

## Feast of St. Francis (2021)

Today, in the middle of his sermon on the Mount, Jesus makes this bold proclamation: “No one can serve two masters.”

Now, take a moment and calculate how many masters you strive to please over the course of a single day? How many masters do you have? Who and what are your masters?

There are almost 8 billion people living on planet earth today, and two-thirds of them have some kind of mobile phone. China is #1 with 851 million and Switzerland is #50 with 6 million users.

If the statistics are true, over half of you will lose your mind if you are without your cell phone for more than 24 hours!

A master can be anything or anyone—an inanimate object or a being of flesh and blood.

Imagine a servant who has two different masters, or a follower with two different leaders. Inevitably the desires of one master will conflict with those of the other.

What, then, is the servant to do? To which master is the servant most loyal? Which master's request takes priority?

As the saying goes, he who serves two masters has to lie to one.”

Truth be told, Francis of Assisi didn't always have a Capital 'S' and a small 't' in front of his name.

He was from a wealthy family who gave him everything he wanted. He enjoyed a good party—wine, women, and song. He was a mercenary soldier for hire, and he spent time in prison. In short, for a time, Francis served many masters.

Until the day, when God engaged Francis in a conversation that changed his life and the world.

“Francis, who do you think it is better to follow, the Master or the servant?” Francis answered: “It is the Master.”

“Why then,” continued God “do you worry to look for the servant instead of the Master?” “What is it your pleasure I should do, my Lord?” “Return to Assisi. This is not your life.”

Francis’ conversion becomes linked with his direct contact with a humanity that was suffering, alienated, disfigured, and overwhelmed by a sense of hopelessness.

We witness everywhere in the world today these destructive forces that deepen a sense of a culture of death: the move to end life through abortion and euthanasia; the random and senseless shooting rampages; the mistreatment of refugees; the end of civil discourse among politicians and the abandonment of a sense of the common good.

In all of these situations we recognize the level to which human beings have lost a sense of the dignity and beauty of life.

Francis also stood face to face with many different threats to dignity, hope, and the future of humanity.

Francis did not run or hide from the disfigured face of humanity. Rather than close himself off and protect himself, Francis chose to jump into the heart of the world, embracing and accompanying humanity, offering love, mercy, compassion, hope to all he encountered, just as Jesus did in his life and mission.

As Brother Thomas of Celano, Francis' first biographer, wrote: "Saint Francis praised the Artist in every one of his works; whatever he found in things made, he referred to their Maker."

"He rejoiced in all the works of the Lord's hands, and with joyful vision saw into the reason and cause that gave them life. In beautiful things, Francis came to know Beauty itself."

The Gospel is preached most effectively, not by powerful organizations that reach to every part of the globe, but by individuals passing it on to another person.

As the friar from Assisi often encouraged his followers: ***"Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible."***