

In our divided and divisive times, today's Gospel invites us to pause, slow down, and consider our relationship with others and all of God's creation. Healing, forgiveness and restoration are Gospel challenges needed to confront intolerance. The Spirit of God works wherever God wishes and through whom God chooses. All creation reflects the beauty and goodness of God. We remain open to the varied ways the Spirit is present in the world.

The attitude of intolerance flourishes whenever "Us vs. Them" is the mentality. We see examples of one country vilifying another; of politicians in our country, who disagree with one another, turn to personal attacks. Us vs Them: there's us, and then there's them; we're right, they're not; we're pragmatic, they're manipulative; we know the truth, they're ill-informed; we're concerned with the common good, they're out to grab what they can get; we're all created equal, but some of us are more equal than others; we're the People of God, we pray for them.

Listening to a person's opinion, reconsidering another's actions, understanding someone's motivation. There are values that make for progress, that make for hope of peace. In today's Scripture, both Moses and Jesus speak loudly about intolerance. We cannot build the Kingdom of God unless we are willing to see value in the person, in creation, the other.

Soon we will look to celebrate the centenary of The Cantic of the Creatures. I refer to the Cantic now because it corresponds to the central element of Francis's personality, with a perfect consonance between the Gospel and living action. It reflects the concrete reality of life and history. It helps us understand the value and meaning that the universe has for Francis, his sense of nature. Francis insists on respect and reverence, his deep devotion to the Eucharist and the permanent presence of Christ crucified, the omnipotence of God the Creator, and the positive quality of creation as a work of beauty and goodness brought forth out of love.

The Cantic is a hymn of praise that recapitulates Francis's journey to God in and through the beautiful things of creation. It represents a lifetime of conversion as Francis strove to be "brother" to all, and to praise God despite his sufferings, his feelings of disappointment and darkness. Francis sings of the human family—brother, sister, mother—as the model of all relationships. He teaches us that we are as dependent on the elements of creation as they are dependent upon us. All creation gives praise to God. Brother Sun and Sister Moon praise God just by being sun and moon.

If Francis calls them sisters and brothers, it is only for the purpose of pointing out that anything else was created by God Himself in the same creative process as human beings. Francis goes further by revealing a web of unity within creation, with clear distinctions among the various levels, charged with the creative action of God as goodness, as beauty, as light, as life. At its center is the person, human and sinner. This gives rise to the close bond between sin and condemnation, between the Incarnation and the redemptive coming of Christ and His sacrifice on the cross for our salvation.

This rupture would have remained inseparable without God's sublime act of love when God sent His Son to become man. His Incarnation, from the moment of His birth to His Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension, with the continual intercession of Our Lady, His mother, a new and no less valid order was established. It was now on a higher plane because since it was not physical and natural, but was divine and super natural, an order born from love, the love of God for His creatures.

On this new level, evil still exists. But when we know how to understand sin, it can be beaten and overcome by the love that Christ taught us, and by the life that He demonstrated for us, and by the example Francis left us. The deeper Francis grew in relation to Christ, the more he found himself related to the things of creation as brother. His relationship with Christ changed his eternal focus, developed a deeper consciousness of “relatedness.” This is a victory that demands commitment and dedication. His concept of the world was of “fraternitas—brotherhood” in God for humanity redeemed by Christ.

