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Overcoming of Self to Be Like Sheep

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According to many critics, egoism is especially an American vice. Supposedly, our culture is one all about celebrating the self. We hold up as a hero the purportedly self-made woman or man who is “in”-dependent, by which we mean that she or he is free from depending on anyone or anything else. We glorify the idea of the radical individual, whom we describe without irony as lifting himself up by his own bootstraps. Our national myth (much abetted by Hollywood) is that our country’s uniqueness comes from the grit of rugged individuals winning greatness by their own gumption and hard work.



[This week’s readings](#) remind us, however, that to follow Christ requires a different attitude. For Christians, greatness is not about the ego. Christ calls us to overcome the self. Indeed, if these readings are taken literally, then we are to be like sheep.

Friedrich Nietzsche – whom we all know for his notion that God is dead – despised Christian morality precisely because of how it diminishes the self. In books like *The Genealogy of Morals* and *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche lampooned Scripture passages like this one where Christians are compared to sheep. True morality, he thought, was found only in being true to our own self will, in being autonomous – in being a law unto oneself. Be the wolf that eats the sheep, Nietzsche thought, or at least be the shepherd, but how despicable merely to be one of the sheep!

Yet, as Christians that is our calling.

Overcoming the self is not a one-off reference in Scripture, but at the very heart of the Gospel message. We’re told to humble ourselves so as to be like children. That one who exalts herself shall be humbled and that the humbled will be exalted. That the meek shall inherit the earth. And, most profoundly, that “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (Mk 8:27) Today’s reading from the letter of Peter notes that even Christ sacrificed his human will to “hand himself over” to the divine will.

Which brings things back to the situation in America... Because, maybe our country is not as much about celebrating the self as some think.

Look around. We wear those masks in public. We avoid congregating with our friends. We social distance and give up travel. Yes, we do such things in part out of fear of catching the disease ourselves. But, isn’t it even more true that we do such things for others, especially for those most vulnerable to the disease, and for the common good of the whole country? Think

about the overcoming of self that it takes for those who serve in public now – the nurses, the grocery store clerks, those who deliver the mail, and those who pick up our garbage.

At one of the demonstrations against social distancing recently, ugly voices were heard shouting at hospital workers coming off a shift. The shouts called the medical workers “sheep” for wearing masks.

Sheep.

“I am the good shepherd, says the Lord; I know my sheep, and mine know me.” Alleluia.

Stephen Schneck, Ph.D.
FAN Executive Director

Suggested Action:

Take time this week to meditate on your own willingness to give up yourself. Do you find it difficult? Open your heart and honestly consider your answer, without judgement. Just notice.

Suggested Petitions:

For all those having a difficult time during these social distancing measures. May they be comforted by the prayers and love from friends and strangers. We pray...

For all people of faith who struggle to be like sheep. May our humility and willingness to give up ourselves serve as an example for others. We pray...

Collect Prayer:

**Almighty ever-living God,
lead us to a share in the joys of heaven,
so that the humble flock may reach
where the brave Shepherd has gone before.
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.**

Amen

Can you help FAN during this unique time?

It is Spring in coronavirus time when most of us are staying at home. Had you anticipated going on an outing to enjoy the warmer weather or making some Spring-time purchases? Maybe going out to a restaurant to celebrate someone’s birthday or a family celebration? Or maybe to the theater or a concert or the movies? While all of these plans will have to be postponed, here is an



alternative suggestion inspired by one of our FAN members. A sister in a Franciscan congregation decided that since she had some unexpected extra cash she would send it to FAN as a [donation](#). What a great idea!

We recently sent out an appeal to all our members and friends and we humbly thank all of you who contributed to the \$1665 that has been raised so far! During these uncertain times, it is critical that we raise more since FAN staff continue to advocate and educate from home about the [plight of DACA recipients](#), the [need for election security](#) and ways to [care for creation](#) from home. **Can you [help us reach our goal](#) of raising \$2,500?**

We completely understand that if you are not able to go to work and not bringing in a salary, you will not have extra cash on hand. However, if you find that you have saved a few dollars because you are not filling your gas tank as often for example, FAN would really appreciate the opportunity to receive a [donation](#) from you.

We hope and pray that all of you and your families and communities are spared COVID-19 as you shelter at home and that you continue to experience God's presence among us in new ways.

Franciscans Celebrate Mother Earth Day Nationwide

Rally in Washington, D.C. in 2017

Last week was the 50th anniversary of [Mother Earth Day](#) and it saw a great deal of [Franciscans joining in the festivities](#), even from a distance.

Credited with launching the environmental movement, 20 million people took part in the first Earth Day in 1970. Since then, many landmark environmental laws and regulations were passed in rapid succession as the movement gained momentum over the next several decades.

