

SERMON - ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI - 4 OCTOBER 2009
St. John's Anglican Church, Greensboro, North Carolina

Giovanni di Pietro di Bernardone was born in 1181 to a wealthy merchant family. His father who was absent on a business trip when he was born, upon his return nicknamed the child "Frenchie" or Francesco, Francis.

Some 45 years later, in 1226, Saint Francis, the Povarello, the Little Poor One, worn out by overwork and physical deprivation died in the company of some of his companions on the dirt floor of his hut near the little church of Saint Mary of the Angels, the Portiuncula, the Little Portion, near Assisi.

To quote the Dictionary of Saints, *Probably no saint has affected so many in so many different ways as the gentle saint of Assisi who, born to wealth, devoted his life to poverty, concern for the poor and the sick, and so delighted in God's works as revealed in nature.*

Francis, who was never ordained a priest, he was however made a Deacon, had an enormous impact on religious life which changed the direction of the Church to this day.

We so often trivialize him as the patron saint of birdbaths, but the influence of his life moved the theology of the Church from the perspective of a Resurrected Christ to an incarnational Christ, a Christ who is fully human and who can feel our individual pains, needs and sorrows.

The message of Saint Francis is as appropriate today as it was 800 years ago. Believing as Saint Paul did, that, Philip. 3:20 (ESV) *our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,* Francis rejected all materialism, all forms of materialism.

Today, our society has totally embraced materialism. Greed, not love, has become the motivating force in today's world. "He who dies with the most toys, wins" is the

prevailing adage of our time.

Against, this, we can still hear the quiet voice of Francis, echoing the concerns of Christ, who spoke more about money than any other subject, that we cannot serve God and Mammon.

Francis had an obsession with this subject to the point of rejecting any wealth of any kind in his personal life, rejecting any material comfort in his personal life.

Francis lived the Gospel of Christ.

Francis preached the Gospel by his life.

Unless, you are Rip vanWinkle just now awaking from your multi year nap, you know what has happened globally due to unchecked avarice. We all are affected. Even Bill Gates is down to his last 50 Billion Dollars, while the Walton family, not the ones on the mountain but the ones that own Wal-Mart have slid to a mere 57.9 Billion in wealth.

I am not condemning either Bill Gates or the Waltons for their wealth. They have earned it and in the case of Bill Gates, he is using his wealth in so many good ways.

Who I am talking about is you and me.

Are you and I putting material “things” ahead of God. Are we more concerned with our careers, with our possessions, with our status than we are in God? Are we motivated by the needs of others or by our own perceived wants?

Is making money and amassing or controlling our wealth more important than what we do for others or for God.

Jesus tells us Matthew 6:25 (ESV) *Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on.*

Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

And goes on to say Matthew 6:33 (ESV) *But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

Francis took these words of our Lord literally.

We should, too.

Amen.