

DEAR FRANCIS: LETTER TO A SAINT
Season of Creation, Week 4, Oct 2, 2016
St. Paul's Cathedral, Kamloops
The Very Rev. Ken Gray

Dear Francis

I write today from the twenty-first century to you born in the late twelfth century. In this fantastic correspondence I hope to explore what is common between us, as we lead our various churches.

In a dramatic vision you were told to rebuild the church of your day. I am also led to lead my own church in a new way in my own day. How does the Good Shepherd, Jesus, want me to lead now? As I invite people to seek salvation, am I correct along with others in claiming that Salvation is Creation Healed. I think so, and such an understanding parallels your own teaching and experience.

You clearly understand yourself and your church as inter-connected with creation. In our day, we still tend to think of creation—as a place, an issue, a recreation, a separate energy and productivity which supports life including humanity. You make no distinction between the two, which is also the wisdom of many if not all indigenous communities and teachers. We are one; all are one. As one prospers, all celebrate together. As one suffers, all grieve together. As we view extinction of species, food chain disruption, rising sea levels, extreme weather events, ocean acidification, we injure ourselves.

In the church of your day, which tended to think of itself as the author and controller of its own destiny, a superior attitude which resulted in the inquisition amongst other things, you called it back to its roots, as a

humble, caring, responsive and faithful body of Christ. We can learn from your story in our day.

For you, the church, our church, is the whole Creation in a process of renewal. We still think of the church as a club, an organization, an institution, sometimes as a collection of buildings. You tell us the church is a visible expression of creation, integrated, with all parts working together, with no area of life left untouched, unchanged, unredeemed. St. Paul agrees with you in this.

As you talk of the church, you likewise describe the world in the new way. As your namesake, Pope Francis says: “Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise.” What is the world? A place where people live and suffer? Yes: a place where creativity abounds? Yes; a joyful mystery; Yes indeed!

A very insightful author, Carlo Carretto wrote a lovely book given to me in the early 1980s titled I FRANCIS. In a series of meditations he captures well your story and your spirit, in words like these:

Sorrow had broken the soil, where a bad upbringing, based on permissiveness and weakness, had only hardened the ground.

It had acted as a plow, turning over the earth, breaking it up, and letting the season of spring burst out.

Above all it had done two great things for me. It had deprived me of my security, and it had **given me new eyes**.

I had the impression that I had never seen a single thing before, and I understood what the psalm meant, “They have eyes, but never see” (Ps. 115:5). **I had not seen!**

Yes, now I saw the sun, the moon, the earth, the springs, the flowers. I had not seen them before.

They had passed me by, **taken for granted**. They might as well have been landscape. I had merely gaped at them, as one gapes at strangers. But now they spoke to me, I felt them near, I loved them, they moved me.

Everything seemed new to me, ever new, and as light entered my **eyes it transformed itself into joy within my heart**.

You would have enjoyed meeting Hans Rainer Rilke, an early twentieth-century lyric poet. Like you, his eyes opened in new and profound ways.

Here in this vast landscape, swept by winds from the sea, I wonder if there is any person anywhere who can answer the questions that stir in the depths of your being. For even the best miss the mark when they use words for what is elusive and nearly unsayable. But nonetheless, I believe you are not left without a solution, if you turn to things like those that are refreshing my eyes. If you ally yourself with nature, with her sheer existence, with the small things that others overlook and that so suddenly can become huge and immeasurable; if you have this love for what is plain and try very simply, as one who serves to win the confidence of what seems poor: then everything will become easier for you, more coherent and somehow more reconciling, perhaps not in your conscious mind, but in your innermost awareness.” (Worpswede, July 16, 1903, Letters to a Young Poet)

You Francis also left us some wonderful poetry, which many have set to music, words like these:

O Most High, all-powerful, good Lord God,
to you belong praise, glory, honour and all blessing.

Be praised, my Lord, for all your creation
and especially for our Brother Sun,
who brings us the day and the light;
he is strong and shines magnificently.

O Lord, we think of you when we look at him.
Be praised, my Lord, for Sister Moon,
and for the stars which you have set
shining and lovely in the heavens.

I have a couple of pericopes to share, which I know inspired you, as you encourage us how to live differently, gently, respectfully, sensibly:

“Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. (Matthew 6:25-29)

May God grant us the ability to glimpse your wisdom, which is to look at everything, anew, with our eyes open as if for the very first time. Amen.