

Divine Mercy Parish
Feast of St. Francis of Assisi
Thurs. Oct. 4, 2012

Galatians 6:14-18
Luke 10: 1-12

Today, St. Francis is a spiritual thread we will weave into this second Triduum Mass in honor of St. Faustina. They are the two saintly threads in the sacred drama of this liturgy. They will lure us into the mystery of God and humans being in love with each other, which is the mystery celebrated in every Eucharist. God gave us both Francis and Faustina so that we could find our way to God through the two different spiritual paths they walked.

The special first reading applies to the life of St. Francis of Assisi, the little poor man who died in 1226. We hear St. Paul asserting the he would “never boast of anything but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This spiritual outlook also characterized the life of St. Francis and the rule for his community. He embraced the cross of severe penance and devoted his life of prayerful reflection on the sufferings of Christ. St. Paul also mentions that he bears on his own body “the brand marks of Jesus.” His words remind us that the body of Francis bore the wounds of Jesus (*the Stigmata*) after a mystical experience near the end of his life while in prayer on Mount La Verna.

These few verses, signed in Paul’s own hand are the conclusion of the letter to the Galatians. According to Paul, the Judaizers fear that if they preach the real “message of the cross” they might be persecuted for it by other Jews. They prefer to soften the message by preaching circumcision instead. Paul opposes that kind of vanity because it empowers FEAR as the force to avoid TRUST in preaching a dependence on the grace and favor of God through the “Cross” meaning the whole Christ-event. The historical event of Calvary, and not some physical ritual, is the life-giving principle of rebirth in the spirit of Christ. Paul was transformed in Christ through the whole Christ-event (Passion, Crucifixion, and Resurrection). This is what makes the Galatians the new Israel of God and not any ritual of the flesh.

When he says that he bears the “brand marks of Jesus in my body,” Paul is not referring to the stigmata that St. Francis had. He is referring to his suffering for Christ from illness, stoning, flogging, shipwreck, imprisonment. These “brands” mark him as a “slave of Christ Jesus.” In St. Paul’s time a *stigmata* often designated the branding used to mark a slave or an animal as someone’s possession. But, Paul gladly bears the marks in his flesh, boasting of them to those who would try to glory in another mark in the flesh, namely, circumcision.

In the Gospel, Jesus instructs seventy-two disciples who will help preach God’s kingdom to the towns of Galilee. Sending them out “*like lambs among wolves*,” suggest the hostility that marks the journey.

“Do not carry a purse” suggests the urgency of the situation that will face the disciples. Not even ordinary greetings, which could lead to distracting chatter, should deter them. Today such interference will be interrupting a meeting or dinner to take a cell phone call.

“Peace be to you” implies that peace has the power of begetting tranquility in others.

“Eat what is set before you” implies that dietary laws have no force anymore. All that matters is the message, *“the Kingdom of God has come near to you.”* It was brought near in the coming of Jesus and now it would be brought even nearer in the mission of the disciples who are extensions of his message.

“Shaking the dust off your feet” is a sign of repudiation to those towns who rejected the invitation to repentance. Sodom did not have that opportunity.

After the apostles, these followers may be our Lord’s first vocations.

St. Faustina and St. Francis Assisi’s vocations have much in common. Both were born of parents who had big plans for them. Pietro di Bernadone; a clothing merchant by trade, had many properties, traveled extensively, dined elegantly and dressed fashionably. But, his son, Francesco, would reject all that and become a beggar.

Maria Kowalska, the third of ten children, was born a peasant. Her father was a carpenter. The family was economically poor but rich in faith. After finishing school she wanted to enter the convent, but her parents refused. When she turned sixteen she went to work as a housekeeper to help support her family. Twice more she asked to enter the convent. Both times her parents refused.

Francis was constantly conflicted between visions of poverty and a life of dancing, drinking and reveling. Faustina, on the other hand, had a vision of the suffering Jesus while at a dance and rushed away to the church, where she was told by Jesus to leave for Warsaw and join a convent. She packed a small bag that night and took a train to Warsaw (130 miles away) the next morning, without the permission of her parents, and without knowing anyone in Warsaw. There she befriended Father Drabrowski who introduced her to a local lady where she stayed until she found a convent.

She was turned down by several convents because she had no dowry and in one case was told, *“We do not accept maids here”* referring to her being penniless and without much education. She was received by the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy on the condition that she would work until she could pay for her habit. She knew nothing about the convent except that she was led there. Due to her lack of education she knew her duties would forever consist of cooking, cleaning and gardening.

After working for one year as a housemaid, she saved enough money for her habit, and on April 30, 1926, at age 20, she took the name “Maria Faustina” of the Blessed Sacrament. The name Faustina means “fortunate or blessed one.” In April 1928 she took her first vows as a nun, and her parents attended the ceremony. She was a nun for just over a decade, dying October 1938.

Both saints died young; Francis at 44 and Faustina at 33. Both had a similar love affair with God though it was lived in different centuries and by walking different paths. Both left a legacy of religious communities; the Franciscans and the Sisters of Divine Mercy. And their feast days are celebrated one day apart. Francis preached the love of Jesus through evangelical poverty. Faustina preached the love of Jesus through her visions and images of Divine Mercy.

St. Francis has often been referred to as *God’s Fool*. He radiated God’s love in his joy, his poverty, his songs, his chats with creation, his love of lepers, his conversation with the big, bad wolf of Gubbio. His life as a spiritual adventure began at San Damiano, became more nuanced in his meeting with Pope Innocent III, deepened when a vocation story became a spiritual love story with St. Clare, took on the colors of a rainbow with his travels to the Orient and finally the Stigmata and the Canticle of the Sun brought the adventure to a joyful ending on Sunday morning Oct. 4, 1226.

Divine Mercy was the energy guiding this spiritual adventure. So, it is fitting that the life of God’s Fool be an occasion for you, People of Divine Mercy Parish, to be set on fire again with the kind of desire for dialogue with God that lures others to the presence of Christ in each of you, in this holy place, in this community of faith.