

Little Weeds



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COMMUNICATIONS 101:

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“Preach always. Use words when necessary.” I’ve always liked that quote. It sorta sums up Francis’s grasp of communication – it ain’t just words. I also think it ties in with his overall outlook on life: love. He might just as easily have said, “Love always. Use words when necessary.”

After all, love, like communication, is a two-way street. And for Francis, to a large extent, love and communication were the same thing. He did both/either in the name of the other. He loved and he communicated that. He communicated because he loved. Hey, it ain’t rocket surgery!

Francis preached what he preached out of love, because he was pretty much preaching love: Love of God. Love of neighbor. Love of creation. He preached the way he preached for the same reason. He wanted to share the Good News. Because when ya got somethin’ good, y’wanna share it. Especially with those you love. And for Francis, that was the whole world.

But it wasn’t necessarily a warm, fuzzy kinda love. His world wasn’t lollipops and rainbows. He wore rags, he slept in caves, he begged for food. And while the “troubadour of God” thing might make you think ‘romantic love,’ it wasn’t that either. Oh, he’d been caught up in that in the beginning, what with the knight-in-shining-armor dream and all. And he never quite got over “Lady Poverty.” But I do believe he was a realist. It’s just that his reality included Jesus in a way that’s hard for us to understand.

We talk about being “Christocentric.” It’s a cool idea. But as human beings, we have a tendency to be more self-centric. That’s how we’re born. There’s nothing more selfish than a newborn. It’s all, “Me, me, me.” Which isn’t surprising. You don’t know a whole lot at that stage of the game except what’s up close and personal. And that’s pretty much just you. Shortly, however, you realize there are others out there – to serve you. And they do. But eventually, you will (if you’re parented correctly) learn that it’s not always about you; you’ll learn to share; you’ll learn to be considerate; you’ll learn to love in a giving way (rather than the getting, ‘I-want-that’ way). But you do have to *learn* this love-your-neighbor thing. Because you can’t pass it on, until you have it yourself.

But once you have it, well, like I said, you wanna share it. And sharing/loving is more than words. Oh, it’s nice to say, “I love you.” And it’s nice to hear it. But if it goes no further than that, it eventually rings hollow, doesn’t it? If the love you proclaim doesn’t show in the way you treat the party of the second part, does it even exist? For many, unfortunately, “love” is just another four-letter word that’s used indiscriminately. Or, if they do, indeed, feel “love,” it’s for money, or fame, or pizza, rather than their neighbor.

Now some might argue that you can’t actually “love” those things. That rather than love, it’s more an idolatry. But the fact remains, if the strongest emotion a person feels is aimed at something other than his/her neighbor, it doesn’t matter what you call it. Because it’s not the love we’re called to. And no matter how often the words are said, they don’t count for much.

I guess what I’m saying is that you have to walk the talk. Oh, don’t stop sendin’ those Hallmark cards. To put it in writing, so to speak, makes a major impression on the “lovee.” But you do have to follow through. A get-well card is nice; a bowl of chicken soup is even nicer. A congratulations-on-the-new-baby card is nice; an offer to baby-sit is even nicer. A thinking-about-you card is nice; a phone call is even nicer.

The thing about love is it’s never too small. Which is good . . . Most of us will never save someone’s life. But we can all make someone’s life better, nicer, happier. All you need is love!