

Podcast Series: Holistic Nature of Us

Episode #79 : Meet: Brother Mark D'Alessio

<https://www.judith@judithdreyer.com>

Welcome everyone to my podcast series The Holistic Nature of Us. I invite you to take a journey with me into a better understanding of the concepts behind our holistic nature and how that ties us directly to the natural world around us. My intention is to be your guide for this half hour as we begin seeing our world with fresh eyes, gaining more understanding and learning how can connect the dots in practical ways that we are nature and nature is in us.

I feature a broad range of guests deeply concerned about the environmental issues of our time and more; authors and educators, practitioners and others whose passion for this earth and for all species help us create sustainable bridges of understanding. These folks are innovators. They're action oriented, creating solutions in a variety of ways that honor us and the planet's holistic nature and I am so honored to share their stories, their projects, and their passion with all of you. So today I thank you for joining me for another engaging interview.

I'd like to introduce you to the Reverend Brother Mark Gregory D'Alessio who is a Franciscan Friar in the new religious society of The Companion of Francis and Clare. He is also an interspiritual Christian priest, a spiritual director/Chaplin, retreat leader, author and past president and executive director of the Psychotherapy and Spirituality Institute which draws together the inspiration of the church with the wisdom of psychological care.

Currently Brother Mark lives on Long Island and he serves as a crisis counselor and program coordinator at a shelter for men and women who are homeless and as a Chaplin at a residential treatment center and school for children with learning and emotional disabilities. In Long Island he founded a Franciscan circle, a progressive interfaith gathering of clergy and lay people who seek to journey in mind and heart with the wisdom and witness of the Saints of Assisi both Francis and Clare. The circle is dedicated to developing leaders for thoughtful social action and spiritual care. The Long Island Coalition for the homeless awarded Brother Mark with their Unsung Hero Award last year.

Brother Mark, it's an honor to have you here today and welcome.

BROTHER MARK: Thank you, thank you. What a joy in the midst of this anxiety and chaos to be talking about such rich and meaningful and faithful things. Thank you for inviting me.

JUDITH: Oh, you're welcome. Tell us your journey. You do so much through your ministry but how did you get there and what calls you with this work?

BROTHER MARK: I always return to a spiritual hero at such times and not only Saint Francis, who is so meaningful. We'll talk a lot about St. Francis and St. Clare today but I'm going to Henri Nouwen for a moment. And Henri Nouwen has among many wonderful works a book called "*The Wounded Healer*" that talks about how our gifts emerge out of our wounds if we invite spirit in to do healing and to move through. Meaning that I have struggled with particular wounds in my life. I was raised in a very difficult family.

I'm a member of Al-Anon because of my step-father's alcoholism and the kinds of things that went on in our home when we were growing up. With lots of self-care and work, including opening my heart to faith and realizing that God loved me, even perhaps when I didn't love myself, I was able to move in and through those wounds and realize that because things went not so well growing up, I wanted to hold space for others for compassion. Because things ... wonderful happened I wanted people to understand what wonder could be. Holding a space for others is really at the heart of what I do, so you know early childhood was seminal for that. And then of course there was trying out the ways of the world, meaning that I bought into the whole system.

At one time, for those who are aware of my journey, may understand that I am now a Franciscan Friar and working for a nonprofit and taking a vow of voluntary poverty. In the past though, I mean not only you mentioned some of the things in the bio but also, I was a businessperson. I mean for about almost eighteen years I had my own business where I owned apartments and offices in New York and Paris. I was the highest level on three airlines and the kind of lifestyle that that implied because I was always everywhere but never inside my own inner life. And I started to realize that buying into

what the culture said was achievement, was empowering, was whole making, actually I felt empty eventually.

I started to realize that the things I did as a volunteer were feeding me more. I started to pull back from the business, commercial side of things and understanding that the gifts I was graced with could actually be put to use in other ways, including eventually in ministry. And that's when I said that God loved me when I realized myself, I didn't realize that the kinds of things I did were welcome in the church, and then one last aspect about my biography. I'm an out queer man and I've known I was gay since probably you know the tween years, 11 or 12, and the church didn't want me. So of course, I didn't go anywhere near it. So being an outsider and feeling that, I bought into the culture to become as "normal", and I put quotes around that word as possible.

