

Wisdom Archetypes

St. Francis of Assisi

February 26, 2019

Common Thread

*“You are vitally important
to the history of the Universe.”*

Controversy

Make your own mind that of the mind of Christ Jesus:

Who, being in the form of God,
did not count equality with God
something to be grasped.

But he emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
becoming as human beings are;

and being in every way like a human being,
he was humbler yet,
even to accepting death, death on a cross.

And for this God raised him high,
and gave him the name
which is above all other names;

so that all beings
in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld,
should bend the knee at the name of Jesus

and that every tongue should acknowledge
Jesus Christ as Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

This hymn from Philippians expresses several scriptural elements basic to the spirituality of St. Francis:

Christ's incarnation, his taking on human form, was a self-emptying, a letting go, a *kenosis*; not done out of necessity, but out of humility.

Christ becomes a slave, to be of service.

Christ embraces human suffering and death,
God his Father transforms this into

resurrection and new life.

Best known and most loved Christian saint.

More biographies about Francis of Assisi in more languages than any other person in history.

Born: Assisi, Italy–1181 / 1182 d. October 3, 1226 (Feast Day Oct. 4)

Medieval “Playboy”, son of rising Merchant class family – but he was characterized by singing, joy and generosity.

Ideal was to become a knight

1204 he went off to war with Assisi's perennial enemy, Perugia.

He was injured and captured in battle.

Due to prison conditions he contracted malaria and bone tuberculosis.

During imprisonment he sang.

About a year later he was ransomed by his father.

During his recuperation he grew disenchanted with his life, changed his ambition: now he was to become a knight of the “Great King” knowing that to be a knight in Christ's court meant living a *very* different life.

Conversion:

His definitive conversion came when he faced his greatest fear.

He encountered a leper along the road, dismounted from his horse and kissed him.

He saw the Christ in him – everything changed
– What was before loathsome became sweetness.

Seeing Christ in those who suffer.

Mission: “Francis, rebuild my church – for you see it is ruins.”

While at prayer in a dilapidate church of San Damiano, Francis heard the voice of Christ speaking to him from the cross, “Francis, rebuild my church – for you see it is ruins.”

At first he literally interpreted and set about repairing the church with his own hands.

Eventually he began to see his larger commission to bring rebuild the entire church through a return to Gospel values of humility, poverty and simplicity.

Focus:

Gospel based – poverty / humility / simplicity – *kenosis*

Love of God's creation. *The Great Chain of Being*

Spirituality – for everyone

“Third way” – both/and

Gospel poverty / humility / simplicity – because Jesus chose to live that way, it must be important:

Literally interpreted, but not condescending toward others
Joyful, yet a severe ascetic

Incarnational spirituality → honoring creation,
what we would today call awareness of ecology,
because Christ is the firstborn of every creature.

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.” Colossians 1:15

Neither a theologian nor a priest (a true *minor*);

Francis could be interpreted as being anti-intellectual;
but he realized the blind obsession with knowledge.

“I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things
from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.” Matthew 11:25

The quest for “spiritual perfection” is not just for priests and monks,
but rather the path for every Christian to follow.

Mission to the streets;

Francis and his brothers had no home.

Highly respectful towards everyone, especially those entrusted with providing the Sacraments.

Not anti-clerical, but showing *solidarity* with suffering humanity.

Holding the tension of opposites.

“The best criticism of the bad is to do the better.”

The “third way” – Not “either/or” but “both/and” recognizing the good in all whether
Christian or not.

Seeing from another perspective.

Prompts for reflection and discussion:

How did Francis live out the mantra
– “*You are vitally important to the history of the Universe.*”?

Have you had in your life a situation in which
you were forced to hold the tension of
opposites?

Did you eventually resolve that tension?
How?

Further readings:

Sabatier, Paul *Life of St. Francis of Assisi* Charles Scribner & Sons, 1894 Available free as Kindle edition.

Sabatier, Paul *The Road to Assisi: The Essential Biography of St. Francis*, Paraclete Press, 1989 Available at: Harris County Library Call No. B Fra ISBN: 1-55725-328-5

Armstrong et al. Editors *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, New City Press, 2000 Available at Harris County Public Library Call No. 271.302 Fra v.2, ISBN 1-56548-112-7

Green, Julien *God's Fool: The Life and Times of Francis of Assisi*, Harper, 1987 Available at: Harris County Library ISBN: 0-06-063464-3

Hays, Fr. Edward *The Passionate Troubadour: A Medieval Novel about Francis of Assisi*, Ave Maria Press (Forest of Peace), 2004, Pages: 638, Illustrated: Hays and Katherine R. Coleman **ISBN: 0-939516-9-1**

Kazantzakis, Nikos *Saint Francis* Ballantine Books, 1962 Translated from the Greek by P. A. Bien Available at Harris County Public Library Call No. 62-9606 Library copy has Introduction by John Michael Talbot

Tolan, John *St. Francis and the Sultan: The Curious History of a Christian-Muslim Encounter* .Oxford University Press, 2009

Available at: on-line @ http://sufibooks.info/Sufism/Saint_Francis_and_the_Sultan_John_Tolan.pdf

Kennedy, Jr., Robert F. *Saint Francis of Assisi: A Life of Joy*, Hyperion Books for Children, 2005 Call No. J 271.302 Ken, ISBN: 0-7868-1875-1

Illustrated: Dennis Nolan

Stories told: Based on words of the Canticle *Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace*

Wildsmith, Brian *Saint Francis*, Oxford University Press, 1995 Children's book.

Kruse, John V. *Lent and Easter: Wisdom from St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi*, Liguori, 2008 ISBN: 978-0-7648-1765-6

Rohr, Richard O.F.M. *Hope Against Darkness: The Transforming Vision of Saint Francis in an Age of Anxiety*, St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2001 ISBN: 0-86716-485-9

Coming Attractions:

March 26th:

Teilhard de Chardin

April 30th:

Dorothy Day

May 28th:

Jim Carrey