

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating July 23, 2017

Pax Christi San Antonio does not solicit donations; however, anyone wishing to join should make a donation to Pax Christi U.S.A. and notify Maria Tobin, matob@aol.com, to receive email messages sent to members. Pax Christi International was founded in 1945 with the encouragement of Bishop Pierre Marie Théas of Montauban, France, by Marthe Dortel Claudot, as a Christian lay organization dedicated to preventing a repetition of the savagery of the twentieth century's world wars.

Editorial

After the calendar, the *Third Reading* commentary is based on the gospel reading for the sixteenth Sunday in ordinary time. Tom Keene offers a reflection that includes several poems and is about a poem: *The Poem that is St. Francis of Assisi*.

Pax Christi Texas has redesigned its website; you can check it out at the address given in the list of links at the end of this newsletter. Pax Christi San Antonio's own website has received favorable comment; thank you Maria Tobin.

Calendar

Tuesday July 18, 1:00pm, in **Austin**, rally at the Capitol protesting many items on the agenda of the special session of the state legislature. Pax Christi San Antonio's delegation meets at Tony Blasi's, 4531 Briargrove St., 10:15am.

Saturday July 22, environmental film extravaganza. 1:00pm, *Green Fire: Aldo Leopold and a Land Ethic for Our Time*. 2:15pm, *Love Thy Nature*. 3:45pm, *Before the Flood*. Mabee Library Auditorium, University of the Incarnate Word, 4301 Broadway.

Sunday July 23, 4:00pm-6:00pm, Michal Lemberger, Finding the Voice of the Voiceless in the Hebrew Bible. \$17. Register by July 14. For details see www.upcsa.org/classes. SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell (park off Shook).

Tuesday July 25-Thursday July 27, 10:30-12:00 noon, Rev. Traci Smith, "Cloud of Witnesses: The Community of Christian Hebrews." \$35 for 3 sessions. Register by July 17. SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell (park off Shook).

Thursday July 27, 12:00pm-1:00pm, death penalty vigil (Mr. Taichin Preyor). Across from the Bexar County Justice Center, which is 300 Dolorosa.

Saturday July 29, 10:00am, Medicare for All March. Hemisfair Park, Yanaguana Garden, 434 S. Alamo.

Saturday July 29, environmental film extravaganza. 1:00pm, *Written on Water: A Modern Tale of a Dry West*. 2:15pm, *Watershed: Exploring a New Water Ethic for the West*. 3:45pm, *Revolution*. Mabee Library Auditorium, University of the Incarnate Word, 4301 Broadway.

Saturday August 5, 10:00am, Pax Christi San Antonio meeting. Residence of Maria Tobin, 8715 Starcrest Dr., Apt. 27.

Thursday August 10, 6:00pm-8:30pm, Dine out to support Headwaters. The mission of Headwaters, a non-profit sponsored Earth care ministry of the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, is to preserve, restore, and celebrate the rich natural, cultural, historical, spiritual, and educational values of the headwaters of the San Antonio River. At The Hoppy Monk, 1010 N. Loop 1604 (east-bound service road, between Stone Oak Parkway & U.S. 281). 15% of the bill will be donated. Make reservations before August 4 at www.groupraise.com/events/33070 .

September 7, 14, 21, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Ron Rolheiser, O.M.I., "Simply Being Good-Hearted is Not Enough: A Spirituality of Charity, Justice, and Prophecy, parts 1, 2, &3." \$60.00; 20% group discount. Contact Brenda, 210-341-1366, ext. 212. Oblate School of Theology, 285 Oblate Dr., Whitley theological Center.

Wednesday September 27, 7:00pm, Abdullah Ahmed An-Na'im, "Religious Freedom and the Universality of Human Rights: A Modernist Islamic Perspective." Saint Mary's University, One Camino Santa Maria, University Center, Conference Room A. Parking in Lots D and H.

Thursday September 28, Robert George, "Constitutional Structures, Civic Virtue, and Political v Culture." Saint Mary's University, One Camino Santa Maria, University Center, Conference Room A. Parking in Lots D and H.

Third Reading (Matthew 13:24-43)

Surprise! The full third reading of the day has three parables about surprises in the "kingdom of the heavens": The farmer who sowed good seed and discovered noxious tares growing up with the wheat, the tiny mustard seed growing into a tree, and yeast expanding the size of bread. The shortened reading that may be used in some services has only the surprise of finding tares growing along with the wheat. While the other two parables come from Mark and "Q" (a sayings source also used by Luke) respectively, the surprise of finding an infestation of tares is unique to Matthew's gospel; it is something he uniquely wanted to communicate. He wanted to point out that it was not merely the growth of the Christian movement that was surprising, but that it was also contaminated.

