

Lent Reflections on the Stained-Glass Windows



South Aisle Window (near to the Chapel)

Friday in the Fifth Week of Lent

Reading: Galatians 6:14-18

May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! As for those who will follow this rule—peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

From now on, let no one make trouble for me; for I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen.

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Philippians 1:20-21

As it is my eager expectation and hope that I shall not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honoured in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Commentary

St Francis of Assisi died in 1226 aged 44 and was canonised just two years later. Born in Italy, he founded the Order of Friars Minor (the Franciscans), the women's Order of Saint Clare (the "Poor Clares") and the Third Order of St Francis (secular lay people who follow a Rule of life). He was inspired to devote himself to a life of poverty and dressed as a peasant- in a coarse woollen tunic with a knotted rope tied around himself. Then he went around preaching to the ordinary folk in the countryside about penance, love and peace. Before long others were drawn to him and they lived a simple life in community at Assisi and went about preaching.

Previously, monks lived in monasteries having taken a vow of stability, separated from the secular world, living a life of contemplation and prayer. However, by the 12th century a number of 'mendicant' orders were founded, orders of friars (brothers) such as Carmelites, Dominicans, Augustinians and of course the Franciscans in 1209. They differ from monks in that they do not live cloistered lives but are called to live the 'evangelical counsels' (poverty, chastity and obedience) in service to society.

Francis is one of the most popular saints. He began the tradition of re-creating a manger scene in church at Christmas. He believed that nature itself was a mirror of God and called all creatures his 'brothers and sisters:' in his 'Canticle of the Sun' he writes of 'Brother Sun' and 'Sister Moon.' It is said he preached to the birds when the people would not heed him and that he persuaded the wolf in Gubbio to stop attacking

locals. In our window, Francis is depicted surrounded by birds, rabbits, and a squirrel - and blessing them. Around his feast day, in some churches, animals and pets are brought to church for blessing.

In 1219 Francis crossed enemy lines during a Crusade to meet with the Sultan in Egypt. They discussed interfaith conflict, war and the search for peace. It is said that both men were changed by the encounter which had far reaching consequences as after the capture of the holy places in the Holy Land by the Muslims, the Franciscans were allowed to stay on as recognised 'Custodians of the Holy Land,' on behalf of Christians.

In 1986 Pope John Paul II organised the first World Day of Prayer for peace in Assisi for 160 religious leaders who spent the day together fasting and praying.

In 1224, Francis went on retreat and to prepare for St Michael's day by 40 days of fasting. He prayed that he might know how best to please God. Opening the Gospels, he read from the passion of Christ three times. As he prayed on the morning of the Feast of the Holy Cross (September 14) he had a vision of Christ on the Cross carried by seraphim and he was left with the 'stigmata' – the bodily wounds of the Crucified Christ -on his own body.

Francis set out to imitate Christ and literally carry out His work. 'Your God is of your flesh, he preached, 'He lives in your nearest neighbour in ever person.'

Meditation

Pope Francis follows his namesake in living as simply as possible and has a special concern for the environment and for world peace. He also talks regularly about the benefits of meditating on the Five Wounds of Christ. ‘God wants to see our wounds,’ he says, for ‘there in the encounter of our wounds with the wounds of the Lord, which was the price of our salvation, there is the tenderness of God.’

It is all too easy to hide our wounds, our deep hurts, from God and others, but recognising our own wounds is often the first step in being able to see and treat the wounds of others.

The Risen Jesus does not appear to His disciples without His wounds, those very wounds which enabled Doubting Thomas to profess his faith.

Meditate on the five wounds of Jesus, by thinking of your own head, hands, feet and side as in this hymn below.

O dearest Lord, thy sacred head
with thorns was pierced for me;
O pour thy blessing on my head
that I may think for thee.

O dearest Lord, thy sacred hands
with nails were pierced for me;
O shed thy blessing on my hands
that they may work for thee.

O dearest Lord, thy sacred feet
with nails were pierced for me;
O pour thy blessing on my feet
that they may follow thee.

O dearest Lord, thy sacred heart
with spear was pierced for me;
O pour thy Spirit in my heart
that I may live for thee.

Prayer

O God of the poor,
help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious
in your eyes.

Bring healing to our lives,
that we may protect the world and not prey on it,
that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction. Touch the hearts
of those who look only for gain
at the expense of the poor and the earth.

Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,
to be filled with awe and contemplation,
to recognize that we are profoundly united
with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light.

We thank you for being with us each day.

Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle
for justice, love and peace. Through Christ our Lord. Amen