Then realized I was hitting a wall and that God called me as God calls all of us to be an individual. And I know we're going to talk about the Holistic approach which means not only human persons but the entire creation, is that we are all individual. We all have our own sort of thumb print, fingerprint in this. I've had to let go of what I thought was useful for me to allow God's spirit in me to awaken me to what actually was sustainable and reverent and intelligent for my life, but that was not simple to do. I mean inner work never is.

So, over the course of about a dozen years I eventually let go of what no longer was useful for me, let go of the business world and started saying yes to this call. I entered into religious community thinking I first was going to become a priest and as part of that I went up to a monastery. It was a Benedictine monastery in the Episcopal tradition. As wild as it seemed that I had this vocation to become a priest, for which I was already in formal process, I felt at home in this monastery and I had to ask, "Is God really calling me to be a monk?" And so, I let go of the priesthood call for the time being and started the formation to become a Benedictine Monk and I did. I entered the monastery and lived an enclosed life and had such a wonderful understanding of what community can be, and what a prayer life behind the closed walls of the monastery can be, that it filled me with joy. But once again, I guess I'm an experiential learner Judith, because as incredible and wondrous as that was, I started to understand that this wasn't my final call. Meaning that to experience that and to learn from that but I felt called to do ministry outside of the walls of the monastery. And for those who

understand in classical religious language the difference between a monk as a Benedictine is, or a Friar a brother to others the highway to life as a Franciscan is, understands that a monk does their work and their ministry behind the monastery walls for the most part, lives an enclosed life set apart 9the world or monk. A Friar, a brother to others, and that's literally what Friar means, a brother, and there are sisters, many sisters in fact, God bless, that one does it outside the monastery walls and that led me to the discovery of St. Francis through some Franciscan Friars I met and the incredible life of a Franciscan, which promises a change of life that accepts everyone as part of a whole. There is a sense of interdependence of all beings including a kinship with nature, not only with other human persons but also with nature and all of matter, the cosmos. It goes all the way back to a beautiful poem, in fact it's one of the first poems in the vernacular Italian language that's called the Council of Creatures. You probably are more familiar with it by the title "Brother Sun, Sister Moon".

JUDITH: Yes.

BROTHER MARK: St. Francis wrote and talked about our kinship with the sun and the moon, all the way through to our kinship with Sister Death and the full cycle of what it is to be conscious of our own being and the universal wonders. Now if St. Francis wrote that today I'm sure he would have started the poem with things like Dark Matter. ... still so relevant today as so much of St. Francis is.

So, I find St. Francis, although he lived, well he was born in the 11th Century, died in the 12th Century, that his wisdom is of all ages. It came out of the ancients and it goes forth through today. And I look at this wonderful wheel, this medicine wheel of five themes that you shared with me about Holism and sustainability and reverence and intelligence and intuition and I'm saying well this could have been written as a biography full of wit and wisdom of St. Francis and St. Clare and the entire Franciscan tradition. Yet you know he isn't often thought about in that way. So that's what I feel like my vocation is now a days. It's to hold a space for others, a place for healing but also to understand that Franciscanism is an alternative orthodoxy. It's a kind of belief and practice that isn't what most think about as Christian. Yet between times it goes back to the original Christian inspiration to understand what is the caring for all beings?

JUDITH: Oh, this is so rich. We could take a half hour on so many things that you've touched upon.

First of all, I want to say thank you for sharing sort of the bullet points of your journey, if you will, because I know from own personal experience the inner road is never easy. And it's the road less traveled, right? The longest road is from our head to our heart, and I hear that in your story. To take a chance on yourself and go from extensively in the outside world to the inside world through a monastery, you know the monks, etc., takes great inner courage to, or some kind of intuitive knowing that this is what you have to follow, and that kind of courage I admire because it's never easy, because it goes against the grain if you will. It can upset our families and friends. We can lose people along the way just because we're following something that speaks to something deeper within us. And I thank you for sharing that.

Again, one of the reasons that I invited Brother Mark here is that St. Francis and St. Clare in the Catholic tradition are known as the saints of nature. You know I always think of the statues of St. Francis with the bird in the hand and his deep love for every being on the planet. And what I like about Brother Mark's inclusion of Clare is that the masculine and feminine gets honored in this understanding. So, I appreciate you relating his philosophy to the passion that I have for doing this work of helping us understand our holistic nature.

