

Well, I have to say that this is a first. It is St. Francis Sunday, and at the same time I'm continuing with my Exodus series. That in itself isn't unusual. I have done that quite a few times over the years. But usually the readings for the feast day of St. Francis, and whatever I'm preaching about in my series mesh together OK.

But today the two things clash in a very visceral way! We are praying for the love of our pets and St. Francis lifts up the joy and care of all creation ...and...in Exodus we heard read about the slaughtering, cooking and eating of a lamb. The only thing I can say is; don't we face that sort of dissonance in our lives every day? Especially at this time in our world. At the same time we must think soberly and humbly about how serious is this disease that we are facing affects people we know, and has felled so many. Even our President and first Lady are afflicted with this. And we still need and want to celebrate what is good and lovely in our lives too. So, I guess today's sermon will just, like life, live with the odd clash of honoring all animals and our pets, honoring St. Francis and the fact that we eat meat (at least most of us do.)

The Passover is more than just about eating a lamb prepared in a certain way.

The meaning of the Passover to the Jews is foundational to their faith, and therefore to ours too.

It is the most important family and congregational celebration every year for the Jews. This meal was set by God for the Israelites for their preparation to leave Egypt for good, to strike out with Moses into the wilderness, and to fill their bellies and gird their loins and get going. The meal preceded the most important event in the lives of Jews then and now; the Exodus. Through this meal people who were worried about their lives and their livelihood were

strengthened, connected to God's presence and protected from the last plague that God visited on the Egyptians, the killing of all the first born of Egypt, animals and humans alike.

This meal was the prelude to the most important message God has for God's people; you are saved and you are free.

Now, for modern Jews the celebration of the Passover every year is not a memorializing of that day, it is a new instance each time of God's connection to the people. The people are again, every year, saved and freed.

What a parallel we have in our Holy Eucharist. The Last supper, celebrated by Jesus with his close friends preceded the awful death and sacrifice of Jesus our Christ. We call Jesus our Lamb of the Passover. And then God in Christ rose from the dead in our Christian celebration of saving and freeing us from death and slavery. For both Christians and Jews a very holy meal precedes the most holy event in our history and in our present time.

And like the Passover for the Jewish people, the Eucharist for us is not just a memorialization of the Last Supper, it is another celebration of Christ with us – Christ meeting us at the table and being present in the sacrament.

I've been to a Passover Seder one time. Seder, by the way, is Hebrew for order or arrangement. I remember being intrigued by all the interesting foods and the traditions; the lamb, lettuce, salt, bitter herbs, matza and other elements which make up the ritual which brings God to the table and brings humans to God. The one thing that I found most wonderful about the seder is the presence and participation of children in the ceremony. The children take an active role. Four questions are asked by a child or children which becomes a catechism

for everyone. Why are we doing this? It is a way of explaining their faith and their liberation on the night of the Passover Seder.

Like the Eucharist for us, the meaning for a holy, God-given meal is far-reaching:

Jews gather in celebration despite fear and worry about events to come – just like we do

The Jews teach children and include them in the meal – just like we do.

They and we remember that it is God who feeds us and sustains us, and gives us the commandment to love one another and feed our neighbor who may be suffering – just like we do. The meal connects us to each other, to God and to the world.

They, and we, remember that we were slaves in Egypt – for us specifically we remember that we were slaves to sin and death before God sent Jesus the Christ to be with us, tell us and show us that we are saved; loved, freed and made whole by the power of God.

And there we have our connection to Francis, the saint who gave up his old life of comfort and care-only-for-himself and his good fortune. Francis grew up as a good Christian boy, celebrating the Eucharist and dutifully learning his catechism. But after becoming a man, and attempting various vocations in the world, he was brought up short by Christ himself who came to him to teach him that caring for humans and animals and all God's creation was better than being a merchant or a military man.

St. Francis surely met Christ in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, just as we do. And Francis surely met Christ in the woods and in the towns and in the fields just like we do.

We who have pets learn so much from them about simplicity of life – they do not fret about money or politics or the status of people. They live life simply in **trust** that they will be taken care of, in **humility** that they are not better or worse than other animals, and in their **instincts**

to rise to occasions of danger and do what is needed, seemingly without fear, without shame, without guilt.

We remember St. Francis today for his commitment to the Gospel and the way of Life, Truth and Care for all people.

We celebrate our Spiritual Eucharist today to connect us to Christ while waiting in patience and humility for the day when we will be able to more fully live into our sacramental life, sharing the bread and the cup. That day will come!

And we give God our praise and our thanksgiving for everything that surrounds us and everyone God has put in our path to be companions, help mates and friends. Christ, come to us this morning through our Spiritual Seder, our Eucharist.