



DSOP Eco-Justice Committee – October Reflection

FRANCIS: PATRON SAINT OF ECOLOGY

“In 1979 (Saint) Pope John Paul II named Saint Francis of Assisi the patron saint of those who promote ecology because he recognized the importance of his God-centered life for our modern age. He gave formal recognition to the popular perception of Francis’ relationship with nature as ecologically ideal. Saints are models of holiness worthy of studying and following. Saints can help shape us into the disciples we desire to be. Francis is one such saint, perhaps the most popular saint of all time. His universal appeal lies in his simplicity of heart, his

dedication to the following of Christ, his love of the poor and his fellowship with all creatures. He loved creation passionately, as brother, lover and friend of all living beings.” (Introduction, p 8)¹

Our phone study group worked through this book—*Care for Creation*-- about a year ago and found it timely, practical and deep. Francis, our brother, confronted the same life-denying heresies that Dominic did but through a vision grounded not in scholasticism but from the perspective of a simple layman’s understanding of God’s Truth through experience and contemplative prayer. His preaching to the birds, his taming of the wolf, his poetic exultation in the Canticle of the Creatures are not just quaint legendary stories. Francis had a deep recognition of the oneness and connection of all of creation well before modern science’s proof of this reality. In Francis, says *Care for Creation*, “there was no tension between loving God and loving all creatures of God...He recognized the beauty of God in creatures and loved God all the more for the abundance of this gift...Francis recognized the the interdependence of human beings with one another and with the rest of creation.”

The book goes on to explore a second central theme of creation being the means through which Francis experienced God. Creation was always full of God’s revelatory Presence which has permeated Franciscan theology and tradition. The God that Francis encountered was always good and full of love for God’s own creatures. Our day seeks to re-connect with that tangible awareness of God’s presence and immanence in our world—so badly in need of such sacramental awareness.

And, Francis was grounded in concrete action. When he contemplated the pain of the world he was moved, yes, to prayer but also to act with compassion and to proclaim gospel values. It is for this reason that we Dominicans in our day need to invoke our brother Francis’ example and intercession as we commit ourselves to both compassionate contemplation and Gospel-centered action—our Dominican calling.

¹ Commentary on Saint Francis from *Care for Creation*, Delio, Warner and Wood, St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2008

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