

**“So they went off and preached repentance.”**

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

**Once upon a time**, there was a young fellow by the name of Frank. Today, we know him as St. Francis of Assisi. Francis was born into a wealthy, Italian family. Even as a teenager, he was a playboy and a spendthrift. He used his generous allowance to pay the bills of his rowdy friends.

In the year 1202, hostilities broke out between the towns of Assisi & Perugia. Young Francis joined the army of Assisi and went off to fight. Early on, he was taken prisoner and spent the next year in chains in a filthy dungeon.

After his release, it took a whole year for him to regain his health. The year in prison and the year of recuperation changed his life forever. He put aside his expensive clothes and put on the garb of a poor worker. On the back of his garb, he drew a large, white cross.

Young Francis then left home and took up the life of a hermit. His new home was a tumbledown church on the outskirts of Assisi. There, he spent hours alone in prayer.

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Francis developed a deep love and concern for the poor and ‘rejects’ of society. This love grew in his heart because of 2 biblical teachings that touched him deeply.

**1<sup>st</sup>** is from the book of Genesis. It says that every person is created in the ‘image and likeness of God’...a point I often harp on. The part of us that is like God... is our immortal soul, which gives us an intellect and a freewill. Consequently, unlike all other animals, we do not have to live on instinct. Also, unlike all other animals, we are held accountable for our free-choices in life.

**2<sup>nd</sup>** is from the Gospel of Matthew. It says that whatever we do for the least person... we do for Jesus.

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One day, Francis was attending Mass and the Gospel was the exact same one I just read to you from St. Mark. Francis was struck by Jesus’ instruction to journey forth & preach the Gospel, taking nothing for the journey, not even food or money. This instruction gave a whole new direction to Francis’ life. He gave up his hermit’s life and journeyed forth, in poverty, to preach the Gospel in towns & villages.

His charismatic personality drew other young men to follow him. These first ‘Franciscans’ went about caring for the sick and helping the poor. They slept under the stars & ate whatever was given them.

The group grew in such numbers that the 27-year-old Francis sought and got permission from the pope to form a religious community. The new community was dedicated to living in poverty, serving the poor, and being itinerate preachers.

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Now, some people criticize Francis’ approach to helping the poor. These same people criticize Mother Teresa for the same reason. They say that neither saint attacks the roots of poverty, that both approach poverty superficially, merely putting band-aids on huge wounds.

I feel this is a terribly misplaced criticism. The call of Francis—like that of Mother Teresa—is a call to help the poor in their present, ‘here and now’, situation. Like Jesus, Francis & Mother Teresa leave to others the political task of mobilizing public opinion and governments to attack the root causes of poverty.

We would do well, at this point, to respect the different calls to service that God gives. Recall Paul’s letter to the Corinthians on this matter. He says:

**“There are different kinds of spiritual gifts.... There are different ways of serving...  
different abilities to perform service...  
the Spirit’s presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all.” 1 Cor.12:4-7**

**“What’s this all about; where’s all this leading, Padre?” you ask.**

**Well, I am glad you asked that question!**

*This has all been leading to my important and final point:*

*Today, in this environment, more than ever, we need the kind of witness to serving the poor that we find in the lives of Francis and Mother Teresa. We can preach the Gospel... by showing our love and concern for the poor.*

*The world needs people to help the poor & the hungry, ‘here & now,’ in their present situation.*

*Jesus was such a person, as was Francis, as was Mother Teresa. And we can be such a person.*

*Now, just hear me out.*

*The teaching in today’s Gospel is clear. All of us are called to preach the Gospel. None of us is excused. We can preach the Gospel by showing our love and concern for others, especially the less fortunate. Of course, our Ladies of Charity, Christian Mothers, & Knights of Columbus/Columbiettes have special collections & fundraisers to, literally, feed and clothe the needy, to help the less fortunate in our area without prejudice of any kind. 100% of that special income goes to the poor!*

*You know, it is not surprising that Mother Teresa began her acceptance speech of the Nobel Prize in Oslo, Norway, in 1979 by reciting the Prayer of St. Francis, which is also the official, daily prayer of her Order.*

*I now close with that same prayer,  
for it spells out how we can preach the Gospel... by the example of our daily lives:*

**“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.**

**Where there is hatred, let me sow love;**

**Where there is injury, pardon;**

**Where there is doubt, faith;**

**Where there is despair, hope;**

**Where there is darkness, light;**

**Where there is sadness, joy.**

**Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console;**

**To be understood, as to understand;**

**To be loved, as to love;**

**For it is in giving that we receive;**

**it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;**

**and it is in dying**

**That we are born to eternal life.”**

*May Almighty God, our loving Abba, bless you...  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*