**19 Pentecost, Oct. 4, 2015, Job 1, Ps 26, Hebrews 1-2, Mark 10:2-16; Rev. Mary S. Trainor**

Today we celebrate the feast day of St. Francis, as well as the 19th Sunday after Pentecost. St. Francis was quite a guy. He is best known nowadays for his love for animals, and indeed he did love animals - but he especially loved people. St. Francis showed incredible mercy to the poor and sick, and he did it cheerfully. He bathed the sores of lepers and prayed over them, when others would not get near them. He owned nothing, and gave all that he had to the poor. Was Francis like that his whole life, from his childhood? The answer is surprisingly "no."

Let me tell you about Francis as a young man back in the 13th Century in Italy. He was an arrogant rich young man, who had been brought up with a silver spoon in his mouth. But as a young adult, he went off to serve as a soldier, as other young men had to do. While in a war, Francis got injured, became a prisoner of war, and then finally was able to come home. Things were beginning to look different to him, and he started praying. One day, he ended up at a local church praying, and heard God asking him to "rebuild my church." His life was transformed, for Francis learned the reality of Jesus and his call to serve Him. Francis' father was very unhappy about this change in his son; his plan was to have Francis take over the family business. So, Francis' dad called upon the local Bishop to make his son come to his senses. This ended up being a public gathering of many in the town square! The confrontation occurred, and Francis did not react as his father or the bishop had hoped he would. Instead, Francis did something that was bold, crazy, memorable, and courageous: he decided to begin his life of poverty and service to the Lord at that moment. He gave back to his father everything his father had ever given him, and that included his clothes. Francis stripped naked, folded the fine clothes before the bishop and his father in the town square, and walked off into his new life, dedicated to the Lord. Can you imagine having witnessed this? Some said that Francis went off skipping and whistling naked into a nearby field of flowers --to his new humble, simpler, and joyful life. Maybe he was singing to himself from our Psalm for this morning (26:7), "***Singing aloud a song of thanksgiving and recounting all your wonderful deeds....I will bless the Lord."***

Our new Bishop, Matt Gunter, has a new vision for our Diocese - he is rolling this new vision out now, during his visits and at our Diocesan Convention in a couple of weeks. This new vision is as follows: "**We are to be communities of delight and mercy."**  It is a simple, and yet profound message--a message you will be hearing more about in the coming year. These two words, delight and mercy, are not common in our everyday language -- yet they are both words that St Francis lived out, and words that we are to live out. God delights in His creation and God delights in each of us human beings, who were created in His image. Synonyms of the word "delight" include: joy, glee, gladness. We are to experience joy through Jesus. In our reading from the 1st chapter of Hebrews this morning, we heard about Jesus this way, "***He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and He sustains all things by His powerful word***." We are to live out our delight in Jesus! Julian of Norwich said, “**For we are God's bliss, because He endlessly delights in us; and so with His grace shall we delight in Him.**” Do others see us living from a place of delight and mercy, like St. Francis of Assisi? I hope so.

There is a little boy who visits the house next to us, and I have seen him through our yard grow up from a cute baby to a nine year old. I notice him because he is very noticeable -- when he visits, the whole neighborhood knows he is there. He is delightfully loud in everything he does, from riding his bike and playing ball to running and raking. When I walk by, he comes right up to me and asks me questions about my dog, my clothes, my hiking poles, my bike. He is unabashedly out there, authentically himself. Jesus talked about little children today in our Gospel. He said, "***Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it***." The Kingdom of God is wherever Jesus is, so receiving the Kingdom of God is receiving Jesus into your heart. When we think about approaching Jesus, we don't think about approaching him like the little boy I just described! Instead, we tend to think from an adult perspective--after all, this is God's Son, our Savior, we are talking about! We tend to think we need to be mature, sophisticated, a bit formal - using the right words, not too needy *(all those things that we are expected to show in the world)*....but Jesus tells us just the opposite! How do little children ask for things? They put it right out there! How do little children share their feelings? Honestly, completely. There is a freshness, a purity, a delight to a little child's way. We are to go to Him with delight, with our authentic selves, unabashedly. How did Jesus end this passage of the Gospel? It says that Jesus took the little children "***up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them.***"

You don't have to run naked through a field or skip or whistle to receive God's blessing....you already have God's blessing, for He loves you so much that He gave His life that you might have life and have it abundantly. This is the transforming message that St. Francis learned that day, and this is the transforming message for you today.

As a community of delight and mercy, let us pray together a prayer that St. Francis prayed:

"The Divine Praises:" **"You are holy, Lord, the only God, and your deeds are wonderful. You are strong. You are great. You are the Most High. You are Almighty. You, Holy Father, are King of heaven and earth. You are Three and One, Lord God, all Good. You are Good, all Good, supreme Good. Lord God, living and true, You are love. You are wisdom. You are humility. You are endurance. You are rest. You are peace. You are joy and gladness. You are justice and moderation. You are all our riches, and You suffice for us. You are beauty. You are gentleness. You are our protector. You are our guardian and protector. You are our courage. You are our haven and our hope. You are our faith, our great consolation. You are our eternal life, Great and Wonderful Lord, God Almighty, Merciful Savior. Amen."**