

**Lessons and Carols for Greccio**  
**Used at AFC 2023**  
**June 12, 2023**

**Hymn- Love is the Reason by Cathy Tisel Nelson**  
(From the album *Hearts on Fire*, the album can be purchased from:  
<http://www.cathynelsonmusic.com/>)

**Opening Prayer- Written by Carolyn Townes, OFS**

Loving Creator God, as we gather together united with one heart and mind, help us to recognize our glorious diversity and our courageous inclusivity - knowing that all are welcome in the crib of your Son. May this time in Greccio and all our Greccioes to come help us to see the manifestation of your love in the incarnational presence of our brother and Lord, Jesus. Saint Francis longed to show the depth of your love to all people. In creating the first Christmas creche, he gave witness to your humility to become one of us, being born in the hearts of all. For Francis, the gift of our Lord's presence was the most profound expression of God's unconditional love for each one of us. As we go forth to build relationships and make friends of strangers, let us awaken the joy that is within each of us. We make this prayer in the name of the One who gathers us, abides with us, and loves us more than we could imagine.

**Amen.**

Lessons taken from *Francis The Journey and the Dream Chapter, Christmas at Greccio* by Murray Bodo, OFM (The entire book may be purchased through Franciscan Media at: [https://shop.franciscanmedia.org/products/francis-the-journey-and-the-dream?\\_pos=1&\\_sid=5a344e249&\\_ss=r](https://shop.franciscanmedia.org/products/francis-the-journey-and-the-dream?_pos=1&_sid=5a344e249&_ss=r))

**Lesson 1:**

Someone to love, someone to care for. It was that thought which gripped his heart at Greccio that Christmas Saint Francis had decided to celebrate the Birth of Jesus in a new way. He has brought a real ox and ass to the altar so that they, too, could share in this rebirth of Christ in the bread and wine of the Christmas Eucharist.

At Christmas it was the infant Christ who was born again in human hearts, and it struck Francis that God came to earth as a baby so that we would have

**someone to care for. Christmas was the dearest of feasts because it meant that God was now one of us. Flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone, this child we could approach without fear. We could be silly and uninhibited as we sought to make Him laugh. We could be totally ourselves, because a child accepts us just as we are and screams with delight at our little performances in his or her behalf.**

**Hymn: Silent Night**

**Lesson 2:**

**Someone to care for, someone to try to please, someone to love. God, a helpless babe; God, a piece of Bread. How much trust God had in creatures! In the Eucharist and in the Nativity, we grow up because God places Himself in our care. We come out of ourselves if we are aware because now we have responsibilities for God. Not only the earth to till and creation to care for, but now God to care for.**

**Hymn: O Little Town**

### **Lesson 3:**

**So strong was Francis' desire to love, that at that Christmas Mass at Greccio, the babe of Bethlehem appeared to him alive and smiling on the cold rock. And he took the babe into his arms and held it to his heart, and the child was warm and soft. Francis' virginity was made fruitful in this child he held to his breast. He had no child but Jesus himself. His Lord had reversed the roles for him and for all who need someone to love, someone to care for.**

**Hymn: Infant Holy, Infant Lowly**

### **Lesson 4:**

**The peasants at that Mass had witnessed Francis' fatherhood, and the child became theirs as well. They had brought torches for their midnight journey from the village on the hill opposite the brothers' hermitage. But they did not need them for the journey home that night, so brightly did their own hearts burn that God had truly been enfleshed in the babe at the altar. Francis was so happy for them. These simple folk from Greccio were like Children themselves, and God had once again been revealed to little ones.**

**Hymn: Go Tell It On the Mountain**

### **Lesson 5:**

**Someone to love. That was Greccio. [Saint Francis] prayed for all the lonely people of the world that they would understand what God's enfleshment meant to them personally. God was like us now in everything but sin. And He let Himself be touched and handled by everyone who would come to Him. Someone to care for, someone to touch. That was Greccio; that was God become a man.**

**Hymn: Angels we have Heard On High**

## **Lesson 6:**

**Francis left Greccio that year with a new heart, for the brothers would keep alive the custom of celebrating Christmas in that fashion. And the people of Greccio would spread the word to the next village, and from there it would cover the whole of Italy and maybe the world.**

**Someday, perhaps, all people could look into the altar creche at Christmas and know they had someone special to love, someone divine to care for. And they would begin anew to love.**

**Hymn: Hark the Herald Angels Sing**

## **Commissioning of All Participants**

**Intro:**

**Prayer Leader: As we conclude our time together, we welcome all to participate in a commissioning service. Please stand as you are able.**

**Prayer Leader continues:**

**God of the Journey, we invoke Your holy name as we commission all in this place as they resume their daily ministries and lives.**

**Send your spirit upon them as they depart from this space to take up their task of service rooted in Gospel love.**

**And so we ask you, loving God:**

*Prayer Leader leads each side*

**All, side 1:**

**Send us forth now as You sent the Angel Gabriel, to announce the good news, the only news, the news forever new; Your birth and incarnation to save all people.**

**All, side 2:**

**Send us forth as You sent the shepherds, to spread the Good News of salvation among the poor and lowly.**

**All, side 1:**

**Send us forth as you sent Anna and Simeon, to dedicate our lives to your service and strive to see your face in every person we encounter.**

**Kathy:**

**Send us forth, O God, to places likely and unlikely; to the seats of power and strife that you may deny their ascendancy with a fearless word; to the dwellings of the powerless, that we, your servants, may bring hope and peace.**

**All:**

**Send us forth as you sent Francis and Clare,  
to be instruments of your peace, love, and joy.  
Send us to those who love, to those who fear,  
to those who are different, that we may sow love  
where there is no love and cultivate peace and good.**

**Send us forth, O God, and bid us return; for we know that  
far or near, our names are written in Your heart.**

**Prayer Leader:**

**Faithful God, in baptism you claimed us;  
and by your Holy Spirit you are working in our lives,  
empowering us to live a life worthy of our calling.  
We thank you for leading us to this time and place.  
Establish this community in your truth, and guide us by your Holy  
Spirit, that in your service we may grow in faith, hope, and love, and be  
faithful disciples, following in the footsteps of Jesus, who lives and  
reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen**

*(Commissioning prayer, Presbyterian Mission Agency, adapted)*

**As a sign of your commitment, I invite you to offer those nearest you a blessing or a sign of Christ's peace.**

*Ritual action: Invite folks to embrace to offer sign of peace or blessing.*

**Blessing:**

**As you take leave of this place,**

**The Lord bless you and keep you.**

**May He show His face to you and have mercy.**

**May He turn His countenance to you and give you peace.**

**The Lord bless you!**

**Closing Hymn- Joy to the World**