

Francistide sermon 2022

Rev Barb has asked me to explain that I am a third order Franciscan and a little about what that means

I have taken life vows in a secular Anglican Franciscan order named the third order society of St Francis. We consist of women and men and non-binary beloveds. We are a religious order that has lay people, bishops, priests, and deacons with a great variety of nationalities. We have members who are single and also those in committed relationships.

I meet regularly with my brothers and sisters in the order; I follow a personal rule of life that I strive to live each day and to do other stuff to attempt to keep me on a certain path, to live my life as a reflection of how Francis of Assisi lived his life.

This is Brother Juniper. He is my stuffed animal, a puppet actually. He will help me for the first part of the sermon. In our third order we also believe of the existence of a fourth order society of St Francis which consists of all pets and stuffed animals. Now I know you are going to say, "Wait, my cat clearly behaves like an atheist" or "I think my lizard is Buddhist" and that's OK. We just believe that they are also Franciscan. So many of you have been living with Franciscans for some years.

Most High and glorious God,
Enlighten the darkness of our hearts,
And give us a true faith, a certain hope
And a perfect love. Give us a sense of the divine
And a knowledge of yourself
So that we may do everything
In fulfillment of your holy will
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

My sisters, brothers, non-binary beloveds, and most wonderful pets (both stuffed and alive),

Good morning and welcome to our celebration of Francistide.

Today's reading of Matthew speaks of things hidden from the wise and intelligent but revealed to infants. What does a little baby have to teach me about my world? What does a baby have in great abundance that I sometimes lack? I believe it is passionate love. Babies have passion in great amounts, some are little actors or opera performers. That passionate love is a key to learning and transformational growth. Those babies love and grow. Most babies receive love and thrive because of it. But it is a baby's loving others that also provides for its growth. Let's see what St. Clare of Assisi, Francis's partner in crime, has to say about this.

“We become what we love and who we love shapes what we become. If we love things, we become a thing. If we love nothing, we become nothing. Imitation (of

Jesus) is not a literal mimicking of Christ, rather it means becoming the image of the beloved, an image disclosed through transformation. This means we are to become vessels of God's compassionate love for others.”

When Clare speaks of love, she means passionate love. Who and what might we love with great passion?

Let's look at some examples of passionate love, and see where that might lead...

- **I love God, and Their son Jesus.**

This is the real object of Clare's quote, that we remain focused on our love for God and passionately seek out God in our lives and in our world. Claire goes on to say that becoming what we love does not mean we become God, but more like a reflection of God through our own individual selves: our personalities, our brokenness, and our healing. We reflect this love in our own unique ways. Let's look at some other possible passions:

- **I love people and pets;** Clare says **who** we love shapes what we become. Our love for others teaches us much and shapes us more than other learning. Our love and relationship with all the significant others in our personal landscapes shapes who we are.

I want to mention that pet owners probably know how much they have been changed by loving their pets.

Stuffed animals are also included here. I used to work with children and had a practice that kids who were in the midst of suffering loss were given a stuffed animal (a little bear), whom they were able to love. While many things around them were going wrong, their love for those stuffed bears was reflected back on them and provided some support.

Today when we come to the exchange of peace in our service, see how you feel afterwards. Are you strengthened by your expression of love?

Also included in those we love can be the poor and outcast. Active love for folks in need can shape our own lives in profound ways. Francis of Assisi was terrified of lepers, those folks with Hansen's disease who become disfigured and without antibiotics, die. Francis worked to overcome his fear in a classic story by embracing a leper, one who in the Middle Ages should have been shunned. He went on to establish a procedure that new members of his order live with lepers for a time, for their own growth.

Who are your lepers, who do you fear, who makes you uncomfortable: old white men, Russians, criminals, brown people, black people, straight people, small angry women, gay people, sick people, young people, conservative people? It is a life affirming and growing experience to consider this for yourselves.

Moving on to my list of possible loves...

- **I love hamburgers.** In this case I speak of not just an enjoyment of hamburgers but a consuming interest. If I have a deep passionate love for hamburgers, you will see changes in me over time. I would not become a hamburger, but I would certainly change. My weight would increase and my health decline. My focus would move away from people and move towards exclusively satisfying my own needs. I would move towards being a thing in Clare's view.
- **I love your new shoes.** Similar to the hamburger scenario a great passionate focus on social trends and styles leads us away from people and real interactions with them. It leads us towards becoming a thing.
- **I love nothing**- for a variety of reasons some people become so isolated or fearful or angry that their love is shut off. These very unfortunate folks fade away and become nothing as Clare says.
- **I love the natural world**
- **I love a society that promotes values of justice and sustainability.**

Perhaps this as a trick question, because for a Franciscan these last two loves are where God resides on earth and point us back to love of God.

In fact, here is where God is to be found for us, humbly waiting to be discovered in poor needy people, in the natural world and in justice. Our movement away from these passionate loves in the interest of our own selves begins to insulate us from reality and starts the process of turning us into things. To turn away from these sources

leads us to transform into things that are easily manipulated by other forces.

To shut off our love for others and this world, to love nothing is, as Claire says, to become nothing.

However, to see Jesus in the poor, to renew ourselves in this beautiful world even as it is shaped by climate change and to support justice at the voting booth and other places keeps us on track, spiritually in shape, justified in the biblical sense.

If some of this sounds like a threat ...It is not. It's more like Christian Karma, or perhaps just advising someone not to walk out into traffic with their eyes closed. We are not unchanging beings who love or don't love. Our love changes us, transforms us to be whatever we are becoming.

We think of our love changing others, but it is very important to realize that our love also changes us. The moment we begin to love another we are already changed.

“We become what we love and who we love shapes what we become.

— St. Clare of Assisi

Love well my friends and become transformed.

Amen