



A weekly reflection by members of the Precious Blood Community

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I once spoke to my friend, an old squirrel, about the Sacraments—he got so excited. And ran into a hollow in his tree and came back holding some acorns, an owl feather, and a ribbon he found. And I just smiled and said, “Yes dear, you understand: Everything imparts His grace.”

—attributed to St. Francis of Assisi

from **Love Poems from God; Twelve Sacred Voices from the East and West**

Daniel Ladinsky, editor and translator

My childhood parish in rural Wisconsin was staffed by priests and brothers of a Franciscan community that served Slovenian-speaking communities in this country. The two-week summer school religion class was taught by sisters from an affiliated Franciscan order in Lemont, Illinois.

An enduring memory for me is from 1956. I went with my Dad to the church to welcome a new pastor who was scheduled to arrive that day. We waited, and eventually, a car drove up. A short, somewhat stout man got out of the car, wearing a brown hooded robe, sandals, no socks—and carrying one small suitcase. That was it, nothing more. His name was Fr. Aloysius. In time, he introduced me to serving Mass, and because I was a student in the public school next to the church, I and other classmates would be allowed during the school day to serve for funerals. The parish cemetery was a mile from the church, and I remember always riding with him to the burial. His ritual didn't vary. He would start the car, reach into the hood behind his head, pull out a pack of cigarettes, light one up, and off we went. I thought he was totally cool—for this and many other reasons. I didn't know it at the time, but he, in his ministry among us—and probably without knowing it—planted a spark that lit a vocation fire. I wanted to be like him.

His sister, also named Aloysius, was my favorite summer school teacher. She was short and jolly, wearing a long robe cinched with a rosary, and blessed with the gift of gab (whenever she would go to visit a parishioner, she would say, “I'm going to stay until I run out of words”). Like her brother, she was earthy and real, also fuel for a vocation—not because she encouraged me to go to the seminary, but because she communicated zeal for the word of God and love for God and neighbor. Even that seventh grader so many years ago could see it in this woman as she spun her stories, which told us about God's love and our responsibilities, smiled with a twinkle in her eye, taught us to sing the Gloria in Latin or serve Mass with reverence, who seemed to have unending energy for everyone. I wanted to be like her.

St. Francis, too, was real and earthy, with none of the shine we have since put on him—a garden statue of a harmless and peaceful-looking monk in a traditional robe, with birds perched on him.

St. Francis lived a lifestyle in which he made no radical claim that his faith was all that it should be. He lived a life of simplicity and sought to honor the dignity of everyone, seemingly never setting himself apart from any aspect of creation. Francis could dance in the midst of pain; he suffered intensely from ailments during his life, including a form of leprosy, which left him blind as he lay dying. He believed that grace abounds everywhere, in everything and everyone. To appreciate Francis fully, we must follow him all the way, not stopping at the romanticized version. The fact is that he went to the heart of the matter in all that matters in any age, our included. His followers—like those who helped shape my soul many years ago—still carry the message.

**Fr. Richard Bayuk serves as the sacramental minister
to the residents of Our Lady of Mercy Country Home in Liberty, Missouri.**

This weekly reflection is made available to all who are part of our Precious Blood family. Feel free to share it with others. Would you be willing to write a reflection? If so, please contact Vicky Otto at votto@pbspiritualityinstitute.org