

May I speak in the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Well, we're celebrating Saint Francis Day today. It's not a particularly big deal in England, but it is over here, I have found out. If I'm looking bleary-eyed it's because I didn't get much sleep last night. I'm terribly worried about the 10:00 service. It's becoming more and more of an issue for me. If you don't know the church will be full of people and their pets.

I did get some practice. I went to Bishop's School the other day and I blessed hundreds of animals there. It was a great celebration, including something I've never ever blessed before: a hedgehog. So I had to adapt my laying on of hands blessing because it wasn't appropriate in this case. I looked over at my colleague, the chaplain who was busy blessing something else. I said, guess what I've got here, I've got a hedgehog. What have you got? Because I saw she was blessing two wooden boxes. So I thought she had spiders or something in them. And she said in a very serious tone, "No, I've got the ashes of two cats here." I was actually pleased I had the hedgehog in that context. Anyway, we'll survive.

It's just a crazy thing to do, to have a service full of animals, and bless them, but then I thought maybe Saint Francis Day is a good day to do something crazy. Maybe the craziness of it is actually a good way to remember Saint Francis, because he was famous for doing crazy things. He was born into a rich family, but when he was in his early twenties he stripped naked, walked to the square in Assisi to renounce his inheritance in front of his parents, the Bishop and all the people of Assisi. Then in the middle of a war, he walked unarmed through the battlefield to meet the enemy's leader. He hugged lepers, he preached to the birds, which I'm sure was a very nice thing to do, but I'm not sure his stewardship sermon would get much of a response.

I could go on, but you get the picture and Francis knew what people said about him, but he didn't mind. He called himself "God's fool". That was the title he gave himself and that resonates with something that we see in the New Testament. Saint Paul did something similar. We see in that reading we from Corinthians that he considered himself a "fool

for Christ" and wrote about how the good news he preached looks to the outside world like foolishness.

Saint Paul and Saint Francis were both convinced that they were called to follow Jesus's way, and they both recognized, they were both very aware that that way they were called to follow was very different to the way of the world that most people like to go. Most people, the majority would dismiss the way that they had chosen as foolish, as crazy. I mean, don't most people think it is crazy to do what Jesus told us to do? Love your enemy. Turn the other cheek. Give someone your tunic when they ask for a shirt. To forgive someone 70 times seven times. Most people might think that the teaching of Jesus had a crazy strand to it, but Saint Francis didn't. He took them all literally. And you know, I think we're carrying on the tradition of being fools for Christ. Look at us here we are at a time that most people would consider ludicrously early on a Sunday morning, when we could be in bed. We're here worshipping in church. It's crazy.

And what's the center of our worship? It's our Eucharist and in that context we hear again the story of Jesus's death on a cross and his mighty resurrection. A story which Saint Paul says is foolishness to the Greeks and I'd add nonsensical to most of our neighbors. Yet we're here because we know that God's wisdom is beyond all human understanding. His wisdom can seem crazy to us. In his wisdom, he chose to reveal himself to the world in the person of Jesus Christ. And when he wanted to show us how much he loved us, he went to the cross to show a love without limits. And to show us his power and glory, he brought him back to life on that first Easter morning, and by his wounds we are healed. How crazy is that?

It's wild enough to be wonderfully true. For as Saint Paul concludes, "God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom and God's weakness is stronger than human strength." Amen.