

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Eight hundred years ago today, October 3, 1226, St. Francis of Assisi died. As a young man he adopted a simple lifestyle, and then assembled a community of like-minded people, befriended animals, wrote a prayer for peace, composed a canticle praising God for creation, received the stigmata—the wounds of Christ on his body, and inspired generations of people to appreciate the blessings God has bestowed upon each of us and on our beautiful world.

Pope Leo has proclaimed this a special year of jubilee in honor of this great saint and grants a plenary indulgence under the usual conditions for the faithful who visit a Franciscan church or place of worship connected to Saint Francis. This includes the Chapel of Holy Eucharist in Independence here in our diocese.

This first weekend of October the Catholic Church in the United States observes Respect Life Sunday. Today therefore also expresses our care for all the vulnerable, including unborn children, pregnant mothers, the unemployed, the houseless, prisoners on death row, and those requiring hospice care. As citizens of Missouri approach the November elections, we'll have an opportunity to vote in favor of Amendment 3, which, as Bishop Johnston points out, "will reverse the radical abortion language in the Missouri constitution, limit the legal reasons for allowing abortions and the timeframe for when they can be performed, allow state regulation of abortion providers, and require parental consent for minors to get abortions. In addition, it will make the current restrictions on puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones for minors a permanent part of the state constitution."

The love St. Francis of Assisi held for creation and the respect we all owe all human life finds a stark counter-example in today's gospel. Jesus tells a brutal parable about a landowner who authorizes workers to enter his field and reap his harvest. But he had leased the field to tenants, who took matters into their own hands: they seized his servants, beat one, killed a second, and stoned a third. The landowner still believed that inside the most violent people there was still some kernel of goodness, so he sent his son to collect the harvest, thinking these criminals would at least respect him. But no, they had no respect for life. "They seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him." The parable foreshadows Jesus' own death. He is the Son who suffered at the hands of those whom God entrusted with the vineyard of his holy covenant. Lack of respect for life eventually led to the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus, who devoted his life to preaching good news, healing the sick, and saving others.

Respect for life means all human life, especially the innocent. It also implies a respect for creation, utilizing the good things of the world in a way that sustains the earth for ourselves, but also for those across the globe who lack basics such as clean water, and for future generations to enjoy the blessings God has so richly poured upon us.

As we celebrate a great saint who still inspires many by his devotion to God, the world, and all the people who share it, considering them his brothers and sisters, let us seek ways to follow Francis, who followed Christ. Let us love the world, love our neighbor, and respect every human life.