



## **“GO REBUILD MY HOUSE; AS YOU SEE, IT IS ALL BEING DESTROYED”**

**“Francis,”** it said, calling him by name, 3 times: **“go rebuild My house; as you see, it is all being destroyed.”** These words were spoken to St Francis of Assisi from the cross at the little ruined chapel of San Damiano.

As we prepare to reopen and return to the celebration of public masses, the major task will be for the church to rebuild itself, to find new energy, creativity, and purpose to speak to the millions of people who feel lost, empty, and disoriented by the pandemic and its effects on our lives.

The failure to do this will mean that the church will become more and more marginalised, and irrelevant to modern man, who looks for meaning and solutions to his life in science, in political and scientific progress. Yet he finds that for all this development, modern man is still unable to answer in a meaningful way, in a way which even convinces himself the

deeper questions of life. What is the meaning of life? What happens after death? What is the point of all my struggles, to find a job, to work, to raise a family?

St Francis himself, had to struggle with these same questions? He knew failure? Depression even. Francis is a nickname, the first saint to be known by a nickname! This name means 'Frenchie'. Why? Francis was the eldest son of a wealthy cloth merchant Peter Bernadone, so he had money to spend and he did on himself, lavishly!

At the time French culture was the dominant culture which was sweeping through Europe; to be in with the in crowd you wore French fashion, listened to French music, and embraced all things French. If Francis was alive today he would have an iPhone, a Facebook page, a twitter account, the latest laptop, and be a regular visitor to the fashion shops of Oxford street! His friends knew him as the 'King of Revels'.

Before Francis could rebuild the church, his own life had to be rebuilt on a new foundation, on Christ and his gospel. Before this could happen Francis had to experience the collapse of his dreams; this happened when seeking to further his dreams of fame and popularity, he went off to fight his rival city Perugia, his army lost, and he found himself a prisoner in a cold cell – this was the end of his career as a knight, and of his dreams of fame and glory. While one door was closing another was opening up in his life.

Returning to Assisi, humiliated,, after being released, depressed and wondering what to do with his life, he started hanging around with the poor, and spending hours in silence in nature. It is this period of his life, praying before a cross in the church in San Damiano, that he received this calling, a personal calling, **'Francis rebuild My house; as you see, it is all being destroyed'**.

Jesus did not present him with a pastoral plan, a technique, or a formula, simply with a call to grow in intimacy with Christ, and to live out the gospel literally and radically. The key to finding intimacy with Christ was to become small, poor, and to embrace this call Francis rapidly began to jettison his wealth and comforts, to live the words which Jesus spoke to the rich young man, **Mark 10:21 "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."**

He rode off and sold his horse and personal items and returned to the church of San Damiano and offered it to the resident priest for the repair of the church. He renounced his inheritance when his Father threatened to disown him. Francis truly embraced Lady Poverty, not to add to the poor of the world, but because he found intimacy with Christ through this poverty. Francis in the end only owned one poor item of clothing, now a relic

in Assisi, which he kept patching up with such care. He became known by the name **il Poverollo**, the 'poor one', which he held as a title of honour.

In our current Pope, Pope Francis, God has given us a sign and indication where the church needs to find the renewal it so desperately seeks, and needs. Pope John Paul II, and Benedict 16<sup>th</sup> both spoke of a need for a new evangelisation, new in Europe because the gospel needs to be re-proposed to these nations if the church is to recover its vitality and evangelical strength again.

St Benedict, St Ignatius of Loyola, St Anthony of Egypt, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, all took this path of poverty, and renewed the church from this lowly starting point.

What can you do? How can you help your parish? Your church? We have to put our own house in order first. This means to embrace the actual poverty, not necessarily monetary, which is not lacking even in the life of the richest person today, and find there the secret of the kingdom of God and a renewed intimacy with Christ.

St. Francis found Christ in failure, poverty, and rejection - so can you - if you look!

We entrust to our Lady of Perpetual Succour, our lives, our families, our parish and the church in the United Kingdom, St Charles Borromeo, and place them all under her mantle and consecrate them to her Immaculate Heart.

Our lady of Perpetual Succour, pray for us! St Francis pray for us!

Fr David Palmer

