

Little Weeds

Gimme that ol' time reverence . . .

By M. Marko, OFS

I went on a retreat, the topic of which was “reverence.” Upon seeing the title of it on the booklet, I had to wonder a bit. I mean, what is reverence? It is the awe with which we behold God. Period. And they’re gonna get a whole retreat outta this?

But it soon became obvious that reverence isn’t just for God, anymore than love, respect, consideration, etc., are just for God. And reverence works like these other things – if you truly feel them for God, you’ll feel them for everyone else, too. Just as you can’t love God and hate your neighbor, you can’t truly reverence Him if you have no respect for your neighbor. Once this connection is made, between the Creator and His creatures, it’s easy to see what reverence comprised and how one should go about including it in everyday life. It also becomes easy to see how little reverence seems to play in today’s world, even in our own individual lives. Reverence is a little like a budget: it looks great on paper, but it doesn’t always translate into real life that easily.

The easiest thing about reverence – and the hardest thing at the same time – is that it is comprehensive: no one and nothing is left out. You cannot be reverent only at work, or only at home, or only by yourself, or only for a certain amount of time each day. It’s for everyone, for everywhere, for everything, and 24/7.

It’s fairly easy to see the need for reverence where others are concerned. We’re all children of God. The idiot in the supply department, the jerk next door, your stupid brother-in-law – they’re all children of God and due a modicum of respect and reverence. (I didn’t say this is easy...) And let’s face it – they’re probably not too thrilled with you either.

But reverence goes beyond people. It extends to animals and our environment. There’s an old axiom that says you can tell how people treat other by how they treat animals. That’s true up to a point. Granted, you wouldn’t want someone who tortures animals over for dinner. But even if someone is kind to animals, they can still be pretty nasty to people. Why they’re nice to animals should be considered.

Is that little dog doted upon because she’s a child substitute? Or is it because she’s a good example of the wonder of God’s work? Is the Doberman kept well fed because it’ll eat someone’s face if it isn’t? Or is it well fed because not feeding it properly would be cruel and show a lack of respect for God’s creation? After all, God made animals first. They’re an important part of a well-ordered world.

We’re very environment conscious nowadays. That’s a good/bad thing. Good, because we’re finally aware of the damage that’s being done to Mother Earth and the fact that something has to be done. Bad, because it took so long to wake up and so much has already been done that can’t be undone. Species have become extinct (and continue to do so), forests have disappeared, and delicate ecosystems have been irreversibly upset – all in the name of “progress.” We’re finally catching on to the fact that we’re merely among the players on the stage – we ain’t the whole theatre.

So by now it’s pretty obvious reverence is a full-time job. But remember when I said above that it’s called for even when you’re alone? Well, one way of showing disrespect for God is a lack of reverence for ourselves. We sell ourselves short; we dwell on what we can’t do and overlook what we can do. We know God doesn’t make junk; but, on occasion, we might think He was havin’ a bad day when He made us.

This doesn’t mean we go about demanding respect. If we live up to our Rule of Life, respect will come automatically. And I’m not talking about the groveling, kowtowing of sycophants. (Just as well: who can afford a good sycophant nowadays?) We’ll get the quiet respect we deserve, because it will be obvious you have that same respect and reverence for others.

Francis is the Patron Saint of ecology. At first glance, this might seem odd. It’s not like ecology was a hot-potato subject in his day. (Was there even a word for it back then?) But he was one with his world; he knew he was only part of the picture, that everyone and everything else had important parts to play, too. Everyone, everything was his brother or sister. That’s the reverence we’re called to.