

The waft of pine tree sap in the air is one of my favorite smells. It's the perfume of nature. Whether the fragrance emanates from northern Minnesota jackpine, or the Eastern White Pine of the Adirondacks, or even the pine-tree-lined roadway of Lakeside Drive along the North Stamford Reservoir, this scent transports me. Camping. Farming. Playing in the woods. The memories flood back. Indeed, the sense of smell is, among the senses, most unique in this regard. Scents are the only sensations that travel a direct path to the emotional and memory centers of our brains. Thus, the power of an aroma has the ability to move us and bring us back to formative and forceful experiences that may have taken place years ago yet seem like just yesterday.

I am struck by the power of scent to impact us. Not to mention the impact of our other senses in making our way through life. Sight, taste, feel, hearing all engage us in the experience of the moment, and they possess echoes that we experience and draw us back to whatever the pleasure or pain of a particular moment might be. I trust that for most of us life is lived, in part, by retracing our steps through those sensory memories. We are transported to another time, a moment in time, and another place. We try and recapture, as best we can, what exactly happened. What was the smell? What were the sounds? What image remains imprinted on our mind's eye? Could we feel something? Was there a taste to ground us? And then with such remove, we turn over the event again and again to try and understand what happened, what consequences emerged from this event, and how does it impact us today?

While the sense of smell is not used as liberally at St. Francis as you might find in other "higher" liturgical churches, where "smells and bells" predominate, smell--and the other senses--are very much a part of our worship. We touch and taste and see and hear and smell, to use the words of the Psalmist, "that the Lord is good." And, certainly, it must be this way for us as human beings. Bound to the earth. We experience God and God's reality in our life through the very real and common experiences that our senses give us access to. Our theologies may tend to engage our mind and invite us into exercises of abstraction, but worship and prayer bring us quickly back to earth. We need to be rooted in the world. We are, after all, an in-carnational tradition. We believe in God embodied in the world. We trust the Holy comes to us through the phenomena of life. And our access to that phenomena comes through our body's senses.

Thus, it is mystifying that we spend so much time, energy, and money finding ways to escape our bodies. And Lord knows that there are myriad reasons why we may be drawn to such activity. However, Christianity, at its best, invites us to settle into our bodies. Indeed, it thinks that the way to God is not through an out-of-body experience, but rather through the very incarnation of our life in this world and for God's world. For, to put it simply, that is how God acts. Rather than remain aloof and distant, the God of Jesus is painfully present, embarrassingly intimate, and meticulously knowledgeable regarding the bodies we possess, the senses that allow us to

experience this life, and the way of the world. Try as we might, we cannot escape our bodies. Nor should we.

I came across this quote from Frederick Buechner in the readings for this week's prayer services. His insight is important for us all, and while he speaks of himself, Buechner also includes us all. I suspect he also trusts that our bodies are important for the work he describes. Buechner reflects:

In my books, and sometimes even in real life, I have it in me at my best to be a saint to other people, and by saint I mean life-giver, someone who is able to bear to others something of the Holy Spirit, whom the creeds describe as the Lord and Giver of Life. Sometimes, by the grace of God, I have it in me to be Christ to other people. And so, of course, have we all-the life-giving, life-saving, and healing power to be saints, to be Christs, maybe at rare moments even to ourselves.

T.S. Eliot wonderfully noted, "We shall not cease from exploration and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time." Well, keep exploring. Keep attentive to the places that your senses take you. Revisit them as often as you can. Turn them over and over again to discover what truth they are telling. Recognize that in your life, your body, you carry the opportunity to be a life-giver or Christ to another and to yourself. And remember that Elliot is right: wherever we go, we ultimately return to know that place for the first time. We might even say that we know ourselves in that moment just as we are fully known. Such is the work and mystery and love of God.