

But a new creation is everything! As for those who will follow this rule—peace be upon them, and mercy. In the name of our merciful Creator, Amen.

On each person's body is recorded the story of their life. My cousin's calloused palms tell about his work as a contractor; his wife's swollen feet talk about her long shifts as a nurse. The dark spots on my mom's neck record her time running in sunshine, and the lines around my stepfather's eyes remind me of the sound of his laughter. Our stories, for better or for worse, are written on our skin.

Even when we die, our bodies continue to tell stories on us. My cavities will reveal that I loved sugar. Some of the marks on my body will be more cryptic, known only to me: for example, this burn on my left hand reminds me of the last dinner I cooked for my uncle before he died; and few people would know that I got this scar on my chin competing in and losing an ice-skating race when I was ten.

One of my favorite ways as a camp counselor to get kids talking was to ask them to tell me about their scars, or their broken bones. Eleven-year-old boys seemed to especially love this game – it was way better than asking them their favorite subject in school, because their answers would invariably tell me something about their history. ‘Oh, Miss Emily, this one time when I was really little, like, nine years old, I fell out of my treehouse and broke my arm and I was in a cast for THREE MONTHS!’ ‘Yeah, well, this one time my brother bet me I couldn't fly, and so I jumped off the garage roof ...’ The stories can go on for hours, and I learn more about skateboarding and woodcarving and whatever else has literally left its mark on these boys.

This question – ‘So where'd you get that scar?’ is one that I would love to ask Saint Francis of Assisi, who we will remember today with a celebration of family pets. Though Francis is known as the gentle saint who loved all creatures and preached to the birds, his life was relentlessly physical, and he suffered in his effort to draw close to God. Francis would have scars from his brief stint as a soldier, when he was a prisoner of war; he might have scars on his knees from the time when he stripped himself naked, kneeling

on hard stone in front of a bishop in order to renounce his inherited fortune. Francis' hands would certainly be marked up from his work constructing huts out of tree branches, where he and his followers lived in the woods outside of Assisi. The vow of voluntary poverty undoubtedly led to deprivation; surely Francis would have suffered from poor posture, weakened bones, and tired muscles. He hiked mountains and spent time among animals, offering his body in sacrifice for his ministry. I imagine that Francis' scars, and the stories behind them, would have put most eleven-year-old boys to shame.

The tales told by our bodies, though, are not all stuff of childhood adventure and challenges overcome. I have learned over time that you can't play the 'So how'd you get your scar' game with everyone. Two summers ago, I worked as a chaplain at Camp Bob, quite possibly the worst-named camp in history. But we did really good work – churches throughout the southeast sponsored groups of poor urban kids to spend a week doing traditional camp stuff. Somehow, as chaplain, it was my job to do the weekly ice-cream social – which was cool. You really can't go wrong giving ice cream to kids. But we always had just enough ice cream, so I had to mark an X on the hands of kids as they took their turn, to make sure that everyone got some. One week I was marking Xs as usual when one of my favorite eleven-year-old boys, Marcus, put his hand in mine to receive an X.

As I turned Marcus' hand over, I saw a smattering of little round scars. I stopped myself from asking about them just as I realized that the dots were cigarette burns. Marcus smiled on, oblivious to my inspection. And so, instead of an X, I drew a smiley-face over his burns. He smiled back at me and walked on. The really sad thing was, once I started paying attention to the kids' hands, I realized that most of them had similar marks. And so, I gave them all hearts and smiley faces, knowing that the scars on their bodies were just signs of some more profound injury caused by the violence, perhaps even evil, of the one who inflicted the wound.

Many of our bodies bear the deep, invisible scars that come of grief and violence, unannounced to the world. Francis certainly did – as the founder of the Order of the

Friars Minor, plus a religious order for women through Saint Clare and an order for lay people, Francis fought constantly against internal power struggles. From the outside, he fought popes and kings for the right to remain poor. Many thought that a person who wandered half-naked in the woods, preaching to birds and living in a shack, must be crazy, and told him as much. I'm not surprised. Francis was a person who lived on the fringes of society, desiring communion with God through creation, poverty and suffering.

Often, like Francis, our souls and bodies bear the scars of thoughtless sin; but perhaps as often, willingly or not, we are the ones who inflict this pain. For me, this is never more confusing or more obvious than on St. Francis Day, which has become a sort of Christian Earth-Day. The very body of the earth bears the marks of greed and selfishness, from the blood-red gashes of logging in the Georgia soil, to the mountain-tops broken by mining in West Virginia. This is the reality of human sin, laid out in front of us: we are trapped in great webs of it, so that we feel unable to maneuver. We have to use cars; we must use electricity.

At the same time, I look around at this community, and I see a people who are in love with God and with God's Creation. We have developed elaborate schemes of recycling and composting and carpooling; we carry waterbottles, and we pray for the earth as often as we pray for ourselves. This ethic has forced me to become a sort of eco-Pharisee – how often have I walked away from a trashcan after throwing away a plastic bottle, thinking in all seriousness 'Jesus would not be pleased'. Even the news-media has picked up on this environmental guilt-infliction: I read an article the other day which berated the band U2, which is known for their global consciousness, for the amount of pollution they put into the air by transporting their stage equipment cross-country for their current tour. Even the most publicly righteous among us cannot escape scrutiny.

And so we keep recycling and composting and writing checks to the Sierra Club, weighed down on one side by the burden of our greed and helplessness, and the other by the responsibility of the earth's salvation.

I was feeling this weight particularly one day a few summers ago at Camp Phoenix, when I was preaching to the campers about water use across the world – when the thirteen-year-old girls complained as if I was putting them in jail when we imposed five-minute limit on showers, we knew it was time for an object lesson. And so we talked about water scarcity, our responsibility to conserve resources, and to be mindful of the needs of others. To drive the point home, we loaded up ten-gallon buckets with water from the lake, and had the campers carry it a mile back to the cabins – this would be the water they would use for the day. And as we were walking back around the shore, I heard one of the girls complaining to an adult volunteer: ‘Ugh, Miss Darlene, this bucket is so heavy! I seriously am going to pass out and die if I have to carry it any more, for real!’ And Miss Darlene said, in a voice that carried over the water, ‘Talk to Jesus, honey; just talk to Jesus.’

The buckets are heavy, but they are not ours to carry. Francis desired to know the suffering of Christ so that he might know the infinitely larger magnitude of God’s love for us. The danger in making such close acquaintance with sin and suffering is that we spend too long carrying our buckets, staring so long into their depths that we lose sight of the one who bears them for us. Deeper than any mark we bear, more permanent than any wound we inflict, is the mark of our baptism. The record of our sin, and our salvation, is already written on Christ’s body.

We are created anew, we are saved; we are part of creation which cries out for salvation. And so Christ calls out to us, ‘Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest’. Let us talk to Jesus, let us reach out for the one who loves us, and watch our burdens fall away.