

The Flame of St. Francis

See the Church again—for the First Time

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"Seek the Lord in All that You Do!"

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The Sacramental Worldview

By Anthony Schefter

Catholics come in all shapes and sizes, all political persuasions, all walks of life, and each has his or her own unique opinions and perspective. One pastor I know (not Father Mike) once remarked, "People say the Church is a cult. They've obviously never been to a parish council meeting, where we can't agree on anything."

Undergirding all this often inconvenient (at least for our pastors), but glorious and God-loving diversity is something unique that all faithful Catholics share, though not all have it to the same degree. It's something I call the sacramental worldview, a particular way of looking at the world, life, people, and God that is informed not by the scientific materialist way of looking at

things but instead by a way that is deeply intuitive, faith-anchored, and broad in its perspective.

One of my favorite definitions of faith is that it is a participation in the knowledge that God has

of Himself. Faith is a kind of knowledge and belongs in a hierarchy with other sorts of human knowledge, like our knowledge that apples are red, people can be good or bad, and light from the stars takes years or centuries to reach us. Faith is a knowledge that informs (or "in-forms") our way of looking at things, and it is a knowledge that places Christ at the center of human history and indeed at the center of the whole cosmos.



The word "sacrament" is related to the word "sacrifice," and the sacramental worldview puts Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross at the center of all things. Everything that came before the Cross,

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was leading up to it; everything that comes after, is in some way a consequence of it. The Cross, the fact that Jesus died on it and so atoned for our sins, is the central mystery of our human existence; nothing that

we know today would be here without it, at least not in the form we are accustomed to.

Take the example of suffering. The fact of human suffering—cancer, wars, blindness, child abuse: the list is endless—is probably one of the best arguments against God. At least that's how the world sees it; suffering to the world is a pointless exercise that benefits no one. But Catholics see suffering quite differently; through suf-

fering, we are united to Christ and his redeeming sacrifice on the Cross; our suffering is fruitful for ourselves and others, in this life and in eternity; and our suffering serves its greatest purpose in making us more like Christ himself. There are reasons that we suffer; life is not just a collection of random events, some more painful than others.

Aside from suffering and the mystery of the Cross, the sacramental worldview also sees mystery in a great many places you might not think to look. Mass is an obvious one; when we celebrate the Eucharist, we do so with the angels and the saints in heaven, who are there, somehow, mysteriously present in a way that we do not understand. But aside from overtly holy things, there is also mystery all over the Creation, in the symmetry of a blade of grass, or the playful barking of a dog, or the glory of the Rocky Mountains. The world, even in its dilapidated and fallen state, is grand, beautiful, and very mysterious: our science hasn't explained everything, not by a long shot, in fact I'd say it hasn't explained much at all of the things that are important.

I often invite people to "see the Church again—for the first time," and when I do, I'm asking you to begin to take on the sacramental worldview. You can start by unlearning much that you think you know (I had to do it, too) and looking with new eyes. Try to remember what it was like to be six years old, playing with a yapping puppy for the first time in your life. You can also pray that God will begin to show you the world as he sees it, as it truly is. Once you get into it, you'll see that this is the way to begin to love God, your neighbor, and the whole of the Creation, and not just with your own love, but with the love of God Himself.

Prayer for the New Year

by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

All make the sign of the cross. The leader begins:

Let us praise the Lord of days and seasons and years, saying: Glory to God in the highest!
R/. And peace to his people on earth!

The leader introduces the blessing:

Our lives are made of days and nights, of seasons and years,
for we are part of a universe of suns and moons and planets.
We mark ends and we make beginnings and, in all, we
praise God for the grace and mercy that fill our days.

Then the Scripture is read, Book of Genesis 1:14-19:

Listen to the words of the Book of Genesis:

God said: "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky, to separate day from night. Let them mark the fixed times, the days and the years, and serve as luminaries in the dome of the sky, to shed light upon the earth." And so it happened: God made the two great lights, the greater one to govern the day, and the lesser one to govern the night; and he made the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky, to shed light upon the earth, to govern the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. God saw how good it was. Evening came, and morning followed—the fourth day.

Reader: The Word of the Lord.

R/. Thanks be to God.

Let us now pray for God's blessing in the new year.

After a short silence, parents may place their hands on their children in blessing as the leader says:

Remember us, O God;
from age to age be our comforter.
You have given us the wonder of time,
blessings in days and nights, seasons and years.
Bless your children at the turning of the year
and fill the months ahead with the bright hope
that is ours in the coming of Christ.
You are our God, living and reigning, forever and ever.

R/. Amen.

The leader says:

Let us bless the Lord.

All respond, making the sign of the cross: Thanks be to God. *The prayer may conclude with the singing of a Christmas carol.*

What is The Flame of St. Francis?

The Flame of St. Francis is an occasional journal of articles, prayers, apologetics, and other written words devoted to moving the reader to a deeper conversion in Christ. The purpose is to inspire, to evangelize and re-evangelize the community by showing the beauty and power of the Catholic Faith. Readers are invited to "See the Church again—for the First Time" through new eyes and in a way that will bring new hope. Any article that is evangelical, apologetic, or inspirational in nature is welcome to be submitted for consideration. Send all submissions to anthony@stfrancismhd.org.