



Walking the Way

Stewardship Narrative Series

Feast Day of Francis of Assisi
Matthew 11: 25-30
Sunday, October 5, 2014

*Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me;
for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.*

Last fall, I along with ten other companions, walked the Via Francigena—the path that St. Francis took from his home in Assisi to Rome. Some of us were on pilgrimage, some on vacation, but all of us looked forward to the time to simply walk and immerse ourselves in the beauty of the Umbrian countryside.

We began our pilgrimage at San Damiano. This is where Francis, while praying before a crucifix, heard instructions from Christ to “rebuild my church.” Taking these words literally, he used funds from his father’s cloth business to repair the broken-down churches in and around Assisi. His father, a member of the wealthy mercantile class, was scandalized, not only because Francis was taking money from his business, but because he engaged in manual labor, and with his increasing attention to the poor, the neighbors started to talk!

A spirit of contentment permeated my journey. I found joy in conversation with my travelling companions, over simple meals, a warm shower, a clean place to sleep. I enjoyed the rhythm of the day, walking for long stretches with others and then by myself. When alone, I prayed the Prayer of St. Francis (though I couldn’t remember all the words) and quietly sang my favorite Taize chants. I pondered the words that Francis heard: “rebuild my church.”

I imagined what this 800-year-old itinerant preacher, mystic, and monk would tell us today about what it means to rebuild the church. I’m convinced that Francis would say that it is to find joy, to truly be a eucharistic people whose purpose is to offer praise and thanksgiving to the One who made us. It is in worship, in praise and thanksgiving, that we are our truest, most fully human selves.

St Francis walked the path of immense gratitude for being part of God’s glorious creation. He called animals “brother” or “sister,” not to be sentimental or silly, but rather to recognize that all of God’s creatures—humans, animals, plants—give glory to God by simply being. Fish give glory to God by swimming, birds by flying, people by worshipping. Francis was drawn to gentle creatures because he perceived Jesus as gentle. He experienced the sweet nature of Jesus and accepted that the first step in following Him is to offer praise and thanksgiving to God.

We know that God does not want empty praise. To take up the practice of intentional proportional giving is worship. To give is to worship. This is how Francis would tell us to rebuild our church.



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Reflection Questions

- How do you experience giving as worshipful?
- Does intentional giving feel like a burden or does it feel joyful?
- What does it mean to praise God not only with our lips, but our lives?

