustrated by the early Christians and the orders developed by Francis and Clare?

Francis of Assisi not only embodies this commitment to community, he also reveals that the choices we make about how to embody our faith are nourished by every effort we make to remain in relationship with God. Prayer, meditation on Scripture, and participation in worship can be life-

giving especially in the face of conflict and struggle. This was profoundly revealed in Francis when, as he was praying one September day in 1224, he had a vision of the Crucified Christ borne on the wings of a seraph. As the vision withdrew, the wounds of Jesus appeared on Francis – scars as though nails had been driven into his hands and feet and a sword had pierced his side. These are referred to as stigmata and remained on Francis for, what was, the last 2 years of his life. Francis died on Oct. 4, 1226, and was canonised by Pope Gregory IX two years later.

The story of St. Francis of Assisi and the work of the orders he helped create, continues to challenge the socio-economic structure of our day, inspiring the current pope to take the name Francis. In him, we are reminded that this challenge is deeply rooted in the Gospel of Jesus and his call to us to make disciples and care for the members of his family, our family. What more can we do? What steps can we take to let go of what society says is important and ensure the wellbeing of all people and creation?

In our desire to continually embody the Good News through our lives and actions, let us pray as we sing together: (GP) #199 The Prayer of St. Francis.