

St. Francis of Assisi. Sunday Oct. 3rd. 2021. St. Luke ch12. V 22 -34.

A Canon of Truro Cathedral once said that there enough Celtic saints in Cornwall to fill up each day of the year. The saints are fascinating in their variety and exhilarating in their effect. They were people who became fired with the love of God, lighting up the darkness of the world around them. Their lives can be summed up in the sentence from the Prayer Book "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

On Monday Oct 4th the Church celebrates the life of St. Francis of Assisi. Francis was born in 1181, the son of a wealthy merchant. He had a frivolous youth. After suffering imprisonment during a civil war and illness he became a changed man. He began caring for disused churches and the poor. While at prayer in a local church, Francis heard the words "Francis, go, repair my church which you see is falling down." At first he took this literally and paid for the repairs of the local church. Later a wider ministry began. In 1210 the Pope called Francis and eleven companions to be roving preachers. Others joined them and Francis prepared a simple Rule of life for them to live by. By 1217 the group began to be a religious Order which witness to Our Lord Jesus Christ by preaching and emphasising the compassion and poverty of Jesus as recorded by St. Paul in Philippians Ch 2. In 1224 while at prayer, there appeared on Francis' body scars corresponding to the five wounds of the crucified Lord. St. Francis died on the evening of 3rd Oct 1226.

Looking back on his life, one factor stands out, the importance of being with people; sharing their lives; walking with them in all their ups and downs. To be an instrument of God's grace and compassion. At the core of our Faith is the centrality of "being with." At His birth Jesus was also called "Emmanuel." Meaning "God with us." Throughout His earthly ministry Our Lord was present with people whatever their situation. His presence in itself was a healing presence. His ministry to Zacchaeus is a model of pastoral care. It shows a moving towards Zacchaeus in coming to his home and then sharing with him in his situation, resulting in Zacchaeus' restoration to society and new life.

Within such a healing relationship there is also a commitment to sharing and caring which is seen in the life of the early Church (Acts ch2 v 31-37.) Meeting together in worship and fellowship the Church showed itself to be a caring community. Such a group had a dramatic effect on their surrounding communities. What they did was wonderful. What they were said that they had been with Jesus. St Francis illustrated this when he took a novice with him on a preaching mission. On returning to the monastery , the novice was bemused. "I thought we were going on a preaching mission." he said. "All we did was to minister to people with help and comfort." St Francis said "Exactly. We preached in the comfort we offered and in the love we showed. WE preached as we went." So can we all. The healing presence we bring, whether words are spoken or not, is a primary way in which we can be he instruments of God's love, compassion and care. God with us.