

My Dear people of God,

As you read this, I am in Assisi the home of the great man St Francis. What a privilege for me and the other ten pilgrims with me, to be here on this Sixth Sunday where the readings invite us to a disposition of trust in relation to God. The witness or the lesson from St Francis can be summed up in these words: ***God Can Be and Should Be Trusted. With God we can put all our eggs in one basket!***

Those who trust in God are truly blessed. The first readings today compares them to a tree that is planted by the waterside. It has no fear of heat, and it never ceases to bear fruit. This reading contrasts the fate of the wicked who reject God with that of the just who put their trust in God and follow his law. Those who trust human beings are compared to a barren desert shrub.

The same image is found in the responsorial psalm where the author is stressing the blessings that flow to those who make God's law the guiding rule of their lives. He says; '***They are like a tree that is planted beside the flowing waters, that yields its fruit in due season and whose leaves shall never fade.***'

The image of a tree planted by the waterside is a beautiful image. Perhaps we don't appreciate the full thrust of it when we live in the bayou country that has an abundance of rainfall and the bayou waters. We may need to be in or visit a country or place where there is a shortage of rainfall to really appreciate it.

In a land that suffers from drought, water is everything. If you are travelling through a drought stricken country, occasionally you may see a ribbon of green vegetation running down a hillside. This is an infallible sign of the presence of a stream of water, often times an underground one. The ribbon of green stands out because it contrasts sharply with the surrounding landscape which is almost totally barren.

This is the kind of a full and fruitful life that is promised to those who follow the way of the Lord. Those who trust in God are like a tree planted by the waterside. It has no worries in times of drought; its foliage stays green, and it never ceases to bear fruit. Yes, there will be tough and rough times, but the Lord will guide those who trust in Him through it all.

It is however important to note that people cannot be forced to trust in God. It a choice that each of us has make, just like St Francis did. God refuses to force people to do His will. Our freedom to choose is sacred to God. We are the only creatures who can say 'yes' to Go. When we say 'yes' to God, our lives are blessed, and we will bear fruit in due season.

The first reading and the responsorial psalm prepare us for the Gospel reading in which Jesus presents to us the Beatitudes. In these beatitudes, Jesus presents the blessedness of those who put their trust in God and follow God's way, rather than the ways of the world. They are truly blessed, even though they may be poor, hungry, and persecuted. Today, the whole world honors St Francis because in the midst of his poverty, hunger and even persecution, he was blessed and a blessing to many others.

St Francis was born in 1182 in Assisi. He was the son of a prosperous cloth merchant, Peter Bernadone. His companions saw him as a carefree youth, calling him the "King of Revels" because he enjoyed partying with his friends and had dreams of becoming a knight and gaining glory on the battlefield. But shortly after riding off to fight against Perugia, a nearby town, he

ended up in their prison, a broken and disillusioned young man. It was after his return from prison, and during the recovery that followed, that Francis' life was changed when he had a God encounter. Meanwhile, his father wanted him to continue in his old ways. Francis was now faced a choice, to trust God or to trust his father. He chose to trust God. He said: **“From now on I will no longer say, My Father Peter Bernadone, but Our Father who art in heaven.”** Francis gave back to his father not only his property and goods, but the money and all his clothes as well. Francis carefully placed his clothing on the ground. Centuries later, the world continues to honor him!

Blessed are they who trust in the Lord. Let us surrender to and put our trust in the Lord.

Thanks and God bless,

*Fr Simon Peter*