

Chapter 6

Care for Our Common Home

[*St. Francis Beneath a Tree, Praying* by Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn]

Summarize the familiar story of St. Francis for the students:

St. Francis was born in the twelfth century, the son of a wealthy merchant. But he gave away all his possessions to live in abject poverty; he also left his family (his mother and father, brothers and sisters) and lived in abandoned churches. His goal was to never be attached to people or possessions in a way that kept him from following God. Many men and women left behind their own possessions and families to follow Jesus along with St. Francis, and he had a large community around him. This painting by Rembrandt reflects the many stories we have of St. Francis going off to the woods by himself to get away from people and find the silence and solitude necessary to hear God's voice. He had many experiences of God in the woods, including toward the end of his life a vision of a fiery angel who branded him with the wounds of Christ, called the *stigmata*: on his feet, his hands, and his side. His stigmata reflected what everyone in his own day said about St. Francis – that he was more like Jesus Christ, the Son of God, than anyone who had lived since Jesus ascended to be with God the Father in heaven.

Next, describe briefly for the students the prayer technique of lectio divina, reminding them to listen quietly and write down anything that jumps out at them. Read Philippians 3:7-14 in a “lectio divina” style for the whole class, slowly and meditatively. After pausing for some moments of silent reflection, read the passage a second time, slowly and meditatively, giving God’s Word space to reach the hearts of those who listen.

Use these questions to guide a discussion after the meditative reading (it might be helpful to read the questions with the students beforehand to help guide their reflection, but this is not necessary).

1. What stood out to you from the passage? Any particular words or phrases? Why? How did they make you feel?
2. Why does Paul “consider everything as a loss”?
3. What do you think St. Paul means by “the upward calling in Christ”?

4. Why do you think it's necessary to give everything up and live in poverty to follow Jesus?
5. Many saints abandoned everything and changed their lives as a result. Why do you think this was a good choice for them? Why would it be a good choice for you?

[Philippians 3:7-14]

A Reading from the Letter of St. Paul to the Philippians.

But whatever gains I had, these I have come to consider a loss because of Christ.

More than that, I even consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ

and be found in him, not having any righteousness of my own based on the law but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God, depending on faith

to know him and the power of his resurrection and [the] sharing of his sufferings by being conformed to his death,

if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

It is not that I have already taken hold of it or have already attained perfect maturity, but I continue my pursuit in hope that I may possess it, since I have indeed been taken possession of by Christ [Jesus].

Brothers, I for my part do not consider myself to have taken possession. Just one thing: forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead,

I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God's upward calling, in Christ Jesus.

The Word of the Lord.

R. Thanks be to God.