

What Is Hidden
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Matthew 11:25–30

The Little Flowers is a collection of stories about St Francis. Here is one. While Francis was travelling with friends, they happened upon a place in the road where birds filled the trees on either side. Francis told his friends to hang around while he went over to preach to his sisters the birds. The birds were attracted to Francis, even surrounding him, hypnotized by the power of his voice, not one of them flew away. He is often portrayed with a bird, typically in his hand. I often wonder what is hidden in this story.

For example, did the birds poop on Francis? Was Francis somehow caught up in the Spirit in such a way that he spoke to the birds in chirps, caws, clucks, squeals and squawks? And what did Francis' friends think while they were waiting around watching this scene unfold?

Another story from the Little Flowers was about a wolf, so terrifying and ferocious, that the wolf devoured people as well as animals. Not afraid, Francis went in search of the wolf making the sign of the cross upon discovering the wolf. Francis commanded the wolf to come to him and hurt no one else, then taking the wolf back into the town. Like the birds, the towns folk surrounded Francis and the wolf, startled that Francis was a wolf whisperer. Francis said to the towns folk that the wolf killed out of hunger and that the townsfolk were to feed the wolf regularly. In return, the wolf would no longer prey upon them or their flocks.

Again, I wonder what is hidden in this story. Did Francis bark and howl when he first spoke to the wolf? When the towns folk surrounded Francis, how far did they keep their distance

—after all, he was with a wolf. How did the towns folk know Francis got the correct wolf, after all, the wolf with Francis may have been someone’s pet?

It’s not that I’m being skeptical or a miracle denier; it’s rather the opposite, I want to know all the details of these miracles that go unsaid. I imagine St. Francis pulling me aside and saying, “Stop trying to find meaning in the detail and words.” After all, it is attributed to Francis to “Preach the gospel at all times. Use words only when necessary.” Okay, that’s why I want to know about the swacks and chirps, barks and howls. Did he preach without words in this way?

St Francis is one of our most famous Christian mystics. Such mystics The worked on the basis that mystical theology is mystical only because of what is hidden. For example, although it should be obvious that no human being sees all in all, mystical theology consciously deals with what is hidden beyond what mortal eyes can see and mortal tongues can speak. Such a mystical approach provides access to an infinite quantum reality in which the divine communicates; and yet, human beings may only see such reality through a mirror dimly and hear such deeper reality through a cheap internet connection. As Christians we must learn from mystics like Francis because he chases infinite superabundance of divine reality most radically known in creation through Christ.

Jesus said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Even Jesus says here that things are hidden from us, especially from the wise and intelligent. I wonder what you think about these words of Jesus. They seem a bit offensive, don't you think.

But maybe it's really not that offensive. The most learned folk I know say they that the more they learn the more awareness of what they don't know. And maybe, children and infants are better at talking to birds than I am, and better at hunting hidden things. And maybe ethnic minorities know a thing or two about "hiddenness". The black writer Ralph Ellison, in his book *Invisible Man*, writes: "I am an invisible man. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids - and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me." *Invisible Man* was published in 1952, went on a search for identity and place in society, as seen from the perspective of an unnamed black man. Ellison goes on to explore the contrasts between the Northern and Southern racism and their alienating effect.

Even though Ellison never said this, perhaps, once we think we have our lives figured out, and other people figured out, it becomes harder to believe in God. And this brings us back to St. Francis, who in his child likeness or naivete, embraced and kissed the leper. No one was invisible or hidden to him.

Our burden becomes those who have eyes to see, let them see. And those who have ears to hear, let them hear. Ezekiel states, „Mortal, you are living in the midst of a rebellious house, who have eyes to see but do not see, who have ears to hear but do not hear“ (Ezekiel 12.2). And after many of Jesus's parables, he would often say, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen! (Luke 8:8)".

The burden becomes needing the details of the story. Did the birds poop? Did Francis find the wrong wolf. Our burden is in not taking the details of the mystery of who we are created to be for granted. All of us need to resist the temptations not to really see another. We must resist the echo chambers, partisan politics, and the zero sum pursuit of knowing someone based upon how we are much better than others. The burden we should never be free from is to open the eyes we have and see. And practice the kind of mindfulness in which we actually can hear others. I think this is the Mysticism of our Social Life. I am because you are and because you are I am. And if this is too much of a burden, be of good courage because we believe we can hear God speak when Jesus says, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."