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## *Homily on The Feast of St. Francis*

The Reverend Deacon Edward Fuller  
October 7, 2007 - Evensong  
The Episcopal Cathedral of St. Philip - Atlanta, Georgia

Galatians 6:15 For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!

Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to me all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

In the name of God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

If you were here this morning, you now have some understanding of the true meaning of chaos. If you were not here I should explain that today, being the Feast Day of St. Francis of Assisi, our 8:45 service was attended by an unusual assortment of furry, feathered, two legged, four legged and some no legged creatures. We celebrate the Feast of St. Francis by honoring his love of animals and we invite family pets to join us for worship and to receive a special blessing on this day. The woofs, meows and screeches combined with the singing of hymns and made a most joyful noise unto the Lord!

If you haven't spent a few quiet moments in St. Francis Chapel, I invite you to do so following this service. It is the small room to your immediate right as you leave the nave and has a beautiful stained glass window with scenes of St. Francis.

Francis lived in the late 12th and early 13th centuries and formed a monastic order that, to this day, draws Franciscan women and men into the service of mankind in some of the most desolate and forgotten places (some of which are cleverly hidden right in the middle of our own city).

I love Francis for a lot of reasons. As a Deacon it is not lost on me that Francis was an ordained Deacon and remained in Deacon's orders until his death. The word deacon finds its roots in the Greek "diakonia" meaning servant. He exemplified servant hood, diakonia, in its very best sense by living in extreme poverty and dedicating his life to loving service of the poor who were marginalized and cast off by society. Deacons today can only hope through prayer that they will be given the strength and grace to follow in the path of Blessed Francis.

I also love Francis because he, like St. Paul, lived a life apart from Christ only to ultimately take on the full yoke of Christ. The complete conversion of life entered into by Francis, confirmed that, in the words we heard from Paul's letter to the Galatians, "a new creation is everything!" I find tremendous hope in the stories of their conversions. Both men led lives filled with self centeredness. Knowing what became of them gives me hope that I, a sinner, may find a way to fully accept Jesus' call and be filled with the strength required to become a new creation.

Francis was a spoiled child and spent his parent's money without care or control. He knew how to party and did so with great gusto and great frequency! Pope Gregory IX praised St. Francis for "having embraced chastity after having given himself over to the seductions of the world".

Francis' conversion of life -- becoming a "new creation" -- took many years. God worked in Francis by giving him a depth of compassion and love for the poor. That love for the poor later translated into Francis embracing extreme poverty and seeing such poverty as the spiritual food that would give him rest for his soul and make the yoke of Christ an easy yoke. He referred to his "Lady Poverty" and embraced her completely finding both beauty and joy in the absence of material things. This transformation was not easy at first. The young men with whom he had eaten so many suppers and sung so many songs, now jeered at him, and even his brother joined in the cruel sport. Francis was too tender-hearted not to be hurt by all this, but he never answered angrily. He thought: "It is because they do not understand." But, if his rich friends were unkind, the poor folk who had loved him for his gentle words and for his gifts, when he was the proud young merchant, loved him the better now that he had given them all his money, and was ready to share his crust of bread with any hungry man. At the little hospital where Francis had gone first in splendid clothes, with a full purse at his side, the lepers were surprised to see him come so poorly dressed, with no horse and no money. But, when they saw how gently he took care of those who were most sick and helpless, they called him "Brother Francis"; and they forgot their suffering while he talked and sang to them.

Through this incredible gift of love, Francis was able to do what most of us would think impossible. There was a time when he would be disgusted by the site of a leper. At one point after his conversion, he faced a man with leprosy, embraced the man and put some coins in his hand. Emboldened by this victory of love, he went immediately to a leper colony and begged the pardon of those there, lingered for a while, distributed money to them and left only after kissing them all on the mouth. He had fully taken on the yoke and burden of Christ, he had become a "new creation" and that was "everything".

Over the past 3 months, our Gospel lectionary readings from Luke have reminded us of the words of Jesus as He taught His disciples:

"Be on guard against greed - life does not consist in the abundance of possessions"

"Sell your possessions and give alms"

"None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions"

"Invite the crippled, the lame and the blind to your banquet"

Blessed Francis did, indeed, sell all of his possessions and gave away the proceeds. He led a life that did not concern itself with the building up of possessions on earth and he did invite the crippled, the lame and the blind to his banquet.

To be honest, the thought of such a radical transformation scares me. I know I could never take up that lifestyle and all of its responsibilities by my own free will. I don't think many of us will leave here today and begin imitating everything Francis had become. But, what are we to do with the Gospel and Francis' example of following those mandates?

I think we face the same questions that Francis faced. The question is not if we shall be burdened (because we surely will be burdened) but by what we shall be burdened. Not if we shall be yoked (because we surely will become yoked), but to whom we shall be yoked.

We have many contemporary examples from whom we can learn much.

Millard Fuller left a high-powered career to found Habitat for Humanity which now builds 12 houses a day around the world. Like Francis he chose a different burden and he chose to whom he would be yoked.

In 1995, Dr. Bill Warren left his private pediatric practice in Sandy Springs to fulfill a calling; he wanted to serve Atlanta's neediest residents. He founded The Good Samaritan Health Center in downtown Atlanta. The center had more than 17,000 patient visits last year providing a comprehensive range of medical services to patients without the means to afford care. He chose a different burden and he chose to whom he would be yoked.

They became new creations.

Jesus says come to me - a very personal invitation -- and then says I will give you rest -- once again, intensely personal. I think we can believe that this is a personal invitation to each of us. An invitation to become a new creation, a change of life, a transformed life-style through intimate relationship with Him. The same relationship that St. Francis accepted and where he found rest for his soul.

The question before each of us is; "do we accept the invitation as Francis did or do we send our regrets?".

Our Lord waits for our response.

Amen.

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