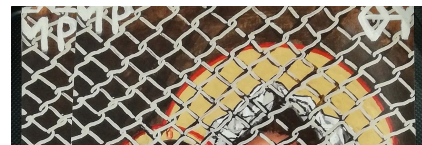
Last week, we took time to rekindle our hope and renew our commitment for climate justice. After our virtual Franciscan EAD gathering on Friday, we shared several possible actions for people to take, including [sending a letter to your member of Congress](#) to require the EPA to cease the complete dismantling of protections in place to care for our common home.



We invite you to [take a look](#) at some of the other great Mother Earth Day actions that took place. From producing videos and planting trees to developing resources and generating beautiful posts on social media, the Franciscan Family was very creative in our efforts to celebrate. We have gathered those actions we discovered in [this post](#). If your community held an action you'd like others to know about, please [contact us](#).

During Pandemic FAN Continues to Advocate for Immigration Reform

Last week the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops released a daily [Rosary for Vulnerable People on the](#)



[Move](#). This Rosary will provide reflections on various vulnerable migrant populations, directions on how to pray the Rosary, and text for each of the prayers.

FAN was one of 224 faith-based organizations and over 1,000 faith leaders who signed on to a [letter](#) sent to the Trump administration, Congress, and Governors, telling them that “immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers must be included in our emergency response [to COVID-19] if we are to assist everyone who is in need.” Additionally, FAN’s director of Campaigns and Development, Jason Miller appeared in this [EWTN story](#).

In response to the President’s announcement last week of a temporary ban on immigration, FAN issued [this statement](#) calling on the administration to stop using the coronavirus pandemic as cover for immoral and un-American policies. Articles in [America Magazine](#), the [Christian Post](#) and the [Hartford Courant](#) contained quotes from the statement.

As we continue to [anticipate](#) a Supreme Court decision on the termination of the DACA program, we are encouraged by the news that the Court granted a [motion](#) to consider the supplemental circumstances created by the coronavirus and some additional information as they consider the case. The next potential date for a decision is today, April 27th.

Today: Ecumenical Advocacy Days Webinar

Due to the ongoing corona-virus pandemic, [Ecumenical Advocacy Days 2020 has gone virtual](#).

EAD’s 2020 conference theme is “Imagine! God’s Earth and People Restored!” As the COVID-19 pandemic lays bare the deeply rooted systemic injustice and institutionalized racism that traps communities of color in cycles of poverty and poor health outcomes, we come together as an ecumenical Christian community to demand justice in our nation’s response. [Sign up](#) to hear from Archbishop Mark MacDonald, Dr. Betty Holly, Shantha Ready Alonso, and Leslie Woods.



Join us for a **free zoom webinar TODAY, April 27, 2020, 1 pm EDT / 10 am PDT** that will prepare us to take online action with members of Congress on what would have been our Lobby Day. [Register to be on the call here](#).

Join Faithful Democracy: Our Elections Must be Protected

Because of the corona-virus pandemic, our election schedule has already been thrown way off course. Primaries held during the outbreak have risked voters’ health and many states have postponed them in the interest of public safety. Here are several good steps towards securing other



protections for our elections.

In the interest of preserving public health *and* voting rights, FAN has joined other good governance groups in a petition that all states pass [no-excuse absentee voting](#). The best way to protect all human beings is to maintain social distancing. State officials can help accomplish this by minimizing obstacles to casting ballots from the safety of homes and shelters. [Click here to sign this petition](#).

The Faithful Democracy coalition, of which FAN is a lead organizer, is hosting a **webinar on Wednesday April 29th at 12pm EST / 9am PT** to hear how the faith community is mobilizing to ensure that the 2020 primary and general elections are safe and fair in the context of COVID-19. [Register in advance by clicking here](#). After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar.

Finally, we want to let our members and friends know about a new initiative from our friends at Brave New Films, who have launched a new series called Watch Party Wednesdays. Each week they will screen a film from their catalog every Wednesday on Facebook Live, pairing it with an action related to the issue the film is addressing. Their inaugural screening is THIS Wednesday, April 29th with [Suppressed: The Fight To Vote](#).

Call to Action: Save the Postal Service

As a trusted faith-based organization, FAN was contacted by the Democracy Initiative about a unified campaign to secure emergency federal funds to support the Postal Service which has been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic and recession. Some facts about the current state of our postal system:

- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, mail revenues are down by at least 30%, creating a grave and rapidly deteriorating financial situation for the USPS and more than 600,000 postal workers.
- The Post Office is an essential frontline service delivering social security checks, tax refunds, absentee ballots, and now COVID-19 stimulus checks to hundreds of millions of Americans.
- During the 2020 Elections, when we need to massively expand voting by mail to ensure voters do not have to choose between their health and having a say in our democracy, the USPS has never been more essential.



Democracy Initiative partners [American Postal Workers Union](#) (APWU) and [National Association of Letter Carriers](#) (NALC) have set up an online action portal to help mobilize letters to Congress and social media in support of the USPS. **Learn more and [take action here](#)**.