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Dean Peter writes...

Season of Creation: St Francis

In the church calendar early autumn brings with it the Season of Creation. It is a five-week period beginning on 1st September. Many churches throughout the diocese of Derby will have kept the season in some way, even if it was simply by keeping harvest festival.

The season ended on 4th October and this is the day the Church of England calendar commemorated St Francis of Assisi. The popularity of St Francis has grown. Not only did the late pope take the name Francis but many seek to follow St Francis' example in the way that he relates to creation. He is the patron saint of the environment movement and influences many in the secular world who care deeply about global warming and its consequences.

St Francis grew up in Italy, in the later twelfth century, as part of wealthy, merchant family. At the age of twenty he was badly injured in a local war, and became seriously unwell. During this time, he gathered friends around him and began to live simply in community. He had a vision of Christ who was inviting him to 're-build my church'. At the time he saw a ruined church building in front of him but his vocation was not to restore the material fabric of damaged buildings but the restoration of the spiritual and human fabric of the church, so that it might advance and grow in different ways. May people across the world follow his example in the way that they set out to be disciples of Jesus, not least because of the attractiveness of his vision for God's creation.

St Francis was a poet, and his most famous poem draws out how he sees the relationship between human beings and the created order. It begins:

O Most High, all-powerful, all-good Lord God,
All praise is Yours, all glory, all honour and all
blessings.....

Praised be you my Lord with all your creatures, especially
Sir Brother Sun
Who is the day through whom You give us light
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour
Of You Most High, he bears the likeness

Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the
stars.
In the heavens you have made them bright, precious, and
fair.

Praised be You, my Lord, through brothers Wind and
Air.....

Praised be you my Lord through sister water
So useful, humble, precious, and pure.....
(from Catholic Online, 2022)



The key point is that Francis sees human beings in a kinship relationship with all creation. Later he refers to 'our sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us'. It is a relationship of fellowship or community, a given mutual relationship that requires nurturing. To take care of nature is to create community including the relationship between human beings across the globe.

In his encyclical letter, *Laudato Si*, named after the first Italian words of St Francis' poem, the late Pope Francis taught the importance of 'integral ecology'. This means that true environmental sustainability includes reconciliation and restored relationships between human beings. Fractured human community will mean the continuing of a broken world, the failure of care for the environment and the ongoing disruption of our biological ecology.

This insight links us to the most well-known part of St Francis' life, that moment when two years before his death in 1224 he received the stigmata, the marks of crucifixion on his own hands, feet, and side. It was Francis' wish to know only Jesus Christ and him crucified that appeared to take form on his body. Francis knew that it was only in and through the suffering of creation which includes the brokenness of human community that God in his Son Jesus would save the world.

May I commend St Francis to you, his poetry, his profound thinking on God's creation and his conviction that in the sufferings of God we will find not only wisdom but also our redemption.

O God, you ever delight to reveal yourself
to the childlike and lowly of heart:
grant that, following the example of the blessed Francis,
we may count the wisdom of this world as foolishness
and know only Jesus Christ and him crucified,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

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