Could you tell us more about Francis and Clare, and maybe a little bit deeper story about their connection to nature?

BROTHER MARK: Well certainly. First, and this was what they understood as the ancients did before them as you and I and I hope many do today is that we are not *apart* from nature. We are *a part*. I mean we don't live on this earth; we are part of this organism called the earth as human persons. And in the midst of this infectious disease right now called Covid-19 and climate change and all sorts of things that a part of the earth is involved in.

JUDITH: It's true and it's affecting all of us, isn't it? So, we can't, we can't hide anywhere. We can't cross the nation and hope to be apart of it, meaning apart, not a part. So, we are a part of what's happening on this planet right now and it's uniting us in so many different ways.

BROTHER MARK: Indeed and if you think about how an infectious disease isn't dissimilar to what will happen to our entire planet with climate change and our attitude and beliefs and practices for this infectious disease, I hope that moving through this we will have some wisdom to understand how to work and save our planet because Francis and Clare understood these, well I'm going to say they're very deep questions of ultimate concern and then I'll go into a little bio.

Who or what is the source, which to me is the God of my understanding? What am I doing here on this planet, and how do I, and my family and friends, and community lead a meaningful and purposeful life? And that's all about relationship, a kinship. And Francis, very similar to my story but on a much larger scale, because Francis inspired the world of his time without the internet, without the kind of mass communication that we have today. Francis became a saint within two years after he died, which was an incredibly short period of time to go through the process, because he touched so many people. And that network of people that he touched then moved out and touched other. People knew that this was something authentic, and dare I say, and holy or whole making? To talk about the difference between genders in some spiritual traditions, that there's a wall between – I mean when Clare of Assisi heard a call to be part of the Franciscan tradition, Francis invited her in even to be a brother and then of course hit up against the wall the church. Then together they started, what became known as the Second Order of Franciscanism, the Poor Clares. They came up with a way that women in that time could be part of the Franciscan tradition. And then ultimately a third order of Franciscanism came up where people who are married and lived outside in the world could do this. And so, you have people like you and I, not nobles, not rich, but living a Franciscan lifestyle.

There were well over ten thousand Franciscans at the time of Francis' death and now it's the largest religious order with well over two million in the various mainstream religious traditions but many others who actively prescribe to what the wisdom of St. Francis is about. And you know, you immediately went to Francis and nature. That attracts so many that a great spiritual hero, contemporary of mine Richard Rohr contemporary Franciscan, has a wonderful phrase to go beyond only this, to get underneath it. He calls it "beyond the birdbath."

So, what I'd like to do when I give you a bit of Francis and Clare's autobiographies is to go beyond the birdbath. St. Francis (the wisdom) to

understand how this is a wisdom of peace that is essential to answer all these ultimate questions of human concern; who am I, who is God, why am I here, and what is my purpose?

Francis started out life as a rich person. He was part of the merchant class. I mean we're very familiar today with what commercial culture is around. Today we talk about consumerism and this and that. This is at the beginning of all those kinds of things when people who were not born as nobles, which was seen a birthright from divinity, were able to make money as part of the merchant class. In fact, the merchant class amassed so much money that they became as powerful if not more powerful over time than the nobility.

Francis' father was part of this merchant class and Francis was born into luxury. He was very charismatic and popular and was known for running around with his friends and carousing around. I mean when Francis later on his life said I have been all things unholy. If God can do this through me, God can do it through anyone. He was speaking an authentic truth because although we don't have from biographies of him from that time, we know from the mayor of Assisi, that the kinds of clubs that Francis belonged to, they not only caroused with alcohol, they hurt women, they destroyed property and then got away with it because of their money and they just covered it up with that kind of power. Did Francis deny himself; we do not know that for a fact, but it goes without saying that Francis was on this track of buying into what was important to the culture of his time for a person of his class and power. He then become a knight, a noble person who went to war during the crusades because that would bring even more power to his family and authority, to actually be knighted. He went war with all the refinements that one could go to war with, that his father purchased for him. Well he was captured. He was a prisoner of war for a year and a half. His father finally had to ransom him to get him freed, and Francis was never the same. He likely started giving up on everything that was important to him in the past. Very likely he had what we know today as PTSD, posttraumatic stress disorder as a result of being imprisoned. Can you imagine living in luxury to going to rags, from going from the best foods to eating what's placed in front of you, of having absolute freedom to none at all?

