

“Love people, use things, the opposite never works.”

The Minimalists

Francis of Assisi is among the most beloved saints and spiritual leaders of all time. He lived his life according to the highest values of simplicity, hospitality and community. And if we allow the life of Francis to be our guide, we would be called to radical change.

Today we honor his memory as we remember our call to serve the poorest, the most vulnerable and the least among us. Scripture tells the story of a rich young man who came to Jesus, asking what must be done to inherit eternal life. Assuring Jesus that he had kept all of the commandments, the young man is unsatisfied to hear what Christ has to say. Jesus told him, “Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” (Mark 10:21, NRSV)

Very few of us can follow this fast track into eternal life. It is a call to radical simplicity and unthinkable generosity. Perhaps Jesus was being rhetorical or simply pushing the young man where it would mean the most to him personally, but the call is still out there to him and to all of us.

In astounding and literal ways, Francis of Assisi followed this call. One day while walking, Francis came across a poor man along the road. Seeing the man’s misery, Francis was moved to compassion. He took off the cloak he was wearing and said to his traveling companion, “It is fitting that we should restore this cloak to this poor man, for it is his, and I accepted it only until I should find someone poorer than myself.” When his companion objected, Francis persisted, “I should be counted a thief by the great Almsgiver were I to withhold that which I wear from him who has greater need of it than I.”

The things we have are to be used in the service of the people we encounter. The Lord’s Prayer finds us asking for *daily* bread. Not tomorrow’s bread or bread for next week. Jesus tells us to ask for what we need and nothing in the excess. How many of us have much more than we need? How many of us store up goods in attics, basements, garages, and storage units? Prudent saving and good planning aside, are we keeping for ourselves what can be put to better more immediate use by someone else?

How can we honor the memory of Francis of Assisi by being instruments of God’s expansive generosity in the world, particularly toward most in need?

St. Clare of Assisi might have best responded:



“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 is not a literal mimicking of Christ, but 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.”
On this Feast of St. Francis, consider how you might be an instrument of God's expansive generosity in the world.