

"Threads" (Homily)

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October 3, 2018 – Transitus of Saint Francis -- John 13:1-17

Saint Francis was born in the late 12th century, and died in the early 13th century. These were tumultuous times for the Church, which was threatened by heresy, by the spread of Islam, by internecine European and middle Eastern politics, and by schism. Sound familiar? It should, because sadly, not much has changed.

No doubt, many of us, like Saint Francis, have pondered these problems while sitting quietly in prayer, perhaps in church, before a crucifix, wondering, as we gaze at our crucified Lord, whether *our* sins will perpetuate *His* suffering until the end of time.

Perhaps you have prayed, as Francis did, for direction, waiting for a sign from God, a clear calling, a "what" to do, and a "how" to do it, a way in which you can serve the Lord and conserve the Church He founded and heads (even though we tend to forget this!), and loves -- still -- despite all the ways in which we have distorted His vision.

And so perhaps it is a good and worthy thing we do, to gather this night, reflecting on the life of our patron saint, Francis, considering how God spoke to *him* about the "what" and the "how" of *his* calling.

Thomas of Celano tells the story thus:

"One day when Francis went out to meditate in the fields he was passing by the church of San Damiano which was threatening to collapse because of extreme age. Inspired by the Spirit, he went inside to pray.

Kneeling before an image of the Crucified, he was filled with great fervor and consolation as he prayed. While his tear-filled eyes were gazing at the Lord's cross, he heard with his bodily ears a voice coming from the cross, telling him three times: 'Francis, go and repair my house which, as you see, is falling into ruin.'

Trembling with fear, Francis was amazed at the sound of this astonishing voice, since he was alone in the church; and as he received in his heart the power of the divine words, he fell into a state of ecstasy. Returning finally to his senses, he prepared to put his whole heart into obeying the command he had received."

Celano concludes,

"He began zealously to repair the church materially, although the principle intention of the words referred to that Church which Christ purchased with his own blood, as the Holy Spirit afterward made him realize..."

Thus Francis received the "what" of his life, his true calling: to go and repair Christ's house, the Church, which was falling into ruin. But what of the "how?" *How* was he to do this? *How* was he to pursue his calling? *How* was he to fulfill his mission, as received that day at San Damiano?

Francis, as was his wont, thrashed around for a bit, but one day at holy Mass, as he listened to the Gospel story of Jesus sending his disciples to the surrounding towns to preach, the “how” of his calling came to him: that just as those disciples had done, *he* would set out into the world, bringing faith to the confused, hope to the lost, and love to the wounded. And thus, Francis went to those who most needed him, and ministered to them.

Unlike many people today -- perhaps, even, some of us -- Francis did not offer grand solutions for the Church's problems. He did not analyze. He did not strategize. Instead, he humbly accepted God's mysterious plan -- the great tapestry of existence -- and was content to be a small part of that plan, that tapestry, threading himself from heart to heart, binding souls into the warp and woof of God's great work.

Day after day, Francis accepted, and threaded, and bound, until the day in which a merciful God cut the thread -- the same thread that binds us together this night -- and drew Francis to Himself.

Thus inspired by our founder and patron, let us consider our own lives, asking if we, like Francis, are content to be humble threads in the great tapestry of existence -- a tapestry whose bounds, and designs, and myriad subtleties will always and everywhere defy human comprehension? Do we have faith in God's plan? His plan for *us*? Our calling? The “*what*” of our lives? Do we have faith in the gospel “*way*” of our Lord Jesus Christ? The “*how*” of our pilgrimage? Do we have love enough to set out into the world, like those disciples commissioned by the Lord Himself, to bring faith to the confused, hope to the lost, and love to the wounded? Francis did. And by means of God's grace, may we have love enough, too.

John 13:1-17

Before the feast of Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father. He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end. The devil had already induced Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot, to hand him over. So, during supper, fully aware that the Father had put everything into his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God, he rose from supper and took off his outer garments. He took a towel and tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel around his waist.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Master, are you going to wash my feet?” Jesus answered and said to him, “What I am doing, you do not understand now, but you will understand later.” Peter said to him, “You will never wash my feet.” Jesus answered him, “Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me.” Simon Peter said to him, “Master, then not only my feet, but my hands and head as well.” Jesus said to him, “Whoever has bathed has no need except to have his feet washed, for he is clean all over; so you are clean, but not all.” For he knew who would betray him; for this reason, he said, “Not all of you are clean.”

So when he had washed their feet [and] put his garments back on and reclined at table again, he said to them, “Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me ‘teacher’ and ‘master,’ and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do. Amen, amen, I say to you, no slave is greater than his master nor any messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it.