

THE TAU ROCK

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I want to share with the readers of Tau a story that, at least to me as a scientist, is almost unbelievable. I am still trying to understand its significance. When I was a Regional Formation Director, I shared my story during a National Visitation as a way to encourage Regional interest in the OFS role in promoting care of the environment and to enhance enthusiasm for taking the St. Francis Pledge. I must admit, it was received with very limited excitement — perhaps because many of us have become rather used to hearing stories of people seeing “Mother Mary in a pancake,” or perhaps because they, like me, just didn’t know what to think about it. Nonetheless, given Pope Francis’ latest encyclical, I feel I have an obligation to pass this along to my brothers and sisters, no matter how odd they might think it.

I am an ardent hiker and backpacker, and over the last 50 years I have hiked many a trail in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Not too ago I was hiking in the Madison Range with a long-time friend. We had been out all day, and having climbed up and down several thousand feet of mountain trails, we were on our way back to camp. We had one last creek to ford, and to tell the truth, I was really tired. Sitting on the creek bank unlacing my boots and rolling up my pants, my mind was drifting as I stared at the rushing water. Then I saw something I just couldn’t believe. A Tau was shining up at me from the bottom of the creek. Reaching down I picked up what was for me as a Franciscan the most incredible stone I have ever seen.

The picture below shows the rock I found next to our Rule, to give a sense of size. The Tau is an integral part of the rock, not something drawn on it or somehow added to it. It’s exactly as I picked it up from the stream.

I have struggled to understand the significance of this find. As a scientist (I have a PhD in biochemistry and biophysics), it is not clear to me how such a rock could have been formed. The rock is very rounded on the edges, and therefore had tumbled in creek for at least decades to centuries before I found it. The Tau is raised, thus it must be of harder material than the brown rock itself.

Initially, in my lack of humility, I took this personally as a sign of my individual vocation. I no longer believe that this so. Although I am “organically” Franciscan, I think this stone has a deeper meaning for all Franciscans. It lay in that stream for who knows for how many eons waiting for a Franciscan to find it, for only a Franciscan could see and understand the deeper meaning of its sign. Pope Francis has called on all humanity to reestablish an authentic relationship with our First Mother, the Earth, before it is too late. We, as Franciscans, have a very direct responsibility to lead the way, to be leaders in the struggle to reestablish the humility and self-restraint necessary to save ourselves, and our brother and sister species on this planet, from extinction. We **MUST ACT NOW** before it is too late for us all.

