

# SERMONS FROM ST. FRANCIS

October 1, 2006 – Feast of St. Francis and St. Clare

Text: Matt. 11:25-30

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## “The Better Way”

Doesn't life get so complicated at times? It seems that no matter how hard we work at it, there seem to be problems, bills and overdue tasks calling for our attention. There has to be a better way.

It seems so complicated to share our faith to the world around us. No matter how hard we try sometimes, the baggage that 2000 years of Christianity brings, or the baggage of a Sunday School religion in the heads of grown men and women, seems to get in the way. There has to be a better way.

Sometimes we get so discouraged by losses and sickness in us and in our friends and neighbors. We grieve the sudden loss of Pastor Jim Lokken. The list of the sick and very needful is long. There has to be a better way!

There is; there is a better way....

And so we ask, “What do we have to do then?” And that is the start of the problem. We are well trained to solve problems by getting to work on them. But this is not the way....

Even though the first and second readings from sacred Scripture invite us to action, there is something prior, something which both Micah the prophet and James the apostle assume, a subtext which, if not comprehended, will misdirect us from the better way.

It sounds so complicated. It looks so complicated. And sometimes it is -- not the better way, but getting to it. The wisdom that is Christ, which Sts. Francis and Clare found, is not complicated. The way is easy -- it's just getting there that can be so complicated.

In our complicated world and complicated lives wisdom arrives to the door of our hearts with our receiving a simplicity. In Matthew's Gospel Jesus is trying to communicate a new delightful relationship with God, a simplicity of heart and mind that sees God as “Abba,” a relationship to God who is as close as the words “Daddy” and “Mommy” reveal.

Jesus was trying to communicate the meaning of God not as some high and mighty distant judge, nor as the guarantor of some new or old world order, nor as the definition of some pompous scheme of thought or program, but strangely as “Mommy” or “Daddy.”

However the God baggage of those times was blinding the often clueless disciples. So, hinting how to adorn oneself with that humble robe of simplicity, Jesus thanks God aloud for

having “hidden [this meaning of God] from those who consider themselves wise and learned, and having revealed them to infants.” We would do well to find that simplicity ourselves by learning from the children. For that is the better way.

So let us end this somewhat necessary sermonic sign post and start to walk along the better way. But don't rush to do something. Wait. Wait, please wait. It's not what we do at first. Rather, it is what we receive --from beyond, one could say.

For until we learn to pray as children pray: with open hearts and open mouths ready to converse with God; until we trust in Jesus as directly as children do; until we lay open the door of our inmost being to receive mommy's and daddy's love, until we receive the eucharist in our mouths like children who trust implicitly their parents' goodwill, we will not start off on the right foot with all our plans, our energies and visions.

And so with open hearts, often exhausted or fearful hearts, we hear Christ's words anew, “Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” In childlike trust we receive these reassuring words of life, words that have wondrous power to renew our life. And infused with that grace, somehow we can begin again to do what we need to do.

This openness to receiving is the assumption behind, the subtext, to the wonderful exhortations in the readings from St. James and the prophetic vision of Micah this morning. This is the foundation stone to this church and the keystone to our lives -- yet this openness and healing infusion of grace is forgotten by the complicating thistles and thorns of our busy lives. Let children teach us! Let children remind us!

The greatness of St. Clare and St. Francis is that their lives show concrete examples of that better way -- not that we should imitate them legalistically, but we should follow their clues to find the same simplicity of loving, adoring the Christ, the Beloved one of God.

The greatness of St. Francis and St. Clare is that they went a step further and learned not only from the children but also from the animals and all of nature's awesome beauty. As a steward of two cats, I can tell you that they are great teachers to me and reminders of unalloyed love and dependence. Buddy and Sox are always reminding me of the simplicities of life, the truly important things. We would all do well to learn from the animals and brother sun and sister moon.

The fastest route to that simplicity of faith, a faith that can move the mountains in our lives, is to confess our sins, and as St. James says, confess to one another that we have not followed the will of God in our lives. Like a child who confesses wrong to mother or father, or to brother or sister, we will hear God's reassuring voice of forgiveness, consolation and renewal. We can begin again.

For the other side of confession is that each one of us can become a St. Francis or a St. Clare, uniquely and concretely, according to the gifts God has bestowed upon each one of us. We might never reach such simplicity of dependence and unalloyed love for God as they, but we

can walk humbly with our God, act justly, care for the poor, visit the sick and pray for the dying.

Our lives, our faith, the world all seem so complicated at times. But learning how to enrich our lives, to deepen our faith and to overcome the world, does not come from “getting down to it”, but first from that simplicity of depending upon the forgiving and loving power of the God whom Jesus knew so well. If these words fail to aid you on the “how” then receive the bread and wine this morning, not childishly, but in childlike expectation. And you just may be surprised!

*Amen*

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