"An enemy did this." The farmer makes a cold assessment. He does not blame the seed or the slaves who handled it, but analyzes the situation. "Let them both grow

together until the harvest....” The slaves will have the added labor of harvesting the tares and the wheat separately; the farmer will be inconvenienced in having to direct a work made complex by an enemy. In general, those who would make themselves into enemies inconvenience their rivals, burden workers, and dishonor themselves. Note that it is the people low on the totem pole who most endure the effects of malice.

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The Poem that is St. Francis of Assisi

Tom Keene

In his time, St. Francis was a sign of contradiction to those times. By the time he was an adult, the dark spirit of the Crusades had for a hundred years swept over Christian Europe. That spirit beckoned Christians of the West to kill Muslims in the land where Jesus walked and to kill Jews along the way and even to kill Christians of the East. In doing this they proudly wore the banner of Jesus and sincerely believed they were honoring God.

During the Fifth Crusade, Francis did two things we know of to contradict that Crusading spirit. He asked for and got from the pope the granting of an indulgence to Christians who made pilgrimage to the church at Assisi. Thus, was offered to pilgrims a peaceful alternative to that indulgence offered for pilgrimage on Crusade. Francis also made a peaceful pilgrimage on the Fifth Crusade where, passing through battlefield lines, he met with Egypt's Sultan al-Kamil. They engaged in an inter-faith conversation and parted in mutual appreciation.

This time of Francis was also a time of growing wealth for society and the church. The Dark Ages of Europe were over. A relative stability had begun which enabled crafts and trade to prosper as it did for the family of Francis. More and more, people discovered that it felt good to be rich, and to have things. But Francis, with his religious brothers and sisters, discovered a contradiction: that poverty, which Francis called Lady Poverty, when freely chosen was a way to the treasures of God.

How do we explain this extraordinary man and the revolution of consciousness he brought to his world? There are of course many ways, and one way is to see Francis as a poet who made of his life one great poem and offered it to God.

To grasp this metaphor, we could try to understand the difference between a mere chore and the doing of a work of art, or a work of love. A chore is a task required by practical necessity, such as taking out the garbage, sweeping the floor, or something assigned from a job description. Such tasks are good and holy in the divine economy when done in the spirit of love. But there is a different kind of doing that flows from our very being when we do out of the quest for truth, love, goodness or beauty. There are no wages for such doing. Rather the doing is such that it redounds back to our being to enhance who and what we are. That is wage enough. Such was the life Francis lived.

That life was a response to God's call. We name that call a vocation.

Vocations

Are they calls
to take up careers, to market ourselves,
or to give flesh to the body becoming,
to begin a telling of who we are?

What Who, what What calls?
Some angel we wrestled in soul's
dark midnight before first light ever?
Some sketch we roughed out on a scroll?
What signs can tell if we heard the call?
What scars bear witness that we answered?

It is clear that the mystery of the Incarnation rested at the center of Francis' grasp of the gospel. We see this in the story of Francis creating the first nativity scene. He brought together an ox, a donkey, a baby and several villagers to portray Joseph, Mary, shepherds and magi. He did this to bring home to people who could not read how the gospels of Matthew and Luke imaged the meanings of God's eternal Word becoming here and now flesh.

That is what poets do. They attend to mystery and celebrate it in the sacramental media of words, sounds, symbols and images. Poets expect to be surprised by mystery. James Joyce called these surprises epiphanies. Epiphanies are the stuff of poetry and the grail of poets. Christian custom gives the name epiphany to the showing forth of Jesus to the magi and the gentile world.

Epiphany

Did the Eternal Word that Judean night
leap down from bright celestial height
collapsing the light years of distance
into the micro-measurement of presence?

Or like the shapeless zygote, from which we rose,
did Eternal Form reach itself into toes
and teeth, eyes, ears, fingerprints and face
to drink the mother-milk of our race?

Or like the reverse of the universe's primordial explosion
into space and time, did Utter Extension find implosion
in an infant dropped from ancestor's dreams of destiny
down a maiden's womb into Bethlehem's epiphany?

What Patient Force sought to sire in minds the inconceivable,
that our hungry, death-strewn world now holds the unreachable,
that the fat and strong are cast down from their heights

and the frail and afraid rise in the Wind like kites?

For Francis, all creation and everything created was an epiphany, a revelation of God. In his *Canticle of the Sun*, originally called *Canticle of the Creatures*, Francis praises God for sun, moon, stars, sister water, brother fire and sister earth, “brother wind and air, fair and stormy, all weather moods.” Francis saw how in the good news of the Incarnation our blessings include the very stuff of our being.

What We Are

Material is what we are,
immersed in a universe of stuff,
each thing in its own moment
momentous:

 each flower,
 every single baby
 in its cry for milk,
 every tart taste,
 each twinge of yearning,
 every jazz beat,
 each aesthetic hunger.

