

## What St Francis Means To Me

Back around the turn of the thirteenth century, maybe 1201, I think I remember dating Giovanni Bernadone, the man who was to become St Francis.

I subsequently learned that due to many experiences, he turned his life around in favor of simplicity, poverty, generosity and a total allegiance to Christ.

Francis, the Saint, has held a draw and strong fascination for me, and when I traveled to Assisi in 1993, for the first time, I was deeply moved.

It was just four years earlier, when exiting a troubled marriage, that my friend Linda Shaffer encouraged me to come to a service in the Historic Church. It felt good. I was moved by Father Mayberry's sermon, I adored the simplicity and beauty of the old building, the parishioners were friendly and after the third Sunday, I called the Rector and asked if I might meet with him privately.

It was important to me to share a bit of my checkered background, feeling that if the fact that I came from a Judeo/ Christian family, was almost twice divorced and had an adored, gay son, proved to raise judgmental eyebrows, I'd best look elsewhere for a different faith community.

We met the following Saturday morning, sat in the front pew and I poured out my heart and concerns. Father Mayberry assured me that as far as he was concerned, I was absolutely welcomed into the St Francis community. I thanked him and proceeded to tell him that I would sit in the last row and remain a silent parishioner, for as much as it was my norm to jump in with both feet, I was feeling a bit fragile and needed peace and anonymity. That lasted exactly two weeks. As the story goes, Richard left our little meeting, ran across the lawn to the Rectory, and called up to his life partner, "Edward, we got one".

I have never quite known what that "one" referred to, but I did know for certain, that I had come home.

Two years later, after several months of "study", Richard baptized me at the Easter Vigil. My only request was that he carry me down the aisle like all the other babies. I did, however, offer to bring a luggage dolly.

Fast forward almost thirty years. What has or does St Francis mean to me?

With no desire to prioritize, here goes.

I find a challenge and comfort in learning to trust in God and sometimes believing in doctrines expressed in scripture.

I come here with a sense of warmth and well being.

I'm enriched by music, some magnificent hymns and anthems which are ours for the taking, and I am honored to lend what little voice is left, to sing to the Lord and to support our congregants.

I hunger for better understanding of life, our forbearers and those who wrote scripture to better guide us, and am constantly in awe of the sermons offered and much thought to chew on, week after week. Mark and Debra have different styles, but they both capture something in the human experience, which makes me clamber for more. As much as our humble Rector doesn't like adulation during announcements, he invited me to offer these thoughts to you, so deal with it, Mark.

I don't have to attend this church to fulfill a desire to offer service to others. That has been an essential part of my tradition and joy.

I don't need to come to St Francis to find God. I need only to look out of my bedroom window, to the woods and the peaceful lake, which my grandfather built in 1935, or sit on the rocks at Schoodic Point in Maine, where the wonders of nature infuse my soul.

I find God in a love note or call from my children, including sons in law, grandchildren, niece, Godchild who live far away or travel on business constantly and are rarely able to come home.

But..... I do crave that amazing thing called community, with a group of peeps with common and uncommon interests, and I look out into the faces of that community, which has become my second family, and I see God, and with more and more difficulty, I attempt to fall on my knees, and I thank the Lord for each of you, for your comfort, for your friendship, for the love we share, and for the many blessings which have been bestowed upon me.

Amen

Margery B. Irish

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