

GOD THE GIVER

Stewardship Narrative Series presented by TENS

*The Feast of St. Francis
Matthew 11:25-30*

As a lover of “all creatures great and small” I have long been in the St. Francis of Assisi fan club. The tradition of celebrating our reverence for, and interdependence with, all of God’s creation is one that felt instantly familiar and coherent to me when I first learned of St. Francis as a college student. My paternal grandfather, raised on the Shinnecock Indian reservation in New York, had very early on instilled in me a respect and care for all of creation. It wasn’t until much later that I understood the fullness of St. Francis’ story and what the example of his life meant for my relationship and stewardship of things temporal too.

It is not lost on me that the Church has been hesitant to have festivals celebrating the embracing of “Lady Poverty” as St. Francis did. To reflect and pray about his rejection of the wealth and privilege to which he was born requires shining what is too often a convicting light on my own relationship to “stuff” and money. Yet, to

embrace St. Francis is to ask questions that bring me face to face with Jesus: can I practice enough non-attachment to walk away from the “stuff”—the smartphone, the wardrobe, the worldly comforts—in order to serve others more generously? What does a life of “self-giving” really look like in 2015? What do I need to let go of in order to see the world in all of its pain and glory, differently?

There is a space between just celebrating the feast day of St. Francis and walking away from our possessions and joining the Franciscan order in which the church is invited to dwell. This space, long occupied by Jesus, is one that requires us to continually assess what, if anything, is getting in the way of our care for others and all creation. Generosity with whatever we may have begins with the ability to see and revere God’s creation. I believe this is part of the ongoing essential work of stewardship. This work takes more than a feast day to take



root. I like to wonder what the world might be like if we took on the spiritual practice of seeing, caring and giving as a daily, year-long way of living and then celebrated St. Francis as a true stewardship feast. And because stewardship is a function of addition and not subtraction, of course we would still bless the animals.

Reflection Questions:

How does the life of Francis of Assisi invite you to reflect on your relationship to money and possessions?

How might you and your church community embrace the fuller narrative and example of St. Francis’ life?

In what ways might care for all of creation ignite generosity?



The Rev. Jennifer Baskerville-Burrows is the director of networking for the Diocese of Chicago with oversight of communications, community engagement and development. She and her family live just north of the city in the suburb of Skokie, Ill.