Yet each bit of stuff tells
of some Awe-breathing All,
some Ultimate Other:
 the More that is beyond,
 the More that we become
 when we know
 we be.

For all the joy Francis took in the wonders of creation he did not shrink from the facts of suffering and death in this world. His embrace of all realities, whether painful or joyful, showed an intuitive grasp of the creative tension of opposites coming together to transcend their particular limitations. The famous *Prayer of St. Francis* has the lover comforting the hater, the joyful embracing the sad, the hopeful assuring the despairing. This creative tension can even be found in kites and poems.

Kites and Poems

Bound to strings and words
they strain for range.
Cut the string,
the kite falls.
Stop the words,
the poem remains a ghost.

But bound:
see them soar, dip, dive,
wind scooping,
testing the tension,
riding it.

Be wind to my kite
that we be poem:
bound, yet free.

In his understanding of the gospel stories, Francis was clear about this creative tension of opposites. He could see that Jesus' "good news for the poor" was not likely to be heard as good news by the rich. Luke tells of Jesus coming out of the desert to the synagogue of Nazareth and announcing the time has come "to proclaim liberty to the captives" and "to set the downtrodden free." His listeners were hardly delighted at this "good news." They promptly tried to throw him off a cliff. Luke also has Mary announcing that God is pulling down princes from their thrones and exalting the lowly, filling the hungry with good things and sending the rich away empty. Proclaiming such a "good news" is not for sissies afraid to take up their cross and follow Jesus to Calvary.

As a poet, and as one who understood persecution, Francis must have appreciated the irony of being marginalized by his own community over issues about living the gospel in real life. Had Francis read Plato's Republic he might have mused over Plato wishing to banish poets from the state.

Beware the Poets

Prophetic spies,
they see light before dawn,
dark before dusk.

Treacherous informers,
they tell tales of phoenix rising,
of wisdom claimed at beauty beheld.

Rude arouasers,
they blast scales from our eyes,
coax us from our infirmary beds,
erase denials of who we are,
affirm the truths we fear.

Hence,
let us banish them from our republic
lest the blind see,
the deaf hear,

the cripples dance,
the possessed be freed,
and the services of our dominion
be required no longer.

In his meditations and communing with nature Francis understood, as few have before or since, the intimate connection between life and death. While most of us live out our lives in fear and denial of death, Francis embraced it, calling it Sister Death. To Francis, death may have seemed utterly natural. Possibly he meditated on how animals and vegetables give their lives for us. If the creatures we kill by eating them so that we may live could speak to us, what might they say?

Volunteer Tomato

I create my color
as a call to consume.
So when you see me,
see me with hungry eyes.
When you tear my skin between your teeth
and hear my lush guts burst,
feel with me my spurt-squirt gush,
enter my joy in surrender.

When you taste my rendering
of sun, earth, air and rain,
make in your mouth a mix
of your juices and mine.

As I become you
celebrate my becoming
that when we die
we can show
death how to do it.

In the poem that is the life of St. Francis of Assisi, there runs the theme and reality of life/death/resurrection. Every Easter/Springtime, Christians celebrate how after the dead of winter, life leaps forth renewed. For many of us that celebration is a one-day event. For Francis, it was a lifetime affair.

Hymeneal for Francis

In his unsealed celibacy
Francis did not deny love

or try to force it,
but let it squeeze itself
into all forms and beyond.

The wet dream from which he woke,
in red stained stigma,
promised the consummation
his hungry heart had courted.

A lover's juice
oozed from his hands,
feet and side,
a once invisible ink
legible at last.

Ultimately,
Sister Death and Francis,
engaged since birth,
completed kept love.

Like a Jewish groom's
crystal crushing step,
they shattered the glass
that separates.

At Death's patient urging
Francis broke her bloody seal,
bled himself into the waiting womb
of the Universe.

Tom Keene

May the Voice of the Muse
be heard in our land
www.tomkeenesmuse.com

Links

Pax Christi International
<http://www.paxchristi.net/>

Pax Christi U.S.A.

<http://www.paxchristiusa.org>

Pax Christi Texas

<http://www.paxchristitexas.org>

Pax Christi San Antonio

<http://www.paxchristisa.org>

COPS / Metro Alliance

www.copsmetro.com/

Marianist Social Justice Collaborative

www.msic.net

Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, International JPIC Committee

<http://sacvci.blogspot.com/>

San Antonio Peace Center

<http://www.sanantoniopace.center>

Interfaith Radio, (*Interfaith Voices*)

<http://www.interfaithradio.org/>

Texas Catholic Campaign to End the Death Penalty

www.txccedp.org