

Feast of St Francis of Assisi (4th October)

Francis embodies the Gospel journey from violence to non-violence, wealth to poverty, power to powerlessness, selfishness to selfless service, pride to humility, indifference to love, cruelty to compassion, vengeance to forgiveness, revenge to reconciliation, war to peace, killing enemies to loving enemies. More than any other Christian he epitomizes discipleship to Jesus ... If each one of us practiced Gospel simplicity, voluntary poverty and downward mobility, like Francis, we would share the world's resources with one another, have nothing to fear from others and live in peace with everyone. (John Dear: You will be my witnesses: Saints, Prophets and Martyrs. 2016)

It is no exaggeration to say that St Francis of Assisi, whose Feast Day we celebrate in the coming week, has had a revolutionary impact on religious belief, spirituality and the Church, both in his own lifetime and across the almost eight centuries since his death. It is indeed hard to imagine a world without Franciscan spirituality and its focus on simplicity, selflessness, charity and care for all of creation.

As Richard Rohr notes:

Franciscan spirituality has never been an abstraction. It is grounded in Jesus' specific instructions to his disciples, not ideology or denominational certitudes. Francis' living of the Gospel was just that: simple lifestyle. It was the Incarnation continuing in space and time. It was the presence of the Spirit taken as if it were true. It was being Jesus more than just worshipping Jesus. (Rohr: Centre for Action and Contemplation 2016)

As we take time this week to remember and celebrate the life of St Francis, let's remember that one man did change his world. He looked for new avenues of responding to the needs of his time and pioneered a new way of seeing who God is, and what God calls us to in our lives. Francis lived in a time of poverty, inequality, war and violence. A time of religious intolerance and power politics. A time when life was precarious and the gap between the rich and the poor, enormous. Sound familiar? Indeed, it was a world not unlike our own.

St Francis' life and teachings, as a mystic, peace maker, contemplative and environmental advocate, remind us that we are all part of God's mission; that each one of us can make a difference - one act of generosity and kindness, one act of support and practical assistance, one prayer and blessing at a time.

If we truly believe, as St Francis did, that every person is created and loved by God and deserves to be



treated with dignity and respect, then we must look at the social challenges of our day differently: homelessness, violence, the treatment of refugees and the marginalization of our First nation's people.

If we truly believe, as St Francis did, that all creatures, plants and elements of the natural world manifest our Creator God, then we must also listen to the cry of the earth and notice the impact of environmental devastation on all living things: climate change, loss of biodiversity, rising sea levels, plastic pollution in our oceans, deforestation and scarcity of water.

But the challenge of St Francis is not just noticing the problems but also in acting on them. To embrace the challenge of living more simply, of standing up for those who are vulnerable, exploited and struggling, of protecting the environment. The call to act, to speak, to challenge and to agitate has never been more urgent. Indeed, the old adage that injustice thrives not just through the actions of the selfish and greedy, but the inaction and silence of the 'good' is a timely reminder of the need for the living of Franciscan values: peace, justice, inclusion, service, mercy and care for all.

As you announce peace with your mouth, make sure you have greater peace in your hearts ... let everyone be drawn to peace and kindness through your peace and gentleness. (Attributed to St Francis of Assisi: The Anonymous of Perugia 8:38)

Jesus and Francis had no pragmatic social agenda for reform. They just moved outside the system of illusion, more by ignoring it than fighting it and quite simply doing it better. They knew that the best criticism of the bad is the practice of better.

(Rohr: Centre for Action and Contemplation June 2017)

REFLECTION: How can you practise the 'better' in the face of today's 'bad'?

We acknowledge and pay respect to the traditional owners of the lands on which our ministries exist and the Elders both past and present on whose land we walk, work and live. We support the Uluru Statement from the Heart.