JUDITH: Yeah it reminds me of the spiritual principle that sometimes we have to be destroyed in order for us to find the light, or that divinity within us, and that's how I see that part of his journey, you know? And it's painful.

BROTHER MARK: As any of us who have been through that. We all have in our own way, if not on quite the scale of being a prisoner of war, we've all been prisoners of something. There are many 12 step groups and that's what they're all about, being a prisoner of something, right?

JUDITH: Right, right.

BROTHER MARK: When Francis started returning to his everyday life it wasn't the same. He started living in caves and wearing rags and started doing menial labor and begging for food. He didn't want anything from his family. He eventually gave up his inheritance and heard a call, and this is where some of the myths come in. We don't know what is authentic in a spiritual life. We all have different things that we give our heart to. But he heard from the crucifix this phrase, "repair my church". You know our Jewish brothers and sisters have a phrase, "repair the world", right? Well this is what he heard, "repair the body, repair the church". And he started doing what any sensible person would do. He picked up bricks and mortar and started physically repairing a church.

JUDITH: Right, he took it literally.

BROTHER MARK: And eventually he started to understand that it wasn't only the physical church. It was the spirit of the church. And he started attracting others. They started living in a community of kinship and then went to the religious authorities who turned down so many others who did the same, yet there was something about this friar and his rag-tag group of penitents that touched the pope and the others that they actually authorized them to do something, and it grew.

Clare was actually a noble woman, the daughter who of course would be betrothed to some noble man to make even a greater power for the family, but what she did, she actually heard St. Francis preach and within the year she had left her family, had her head shaved and started as the first female in the Franciscan tradition to show that this was a charism, a spirituality that was not just for men but for women and for all people, and it grew from there. In fact, what's very little known is St. Francis died in 1226 and St. Clare lived for 27 years after him. And it's because of St. Clare the integrity of the Franciscan tradition was maintained when outside forces wanted to change the vow of poverty to mean other things. When they wanted to change what obedience meant. When they wanted to change what loyalty to

God meant. Clare kept the integrity going that the men of the time, who became far more famous like St. Bonaventure said she was the Franciscan's Franciscan. And in fact, St. Clare wrote the first rules for women in the church that was accepted. I mean she was very ill at the time when it was accepted. She died the day after it was actually authorized by the Pope to become the first female rule. God Bless her right, that she held on?

JUDITH: Yes and again what I hear in the story, especially for the time that we're in, there is a feeling of powerlessness that is going on right now, that this is something that we cannot control. It truly is in the Divine's hands if we have that belief, in terms of what's going on here, the deeper message.

But what I hear in the powerlessness of our time and what I hear in St. Francis' story and St. Clare's is that if we follow that inner calling, we have no idea how we can impact the world. We really don't know that. And here we are hundreds of years later when they lived in their time, following their guidance, doing their thing, trying to make the changes for a holistic life, valuing nature again within the culture, hundreds of years later it's still relevant. It still has an impact and it's still affecting us if we choose to look at these "Way-Showers", I call them Way-Showers. Other people call them Mystics. If we look at where they came from and what they lived through, and they did it any way. And I think that's the message I'd like to share with my listeners is, every step we take impacts the whole and we have no idea what that really is in the bigger picture.

BROTHER MARK: I mean Francis and Clare understood that their actions were their only true belonging. What they did was more important than what they say. I mean there's a very famous quotation by Francis that he didn't say quite in this pithy way, preach the gospel, when necessary use words. He said something a little more elaborate than that but what he meant was that we have to preach by our actions. We have to share the Good News of what it is to be alive and whole through our actions and not our words, because the words are empty without actions.

JUDITH: I think most of us would agree with that. We've just created such a culture of busyness that it can be difficult to make the space for that and that takes conscious effort and it takes disciplined effort to do that, no matter what the day is like. Because at the end of the day, how we grow our inside is what's really going to be the most important when we complete our tasks here on earth.

BROTHER MARK: Amen. I mean Francis, as powerful as practice was for him and his brothers of his time, when he died in one of his last writings called *The Testament* he said, “I have done what is mine to do, may Christ now give you yours”, meaning that you’re not going to be able to freeze this. You have to have a living tradition and talk with each other, and pray, and practice, and understand as a community where this goes. And you will know if the fruits are there and whether or not you’re on the right course.

