



I am always humbled by the lessons that can be learned by simply paying attention to the natural world around us. One day while stacking firewood, I picked up a piece of oak and while getting ready to put it in the wood shed, I noticed some imperfections in the wood's grain. Instead of the normal straight grain, there were swirls, twists, and concentric rings. As I admired the imperfect wood grain pattern, I wondered what the pattern was like throughout the piece of wood, if this unique pattern was visible on the outside.

So it was off to my workshop.

After cutting the wood into strips 3/8 inch thick by two inches wide, I realized that, with each pass of the saw, I was exposing the extraordinary hidden beauty within the chunk of wood, another example of the hand of God, ever-present in creation.

With the help of the internet, I learned that as the oak tree grows it receives light from the sun, nutrients from the soil and rain from the atmosphere – the essential requirements for normal, healthy growth. But like all living things, trees also experience stress. In the case of an oak tree, this could be in the form of fungal growth or insect damage. When this occurs, the wood fibers respond to the stress and arrange themselves in a kaleidoscope of twists, swirls, and knots. This beautiful natural phenomenon is known as an oak burl, and this "wild grain" makes burl wood extremely dense and resistant to splitting.

This Tau Cross, the symbol of Franciscans and the official habit of the Secular Franciscan Order, was fashioned from the wood of an oak burl. When wearing this, I am reminded that stress is a part of life, and that with the help of God, the fiber of my being can be transformed in a way I could never imagine.

Think about it! Imperfections resulting from dealing with stress can ultimately be the source of strength and great beauty.



*Even in the worst situation in life, God waits for me, God wants to embrace me, God expects me.*

Pope Francis