

A foundational insight of Roman Catholicism, its key insight into God's relationship with humanity is sacramentality. It is a sacramentality that springs from the conviction and faith in the statement in Genesis: and IT WAS GOOD. Creation, as it left the mouth of God was good. And all creation was redeemed as it received the spirit and enfleshed God's only son, Jesus Christ. Creation is good, humanity is good. What's more, it is – we are – beloved by God. So much so that in the crib of Christmas the creative Word became one of us, on the cross of Calvary he died for us and in the chalice of the Eucharist he abides with us. All creation is infused with this fleshy, creaturely love of God; a God who seeks to be with us.

By contrast with this sacramental view of the world, the magical view of the world believes that divinity must be imposed onto the material world or dominate over others. It seeks to add energy, i.e. it seeks to charm the material world or others by words or gestures; as if to bring God into where He is not, to command God's presence; to make good what is not good. Say the magic words, recite the spell and poof, the broom sweeps the floor or the chair floats in the air. By contrast the Roman Catholic, the sacramental, view of the world and of women and men is that the energy, the divine spark, is already in the world, already in the person both by creation and by redemption. Words and ritual don't make anything holy, the holiness is already there...and it was good.

When a priest blesses water, his words do not make the water holy so it is somehow becomes fit for divine use but rather, the words of blessing make evident to all who hear them that the water already is holy. The words and ritual of our Eucharist don't make the shared meal sacred but show us, remind us how the shared meal, the remembering of Jesus is already a sacred action, already a holy thing. The rite of Reconciliation doesn't make the asking and receiving of forgiveness a holy thing, it is already, in itself, a holy thing. The words and ritual of the Sacrament of Reconciliation only bring the inherent holiness of pardon to

the fore; knock us on the head, if you will, to remind us that forgiveness is sacred, something that is of God.

Creation ***is*** good. Mankind ***is*** redeemed. The kingdom of God ***is*** already among us. In how many places in the gospel does Jesus tell us this: “The kingdom of God is at hand,” (Mt 4:17; Mk 1:15). “The kingdom of God has come upon you,” (Mt.12:28; Lk 11:20). “It is your father’s pleasure to give you the kingdom,” (Lk 12:32) “The kingdom of God is near,” (Lk 21:31). “Receive the kingdom of God like a child,” (Lk 18:17).

Francis of Assisi discovered the sacramentality of this world as a young man and clung to it for the rest of his short life. It permeated his bones and was the basis for everything he did.

This discovery clarified his vision in the extreme. With this new view he saw everyone and all creation anew, for the first time.

Uncorrupted by willful sin, Francis saw nature and animals as perfect; just as God made them. They praised their creator, and reminded us to do the same, simply in their being. Francis’ love of animals was absolutely genuine but it was not the superficial kind of smarmy love we find depicted in holy cards, romantic paintings and bird baths. Francis didn’t love animals because they were warm and fuzzy. Francis loved them because in them he saw the love of God perfectly alive and intimately in the world.

Francis saw that inanimate nature too, was as filled with beauty and holiness when ***he*** looked at it in the 13th century as it was when God called it into being. As an outpouring of God’s love, the sun and moon were no less children of our loving father than he himself was. All women and men were his sisters and brothers, all creatures – water, fire, wind – all were kin to him. To all of this goodness Francis gave a courtly respect.

But how did Francis so change his perspective? What happened? How could Francis, once a wealthy, big party boy turned soldier, pursuing status, wealth and power, typical of his class in medieval Italy, how could he so drastically change his view of the world? He didn't; God did. Francis himself tells us this. It was the leper that gave Francis the glasses he needed to see the deeper reality of God's presence in the world and it was God that brought Francis to the leper. "The Lord," he says in his testament, "led me among them..."

It was there among the outcasts, among the poorest of the poor, the abandoned of society that Francis saw the face of God. Note that he did not have this view while he was among the elite of Assisi, among the wealthy, the powerful, among those lusting for glory in war. No, it was among those that society rejected; among those whom Francis formerly thought so awful that even to see them, he says, was "bitterness." These poor refuse of society showed Francis that all were God's beloved children and that all were good; all were his brothers and sisters. It was from this experience that Francis began to look differently not only at other people but all creation now looked different to him.

In this experience he came to understand the profundity of Christ becoming a human and sharing our daily life and then giving his life. Because of creation and because the incarnation became a baby in a crib – all men and women deserved the utmost kindness. But especially those whom society deprived of it. No one in Francis' time suffered as much social deprivation as the leper. So of course God led Francis among the lepers to show this to him.

From this point on in his life, Francis would never turn back to his old way of seeing; the way society saw and ***still*** sees. From this point on Francis would commit himself and challenge others to see the world through his new glasses.

For 800 years the followers of this little man from Assisi have tried to see the world and others as Francis did – as the reflection of God's purest love – in nature and in the face of the poorest and neediest among us.

This feast day is the perfect time for all of us to live up to our Catholic, sacramental faith in the inherent goodness – the **God-given** goodness and the **Christ-redeemed** status of all men and women, of all the world.