St. Clare had something also beautiful to say about this and I’m going to have to read this, because I don’t know this by heart. “We become what we love”, she said, “and whom we love shapes what we become. If we love things, we become a thing. If we love nothing, we become nothing.”

Imitation is not a literal mimicking of Christ, and we’ll talk about Christ in a moment okay, so this is incurably and wonderfully Christian. “Imitation is not a literal mimicking of Christ, rather it means becoming the image of the beloved, an image disclosed through transformation. This means we are to become vessels of God’s compassionate love for others, meaning we are not just to feel it and think it but we are to become an actual being of compassion. We are to involve ourselves in the mystery of God.

That mystery through our own humility changes us, or in a religious term we convert. We are converted to something, open to transformation, and that transformation is into a being of compassion. The mystery of God’s conversion, the fruit of which is compassion; that’s the heart of a Franciscan’s journey. And it’s really done by living life without grasping. **Cine proprio**, a Latin term which means without appropriation, meaning we do not hold too tightly onto anything. We detach from things and live it but at the same time we are able to be aware of what it is doing to us, so that we are able to say is this whole making or does it cause death? Is this reverent and loving, or irreverent and corrupt? Even if it’s something that we’ve given our heart to in the past, is there something new we can learn about it, that’s called poverty. We often think it’s only about money but it’s not. It’s about holding on to attitudes that are no longer useful, beliefs that are no longer useful. In fact, Frances saw that grasping onto things that are no longer useful, that are causing death, as the root of all cosmic evil. I’m going to use some Christian imagery for a moment. Many are familiar with the image of Mary as the Cosmic Mother of God. She is holding baby Jesus or Baby Jesus is in her heart but she’s stepping on the snake. Have you ever seen that statute around a Roman Catholic Church?

JUDITH: Yes.

BROTHER MARK: The very famous but not as famous statue of St. Francis; he, there, is dressed as a friar and we know that Francis is the closest we've ever had, after Jesus, to living a beatitude life. We know he represents that. And what he's stepping on is not the snake. He's stepping on a moneybag, and it's not about money, it's about possessions. We hold on too tightly. If we possess things, we try to control them, then we are not in that flow of love that goes back and forth between the mystery of God and ourselves; the mystery of creation and ourselves; the mystery of each other and ourselves. We interrupt that flow of love and without that love, fight.

JUDITH:: Well what I'm hearing today too with everything that you're saying is, by the virus causing us to be home we probably have time to be in the stillness and I know from the brain research that's out there; there's book I forget the author, but it's called "*How God Wires Your Brain*". They actually have scientific research to back up how the brain functions. Contemplation takes us, and meditation, into the frontal lobe where compassion, tolerance, patience, love, kindness are accessed in our brain emotionally. The lower brain has fear and it was designed for fight or flight to protect us. But there's actually a neural pathway that goes from the lower brain to the higher brain but the only way that we can keep the flow going is through stillness and through contemplation and prayer, all help us get to that upper highway, to that upper road, to the upper lobes of compassion and all those other qualities that speak of love and compassion.

So that leads us into talking about prayer based on everything you've shared with Frances' journey, St. Clare and the holistic model . would love you to talk to us about why prayer is so important right now.

BROTHER MARK: Well I'm going to get thoroughly Franciscan on you.

JUDITH: That's okay.

BROTHER MARK: That prayer is understood not to change God. I mean both sides of a war pray to God. Sometimes they believe the same God, right? Prayer isn't about changing God. Prayer is about changing us.

JUDITH: Beautiful, that's beautifully said.

BROTHER MARK: And by giving ourselves permission to enter into that space, that interior space that actually is a connection to everything that is and beyond, we have a chance to know more, with a capital M, and then if we're truly listening and wise and dare I say brave? Because courage, which comes from the word heart ("cour" means courage) means to hold our hearts open when they want to close.

You know when we pray and we learn something; we feel something; we understand something that is of ultimate concern, if it's authentic prayer, the Franciscan understanding is we get off of our knees and then we do something about it. And that's what prayer is for. We do something about it. So even in this time in the midst of anxiety of physical distancing, we are not to observe social distancing. We are to have hospitality to our neighbor, which is everyone and everything. Meaning that, are we only in touch with our family? Do we learn of someone who actually doesn't have contact? How can we be in contact with them? I mean this is one of the amazing things for Facebook. People have talked about all the ills of Facebook yet people are returning to Facebook in an amazing way because it's away of reaching out, and they're discovering other people and finding hope in these responses, not just the facts about what's going wrong right now, and how more people are getting sick and dying. I'm - painful to say I know some friends who have died, some friends who are in ICU and some friends who are at home right now struggling through this and I hope that they are part of the 81% mild symptoms and come through.

