

## Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time<sup>1</sup>



**“Beyond the Birdbath”** – This Thursday (Oct. 4), the Memorial of St. Francis of Assisi, is a fit time to delve into “the Little Poor One” (*Il Poverello*). Robert Bolt wrote that Francis “is famed for the things he would have regarded as unimportant, whereas the one thing that mattered to him—his religious faith—is ignored and even disliked by some of his admirers.”

In his book *The Reluctant Saint*, Robert Spoto runs through Francis’ failures, such as: failing as a warrior; failing as a respectable son; failing not to establish a religious congregation; failing to become a member of the clergy (a deacon); failing to make peace between Crusaders and Muslim armies in Egypt; failing to die a martyr; failing to convert the Sultan Malik al-Kamil; failing to persuade his congregation to live radical poverty; and finally being expelled from the Order he wished never to found. Spoto

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<sup>1</sup> **“THE PROPER OF TIME”**: How is time to be told properly? How do we “tell” time what time it is? For example are we now in the year 2019 A.D. or are we in the year 2019 C.E.? Earlier calendars designated March 25<sup>th</sup> as New Year’s Day because that date was seen as the date both of Jesus’ conception and also of his Crucifixion. Because the Christ Event is seen by some (eg. us) as the Culmination of all Time, we mark all time as either Before Christ (B.C.) or as a Year of the Lord (Anno Domini; A.D.).

makes the interesting point that Francis grew in Christ-likeness precisely by remaining faithful to the Lord throughout a flood of failures. As we Catholics go through a turbulent time and experience institutional decline on many levels, I look for **hope** and I find it in the following insight from G.K. Chesterton in his book *St. Francis of Assisi*:



Assisi, Italy

“If St. Francis had seen, in one of his strange dreams, the town of Assisi upside-down, it need not have differed in a single detail from itself except in being entirely the other way round. But the point is this: that whereas to the normal eye the large masonry of its walls or the massive foundations of its watchtowers and its high citadel would make it seem safer and more permanent, the moment it was turned over the very same weight would make it seem more helpless and more in peril. It is but a symbol; but it happens to fit the psychological fact. St. Francis might love his little town as much as before, or more than before; but the nature of the love would be altered even in being increased. He might see and love every tile on the steep roofs or every bird on the battlements; but he would see them all in a new and divine light of eternal danger and dependence. Instead of being merely proud of his strong city because it could not be moved, he would be thankful to God Almighty that it had not been dropped; he would be thankful to God for not dropping the whole cosmos like a vast crystal to be shattered into falling stars. ***Perhaps St. Peter saw the world so, when he was crucified upside down.***”



**FAMOUS LAST WORD** - This beautiful stained glass image of the martyrdom of St. Peter is located near the altar in the Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul in Philadelphia. St. Peter was first Pope, the prime bishop among bishops after the Ascension of the Lord. Actions speak more powerfully than words and so the first Pope's final "Word" is from the pulpit of an upside down cross. While this is surely a statement of humility, it is also an orientation gesture for subsequent bishops. If for a moment we might reduce this famous last word of Peter to written words, the message of the first Pope might go something like this: "My Friends, when you look at life, the world and the Church in our fallen condition you will see them one way, but the odds are high that you are not seeing them as the Lord does. In order to see as Christ sees you will need to stand on your head. Life, the world and the Church are often deeply and pervasively upside down and so the Father has sent the Son to enter into creation and return it to its right order, its right side up-ness. Seeing as Jesus sees, the least are the greatest; the last are the first; our greatest strength comes when we claim our weakness; success is failure and failure is succeed.



**THE MISSION** – This poster for the 1986 film *The Mission* depicts a priest on a cross falling head-first to his death over a South American waterfall in the 1500's. This was a not-so-successful time for our ancestors, but the mission continued and continues. Just as the Cross was the means by which the Kingdom came in its finality on Calvary, so the Cross remains the means by which Christ and his disciples are bringing the Kingdom to its fullness. As the prophet proclaimed: "For the vision still has its appointed time; it hastens toward the goal and will not fail. Though it tarries, wait for it. For it will surely come, it will not delay"(Habakkuk 2:3). Again, St. Paul wrote: "For in hope we were saved. Now hope that sees for itself is not hope. For who hopes for what one sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait with endurance" (Romans 8:24-25). I believe we are being pruned, re-rooted and rebooted for mission. I think being pruned hurts, but that's how dead wood is removed and space is cleared for new, resurrected Life.