

In his book *Love One Another*, written in 1944, Fulton Sheen wrote: “*The enemies of the Church often do not hate the Church: they only hate what they erroneously believe to be the Church.*”

The converse can also be said - that is, that there are many who only love what they erroneously believe to be the Church.

Today is the Memorial of St. Francis of Assisi.

Francis is often caricatured in garden statuary, holding birds and surrounded by little bunnies. Yet in reality, Francis' appearance would have shocked most of us. His clothing was a ragged robe with patches upon patches. Most certainly he didn't smell very nice. And Francis' love of poverty offended many who thought he was after their riches.

Born around 1181 to a wealthy family, Francis was baptized Giovanni (John) while his father was away on business in France. On his arrival home, he re-named his newborn son “Francesco” ... what we might consider the name “Frenchy” ... to celebrate his business successes.

Francis lived the life of a rich kid, but always came back to a love for the poor. So much so, that when confronted by his own father after giving away merchandise from the family store ... Francis stripped naked, in order to return everything to his father.

St. Francis embraced the life of a roving penitent as well as a life of radical poverty ... not allowing his brothers to even touch money. They lived outside, and preached repentance everywhere they went. Often mocked, but also widely accepted ... he preached to anyone and everyone ... and anything who would listen.

In 1219, in the midst of the Crusades, he went to Egypt to preach to the sultan. In 1223, he arranged the first Christmas creche so that people could see the poverty Our Lord was born into. In 1224, he became the first recorded person to receive the wounds of Christ - the Stigmata. He died in 1226, and was named a saint in 1228 by Pope Gregory IX.

His deep desire to live a life modeled on the life of Christ has made him the most beloved saint in all of Christendom - among many denominations that don't even have saints, or recognize the proclamations of any pope.

Francis calls us to be uncomfortable with our own status quo ... and to seek every opportunity to repent - that is, to turn away - from any thing that may distract us from God ... and to live our lives through, with, and in Jesus Christ.

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ ... let us pray for a deep sense of who we are in Christ ... and also who Christ is calling us to be. And may we set aside anything that separates us from Jesus Christ, and embrace whatever life that Jesus is calling us to live.