

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Friday we remembered St. Francis of Assisi. So how do you find Francis? The temptation is always to sentimentalize him. He was more than the little poor brother, the preacher to birds and the singer of songs to Brother Sun and Sister Moon.

Furthermore, in today's sentimentalized age it is all too easy to turn St. Francis into the poster boy for fashionable causes. Yes, he loved nature and stands for our proper stewardship of the world's resources, but he is not just a proto-environmentalist. Yes, he was for poverty, but he really lived it. He didn't just show off and pretend he was poor. The question of poverty and riches is as potent and controversial in our age as it has ever been.

While we admire St. Francis and the Franciscans for their love of poverty, we also realize that many who seem rich are in fact very poor, while many who seem poor are rich. We can never judge by outward appearances. Material wealth is not bad in itself, just as poverty is not good in and of itself. The question is not how much money we have, but what we do with it. The question is not how wealthy we are, but whether we are prepared to leave it all behind, because one day we will indeed leave it all behind.

The example of St. Francis challenges our attitude to our wealth. Can we live generously and give generously? If so, we will have joy and freedom. If not, we will lapse into greed, mean heartedness, and lack of compassion.

Your Pastor,
Fr. Longenecker