

ST ANDREW'S CHURCH GRAFHAM

'THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK'

7th October 2020

The season of Creationtide in the Church's year came to an end on 4th October which is the feast day of St Francis of Assisi. Many people when they think of Francis will instantly think of pictures of him surrounded by animals and indeed he does seem to have had a particular care for the whole of creation. Like Hildegard of Bingen, about whom I wrote a few weeks ago, Francis had a deep sense of the interconnectedness of all things and their relationship with God as Creator and Sustainer. Many of us will know the hymn by William Draper 'All creatures of our God and King' based on Francis' beautiful 'Canticle of the Sun' which calls on the whole of creation to praise and honour God. In it Francis emphasises our relationship with all things in such phrases as 'brother sun' and 'sister moon'.

Yet this is only part of the picture. Pope Francis has called him 'a man of peace, a man of poverty, a man who loved and protected creation'. His deep love of Christ led him to a way of life which sought to bear witness to the message of the Gospel. The popular hymn 'Make me a channel of your peace' which is often attributed to Francis is probably much more modern but nevertheless expresses the values which determined his life. Francis believed that it was our duty and joy to make Christ known in the world here and now writing, 'We are [his] brothers when we do the will of his Father who is on heaven; mothers when we carry him in our heart and body through love and a pure and sincere conscience; and give him birth through a holy activity, which must shine before others by example.'

This year on the feast of St Francis, Pope Francis published his latest encyclical (letter), 'Fratelli Tutti'. The title meaning 'brothers all' comes from St Francis' own writings. I have only, as yet, read a brief summary of the contents but the encyclical calls for us to recognise our interrelatedness and to live as a single human family in which we are all brothers and sisters. One leading English Catholic theologian has said that 'Fratelli Tutti' is 'a devastating challenge to our ecological, political, economic and social life. But above all it is a proclamation of an ineradicable, joyful truth, presented here as a well-spring for a fatigued world.'

As I reflected on the teaching of both St Francis and Pope Francis I remembered a poem by Sister Melannie Svoboda:

Saving the World

Jesus did not leave behind
a three-ring spiral notebook
labelled: How to Save the World.
He did not leave behind
a file cabinet stuffed with
folders marked
Faith, Hope, Love,
Recruiting Strategies,
Financial Planning,
and Pro-Active Public Relations.

He did not leave behind
his journal,
his password or his Blackberry.
Instead,
Jesus left behind
the gentle sway of who he was:
his integrity, compassion,
prayerfulness,
longsuffering, and forgiveness.
He left behind
the bread and wine
of his life and teachings,
and his total surrender
to a terrible death
borne of unselfish love.
He left behind
a handful of followers,
radically made new
just by his presence.

We will save the world
in only one way:
by being transformed
into his beautiful person.

(from *Just Because* by Melannie Svoboda)

With my love and prayers
Camilla

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