

# FRANCIS OF ASSISI

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*He may seem like a sort of medieval hippie, but St. Francis' respect for all living things and his joyous outlook were deeply rooted in his faith – a faith that emerged over many years and grew slowly.*



Francis of Assisi (1181-1226), the spoiled son of a wealthy merchant, grew up dreaming of glory on the battlefield. On his way to war at the age of 20, though, he was told in a vivid dream to return home “to serve the master.” He obeyed, not understanding, and worked for his father for a time.

Francis began praying and asking what God wanted of him. Eventually he left his old life and all his possessions behind. When challenged by his father, Francis emphatically renounced his inheritance by publicly stripping off his clothes – they had been provided by his father. In 1208 Francis was deeply moved by a Gospel reading at Mass, and understood that the purpose of his vocation was absolute poverty: being free of all possessions in order to love all of God’s creation and spread God’s word.

Francis traveled widely to preach. His homey sermons and practical approach drew large crowds. He didn’t set out to be a reformer, but he played an important role in renewing the Church in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. “We have been called to heal wounds,” Francis said, “to unite what has fallen apart, and to bring back home those who have lost their way.” Within 10 years this “Fool for Christ” attracted 5,000 followers from all walks of life to his Order of Friars Minor, better known as the Franciscans.



**“Jesus is happy to come with us,  
as truth is happy to be spoken,  
life is to be lived, light is to be lit, love is to be loved,  
joy is to be given, peace is to be spread.”**

“We must be simple, humble and pure. We should never desire to be over others. Instead, we ought to be servants who are submissive to every human being for God’s sake. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on all who live in this way and persevere in it to the end.”

**“Whoever may come to us, whether a friend or a foe,  
a thief or a robber, let him be kindly received.”**

“May the Lord bless thee and keep thee; may He show His face to thee and be merciful to thee. May he turn His countenance to thee and give thee peace.”

Blessing his friend, Friar Leo; based on Numbers 6:24-26

**“Preach the Gospel always, and if necessary, use words.”**

Paraphrased from Francis’ Rule for his order, written in 1221

**Francis was canonized in 1228, just two years after his death. His feast day is October 4.**

# CANTICLE OF THE SUN

Most high, all-powerful, all good Lord! All praise is yours, all glory, all honor and all blessing. To you alone, Most High, do they belong. No mortal lips are worthy to pronounce your name.

All praise be yours, my Lord, through all that you have made, and first my lord Brother Sun, who brings the day; and light you give to us through him. How beautiful is he, how radiant in all his splendor! Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.

All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Moon and Stars; in the heavens you have made them, bright and precious and fair.

All praise be yours, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air, and fair and stormy, all the weather's moods, by which you cherish all that you have made.

All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Water, so useful, lowly, precious, and pure.

All praise be yours, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom you brighten up the night. How beautiful he is, how gay! How full of power and strength.

All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Earth, our mother, who feeds us in her sovereignty and produces various fruits and colored flowers and herbs.

All praise be yours, my Lord, through those who grant pardon for love of you; through those who endure sickness and trial.

Happy those who endure in peace; by you, Most High, they will be crowned.

All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Death, from whose embrace no mortal can escape. Woe to those who die in mortal sin! Happy those She finds doing your will! The second death can do no harm to them.

Praise and bless my Lord, and give him thanks, and serve him with great humility.



## **“Sanctify yourself and you will sanctify society.”**

“My little sisters, the birds, you owe much to God, your Creator, and always in every place you should praise Him. He has given you liberty to fly about everywhere, and has also given you double and triple finery. ... He feeds you, and gives you the streams and fountains for your drink; the mountains and valleys for your refuge and the high trees to make your nests; and because you know not how to spin or sow, God clothes you and your children. Your Creator loves you much, seeing that He has bestowed on you so many benefits. Therefore, my little sisters, beware of the sin of ingratitude, and always give praise to God.”

Sermon to the Birds, c. 1220

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## **QUESTIONS FOR CONTEMPLATION**

1. It took Francis eight years to understand and fully respond to God's call, once he heard it. Has your response to God's call evolved over the years? How so?
2. A modern "Prayer of St. Francis" implores, "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace." What does that mean? How can you be an instrument of peace in your world?
3. To Francis, all of creation was sacred because it was created by God. How can you treat nature with greater respect?

## **MORE INFORMATION**

Order of Friars Minor: [www.ofm.org](http://www.ofm.org)

The Franciscans on Francis: [www.americancatholic.org/Features/Francis](http://www.americancatholic.org/Features/Francis)