



**Electoral Synod of the Diocese of New Westminster October 3, 2020
St. Francis of Assisi**

Galatians 6:14-18

May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! As for those who will follow this rule—peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

From now on, let no one make trouble for me; for I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body.

Matthew 11:25-30

At that time Jesus said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

I have to admit that figuring out which readings and focus we might have for today was a bit of a struggle for me. Some good suggestions were made—that this day be focussed on readings related to the Holy Spirit, or that this day use the lections that are appointed for the consecration of a bishop. But as I thought about it and realized that October the 4th is the day we remember St. Francis of Assisi, more and more I came to believe that it would not only be appropriate but would be appropriately challenging to use the readings and the personage of one St. Francis of Assisi on this day when we are electing a new bishop for this Diocese. But that does not mean that it would be easy....

And, of course, in choosing to focus on St. Francis today, I'm building on someone else's good idea, aren't I? For on a ground-breaking day in 2013, a group of Roman Catholic Cardinals elected a new pope who was not only the first South American elected in the history of the papacy, but was also

the first pope to take on the papal name of Francis—a name not associated with the splendor many connected to the papacy. He chose Francis, a name associated with humility and gentleness, a name associated with the wounds of Jesus and, through those very wounds, with a life lived intimately with humanity and with creation. He chose Francis—a name associated with joy.

In his choice of the name “Francis” it was as if the newly elected Pope were saying to the people of the world:

“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will”...And so “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Leadership that identifies with the wounds of Jesus, and through them, identifies with creation and all humanity, especially the most vulnerable. Leadership that does not find its joy in the more splendid trappings of the office, but finds its meaning and joy in the humility of an intimate relationship with others.

Oh my goodness, what a challenging and compelling image as we consider our task today—electing the next Episcopal leader of the Diocese of New Westminster.

For when you read much of the writings about what it means to be a bishop, you might believe it’s all about functioning as a bishop: A bishop needs to *function* as chief liturgical officer; a bishop needs to *function* as one who guards the unity of the church; a bishop needs to *function* as one who cultivates vocations, a bishop needs to *function* in support of the ministry of all baptized people; a bishop needs to *function* in the Councils of the Church.

And, of course, as a bishop begins their work, figuring out how to *function* is very much on that bishop’s mind because, well, people are watching to see how... you... function. And so people are interested to see what kind of liturgical decisions you will make, to see how your decisions reflect and knit together the church’s unity in Christ or not, to see how you will encourage and cultivate lay and ordained vocations, and on and on, through specific decisions at specific times.

And this isn’t the only kind of *functioning* that people will notice. For they will see how you *function* as a human being in the role of bishop. They will notice not only what you say but how you say it. They will notice what and who you pay attention to and what you leave to benign neglect or simply leave to others to sort out. They will notice whether you listen or not. These dimensions of *functioning* not just at specific junctures. No, these dimensions of functioning happen all the time—minute by minute, encounter by encounter, day by day, week after week, year after year.

But what holds all the functioning together, what gives the actions integrity and power, is something else, something deeper. And this, it seems to me, is what the witness of Francis is suggesting to us today as we elect our next bishop: it isn’t enough just to be able to *function* in the various roles and in the day-to-day interpersonal ways that will be needed. (And, believe me, those things are tall orders). The Church needs more. A bishop’s functioning and interpersonal actions need, if you will, a soulful, Christ-inspired centre.

Francis had that soulful, Christ-inspired centre. He had it all over the place.

And so to our nominees:

- What do you already know about your ability to function across the many areas you already have responsibilities for that are akin to the specific functions you'll be asked to engage in as a bishop? What in humility will you need to learn and how will you learn about it?
- What do you know about how you function interpersonally—the positives and the not so positives of it? How will you in humility learn and grow in this area?
- And, lastly, what in the story of our Lord Jesus Christ, the story of God with us as the one who came to us in humility, what in the story of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the soulful centre of your life? How will you make room to stay in touch with that centre, allowing it to integrate and infuse who you are and what you do?

And, I suppose, members of Synod, you who will participate in this discernment and voting process today, you might ask yourselves some related questions:

- How does any of this exploration of functioning in the episcopal role, functioning interpersonally and the need for a leader to nurture a soulful Christ-inspired centre flow into your discernment today?
- What might these same considerations mean as this diocese and its leaders work together with its new bishop over the months and years after the decision we make today?

Now, of course, most of us are probably not thinking right now about what will come after our decision today. Instead, we're each focused on, making the "right" decision from our perspective, the one that we believe the Holy Spirit is nudging us to make. And of course we want, with God's help, to make the "right" decision for our diocese at this time. Of course, we do.

But remember to remember the words of the Gospel assigned for today: They are not about making the right decision.

Instead, they are addressed to all of us burdened with many things, even the burden of making the "right" decision. They are words inviting us together to join with Jesus and with each other in humility as together we shoulder the Gospel work given to us to do. It is a work that because it is done with him finds rest for the soul. It is a work that because we do it together can discover joy along the way.

And if this is enough for you, remember to remember the words of one Rabbi Edwin Friedman who said this (and here I'm paraphrasing a bit): Most of the decisions we make in life turn out to be right or wrong not because we can anticipate the future and make the right decision based on it. No instead, most of the decisions in life turn out to be right or wrong because of (what we all do together *after* we make the decision."

A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix by Edwin Friedman