

Brother Juniper - Highlights from Peter Gruning's Presentation

January 4, 2020

The Franciscan saints are fun to study as they are so earthy, so human and often seem very peculiar. Brother Juniper is a good example. Through 21st century eyes, he may seem like a total lunatic, but he was actually profoundly kind and good - and very radical!

It seems like the early Franciscan saints often went around naked! Often St. Francis would order them to take off their clothes when preaching. To help them get past the physical world and reach the spiritual world. Disrobing was a sign of being vulnerable and openly penitential. (Reminds us of reconciliation where we disrobe and are vulnerable and show our true selves.). Like Jesus, the Brothers were ready to reject the vices of the physical world.

The stories of the Saints have meaning on several levels. For example, some think the wolf in the story of the wolf of Gubbio may have represented the Muslims. The story is about how kindness and understanding overcomes fear.

Two famous stories about Brother Juniper:

- Teeter-totter. Showed Brother Juniper's profound holiness. Even the Romans came out in crowds to see him.
- Pig's Foot. Kind of crazy story where Brother Juniper cuts off a pig's foot, cooks it and offers it to an ailing Friar to make him feel better. The owner of the pig is outraged. Francis is worried about the reputation of the Friars and yells at Brother Juniper who loves being chastised. Juniper can not understand why everyone is so angry over such an act of charity,

There was a time when Brother Juniper was silent for 6 months. This was probably when he first became a Franciscan. He would become so angry that he would spit up blood. He realized that he could not do that and still mirror God, so he became silent. During this time he absorbed the Franciscan spirit, his humility grew and then God could speak through him.

His holiness is evident in the fact that Francis allowed Brother Juniper to travel alone. The Friars were always to travel in pairs so one of them could protect the other from the devil. However, Francis released Brother Juniper from this obligation.

Finally, when we think of Brother Juniper, we think about his absolute focus on humility. And his holiness. Often, the people in the stories would start out very angry about some outrageous thing Brother Juniper had done, but in the end would end up apologizing and asking for forgiveness from him.