

Feast of St. Francis



****Pet blessing with Father Dan**

****Opening Prayer**

The Breath of the Almighty

L: Lord God, loving Creator, You fashioned us from clay, and breathed life into us. We are made and loved by you.

All: The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty has given me life.

L: Heavenly God, Your Spirit fills us with hope and lights the path to fullness of life. Hear us! As we cry out to you, uncertain and afraid.

All: The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty has given me life.

L: In your mercy, Lord, grant us the strength to rebuild when all seems lost and the courage to reach out to those in pain.

All: We take from creation much more than we need. We threaten your world through indifference and greed.

L: May we be good stewards of all that you give, protecting creation wherever we live.

All: The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty has given me life.

****Self-guided meditation for walk**

Reflect on any or all of these readings while walking or sitting on a park bench.

Reading 1 "A prayer that does not lead you to practical action for your brother-the poor, the sick, those in need of any help, a brother in difficulty- is a sterile and incomplete prayer." *Pope Francis, Angelus, July 21, 2013*

AND "A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love in intrinsically fragmented." *Pope Benedict XVI, Deus Caritas Est (God is Love), no. 14*

Reading 2 Love, overflowing with small gestures of mutual care, is also civic and political, and it makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world. Love for society and commitment to the common good are outstanding expressions of a charity which affects not only relationships between individuals but also "macro-relationships, social, economic and political ones." That is why the Church set before the world the ideal of a "civilization of love." Social love is the key to authentic development: "In order to make society more human, more worthy of the human person, love in social life- political, economic, and cultural- must be given renewed value, becoming the constant and highest norm for all activity." In this framework, along with the importance of little everyday gestures, social love moves us to devise larger strategies to halt environmental degradation and

to encourage a “culture of care” which permeates all of society. When we feel that God is calling us to intervene with others in these social dynamics, we should realize that this too is part of our spirituality, which is an exercise of charity, and, as such, matures and sanctifies us. *Laudato Si’* 231

Reading 3 Many of the saints learned the path to merciful love but St. Francis of Assisi stands out. In his youth, Francis wanted to be a famous knight, but he was wounded in battle. After he recovered, he started to wander into abandoned churches to pray. Praying before the San Damiano cross, he had a deep personal experience of God’s compassionate love. The event that changed his life was his encounter with a leper along the road. Instead of showing disgust, Francis dismounted his horse, gave the leper alms, and kissed the leper’s hand. This experience marked a profound turn of events in his life. By experiencing God’s love for him in the crucified Christ, Francis experienced the same goodness of God in the kiss of the leper. Recounting the experience at the end of his life he wrote, “What was bitter had turned into sweetness of soul and body.”

Through the cross he came to a new awareness of God’s merciful love. Love opened him up to the divine mystery at the heart of everything. He realized that the God of his life was the God of every life and he called all creatures “brother and sister.” Each and everything, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, had infinite value because it reflected God in its own unique being- earthworms in the middle of road, bees freezing in the winter- Francis attended to every creature with grace and respect. He called himself “brother” not as a title but as a structure of reality. He lived in solidarity with all creation because his life was part of every other life- bird, tree, rabbit, human- all were bound together in the compassionate love of God- even at the end of his life when he was blind and wracked with disease, as expressed in the Canticle of Creatures. His inner world was light-filled; his life shows that when we live in the gift of God’s merciful love, we discover the whole Earth as “pregnant with God.” We discover the truth of ourselves as part of a cosmic family and we live with a new reality of belonging together, bound in the heart of God’s mercy. -*Illia Delio, OSF, Earth Community and Mercy Consciousness*

**** Reflection on Meditation/Walk**

****Closing Prayer**

St. Francis and the Franciscan Benediction (Adapted)

All: May God bless us with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that we may live from deep within our hearts. May God bless us with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of God’s creation, so that we may work for justice, freedom, and peace. May God bless us with tears to shed for those who suffer illness, pain, rejection, injustice, hunger, and war, so that we may reach out our hands to comfort them and to turn their pain into joy. And may God bless us with just enough foolishness to believe that we can make a difference in the world, so that we can do what others claim cannot be done: to bring justice, kindness, and healing to all our children, all our neighbors who are poor, and all of creation.

L: And the blessing of God, who Creates, Redeems and Sanctifies, be upon you and all you love and pray for this day, and forever more. Amen.