JUDITH: Yeah, I'm sorry to hear that.

BROTHER MARK: I mean it's powerful. I mean none of us are unaffected by this, but we're called to get up off of our knees and do something about it. This is why you and I are on the podcast right now. This is why I maintain my practice of spiritual direction and talk to others and listen for God together. This why I'm still convening a group called the Franciscan Circle where we used to meet in person but we're doing it by Zoom. We can go out with the people that we can touch either physically or digitally. Physical distancing is not social distancing. And here's a practice for everyone, because I'm talking about using Facebook and the like, and the prayerful connection with the mystery beyond, the mystery of God. Go outside; bring a little pot, a beautiful dish, put some earth in it. Bring that pot back inside with the earth in it and when you pray put your finger in that earth and feel connected. That's from the American Indian tradition and it's

a gorgeous practice. If you have an altar, wherever your place for solitude or contemplation is, bring that pot of earth inside and touch it when you are praying and be part of everything there is.

JUDITH: That's beautiful. I always like to end the podcast with something practical that people can do today and, in my world,, I have studied Native American Tradition so we always give thanks. I either use tobacco or I use cornmeal, and I have sage that I can burn but we don't need to use sage. We can just light a candle if that's all we have. But the point is, it's taking action and as I shared with you, I'm having this wonderful opportunity of working with teenagers on their dreams and the same principle holds true. If you get guidance during the night in your deep dreaming time, which I feel we can touch upon the soul level of our being and even the divinity of our being, it's important to bring it into the world, ground it and take some action on that however guided.

So, this is just another way of bringing action into our world; through the dreamtime, through prayers, get up off your knees and go knock on your neighbor's door. Are they okay? Call somebody that you haven't talked to, are they okay? You know we can do all those kinds of things today and it's bringing us closer. Isn't that interesting? And I just read a beautiful poem today from somebody from Ireland and part of the lines of the poem are, "In Wujan, they can now hear the birds sing and the clouds have dissipated, and they can see the sky.

BROTHER MARK: Here's something I've heard in my heart, and I don't know if this is of God or just my own fear, but it makes sense when I share it with people of wisdom. Human persons are destroying the planet. If you look at a timeline when creation happened 14 billion years ago to when the earth was formed, to when human beings came on the planet, to the last few centuries, the amount of destruction of the planet and the change is unparalleled since the destruction of the dinosaurs. And there is a powerful system that's holistic at work in the planet. Just like our bodies have immune systems, the earth has an immune system. Are these kinds of things earth's own immune system attacking the infectious disease called human persons who are destroying the planet?

JUDITH: Well that's a worthy thought, something to sit with. You know taking responsibility for what we have done to this place. It brings us back into what does it mean to be holistic here. How can we take care of this

place? Now. Not tomorrow, not next week, not when the kids go back to school, but what one thing can we do today that will contribute to a holistic – not only a practice but a way of being, because you keep mentioning being.

BROTHER MARK: The earth, planet earth is not like our automobile a vehicle for us to travel between places for life. Planet earth is part of us. We are part of the organism of the earth. We are a part of the kinship. And if this time does anything, I hope we're reflecting on how we treat each other and our planet home.

Walter Bruggemann, an incredible theologian, said something apt about this. He says "what God does first and best though is to trust people with their moment in history. God trusts them to do what must be done for the sake of community." And that's not unlike what Francis – "I've done what is mine to do. May Christ now give you yours." God trusts us to do what must be done for the sake of the community and that community includes our kinship with the planet. I hope as we move in and through this that we understand that the things that we find life giving right now have always been life giving. We just haven't emphasized them. That these are things that need to be emphasized more.

JUDITH: Right.

BROTHER MARK:essential, understood as essential. How they're doing what's essential. Let us not forget what is essential. And that really is at the heart of what St. Francis was saying with his vow of *sine proprio*. To live life without grasping that vow that we understand more popularly as poverty, voluntary poverty. Don't get attached to anything so much. Love it, but don't get so attached that you lose track of the realer reality behind it. Because you may understand over time that something isn't working, and you need to let go of what's no longer useful. I think a lot of what's going on up until now is no longer useful. It's no longer essential. What we're understanding in the midst of this terror and through our grief is what is essential that's life giving. Let us practice that going forward once we move in and through this terrible time. And let us always remember that our kinship is not just with each other with that but it's also about our planet home.

JUDITH: Ah, Brother Mark this is such a rich discussion I can't thank you enough for sharing not only the wisdom that you've gathered in but making some of the principles clear. I think you have a very clear way of describing a holistic lifestyle, how we can take practical action, the value of prayer and meditation and contemplation in our daily life. And guess what? This virus is giving us an opportunity to perhaps do just that. So, is there anything else, before we leave, that you'd like to add?

BROTHER MARK: Well I'd like to express gratitude to you and your big heart and wanting to share perennial wisdom, meaning that I'm sharing this not only about St. Francis but St. Francis is part of generations of people who came before and now the tradition is generations that will come after. And just as Saint Francis reached beyond the Christian tradition, there's a very famous story about the sultan of Egypt and that will be perhaps for another podcast with you, I hope. He also reached out to those most vulnerable and that's the famous story of St. Francis and the leper, which will be another podcast perhaps. What's most essential to understand is that St. Francis had to face his own shadow. He had to face the dark side of what it was to be human. And that dark side had many gifts. And we started that way to talk about the gifts that come out of our wounds. So, we must always be aware of our hurt. We must not run from it. We must say hello my hurt, my dear habits that come out of that hurt. I know you're there and I will take care of you.

JUDITH: That's beautiful. That's really beautiful. Robert Ohotto is one of my favorite teachers and he said this time is forcing us to look at our shadow. Looking at all those places that we have not wanted to look at before because we fooled ourselves into thinking that we don't have to and now is a time when we have an opportunity to do that. And so many teachers like you, like Robert Ohotto and others that I deeply admire are deeply passionate about helping us wake up to this part of what's going on right now. You know, not to be afraid of it. We can help each other through the dark times, and we can come out of the other side more enlightened and more compassionate and more caring, and maybe happier! You know, happier that we've let go some of the attachments to stuff that really no longer serves us.

BROTHER MARK: Indeed. I mean this sounds Buddhist but it's also the perennial tradition of all the spiritual traditions that says that, "Love and life are also about suffering". Yet if we accept that there's suffering, and there

is, we understand also that the conditions for happiness, for wholeness are also still there. So suffering is the consequence of loving. We were always to suffer and struggle. We will fall and get back up. We will fall and get back up. We will fall and get back up. And the conditions for a full whole life are still there, if we want to say yes to them. So, if anything, podcasts like this, our faith, they inspire us to get back up because those shadows aren't only what we consider dark, the things we get attached to. Only with enlightenment or wisdom do we understand that they're dark. They seem golden at the time. Money, wealth, power, position – those are golden shadows. Our ego gets attached. We have to let go of that egoic operating system and bring other systems online: the systems of the heart, the systems of the wisdom of the mind, the systems of the body that know that we are all one. Those three intelligences and they connect to everything in the wider universe.

JUDITH: They do. So, thank you. I think I'd like to end here. I think you've given us a lot to think about.

Would you like to share with us your contact information?

BROTHER MARK: Well certainly. And I'm sure it will be, my short bio will be part of this podcast when you click on it. You can include my e-mail address there. It's br.markgregory@icloud.com so I hope you'll be in touch. I hope something here was useful and please share your wisdom. You know humility is a sense of awe in a universe of wonders. Everyone who listens to this, you are part of the wonder of the universe and please let your self be known.

JUDITH: Thank you. What a beautiful way to end.

Well folks, another deeply thought provoking interview and I hope you are inspired by it as much as I am. And I want to thank Brother Mark again for his time and sharing with us today. So, thank you!

This is Judith Dreyer. I'm the author of "At the Garden's Gate", book and blog. My book is available through my website www.judithdreyer.com as well as several distribution arms such as Amazon, Nook, Goodreads and more. I'd like to remind all of you that a transcript is available for each podcast. And please like and share these podcasts. Let's get the word out and support each other.

And remember, **now** is the time for practical action and profound inner change so we value our world again.

Enjoy your day.