

Saint Francis of Assisi

“He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.”

Pope Francis, Laudato Si' #10

Pope Francis frequently refers to Saint Francis of Assisi (whose name he took when elected pope) and credits him as an inspirational example of “care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically.” Laudato Si' #10

Saint Francis shows us that God speaks to us through nature. He teaches us to care for all creation.

In quiet reflection, read this short account of Saint Francis of Assisi's life and spend some time in prayerful reflection. You may wish to use the provided prayer below when praying for the strength and perseverance to follow his example of living in “harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself.” Laudato Si' #10

Saint Francis of Assisi,
Your life shows us how we should live in respectful solidarity
with our neglected sisters and brothers around the world.
Your actions are an example of how we should care for
creation, how to be joyful and generous in our service of our
loving God, and how to open our eyes to the presence of God in
all things.
Help us to be like you, sharing the joy and compassion of God
with all whom we meet.
Inspire in us a change of heart to treat the whole of creation
with the reverence and respect it deserves.
Amen

The Life of St Francis of Assisi

Francis was born in Assisi, Italy, in 1182. His father, Pietro Bernadone, was a wealthy merchant and Francis lived a privilege and opulence. He chased fame, glory and material wealth and had little experience of, or compassion for, the poor or sick. However, this began to change after Francis was captured during a military excursion. Whilst being held for over a year, he developed a serious illness and began to undergo a spiritual dilemma and transformation of heart. Eventually Francis was freed and recovered, but his transformation had already begun. One day the young man who had once had an exclusive taste for the finer things in life came across a disfigured and poverty-stricken leper. In a moment of compassion, he gave his cloak to the leper and kissed him. This marked the start of a radical new way of life for Francis.

He began to see the world and its people in a different way, and spent much time in prayer.

On one such occasion, Francis sat praying in the dilapidated chapel of San Damiano. It was then that he heard a voice saying, "Francis, repair my church." Thinking this was a command to restore the chapel building itself, Francis began selling his family's goods in order to fund the restoration. Upon discovering what his son was doing, Pietro Bernadone had him brought before the Bishop of Assisi. Francis admitted that he had used his father's wealth without permission, essentially stealing from his own family. As restitution, Francis not only returned the money he owed his father, but he renounced his entire inheritance, even stripping off the clothes he was wearing! The Bishop hastily covered Francis in a simple peasant smock, and the transformation of "the poor man of Assisi" was complete.

Later, Francis realised the true meaning of the words he heard in San Damiano and understood that God was asking him to help restore the heart and spirit of his Church. God wanted Francis to recall it to the spirit of the gospel by recognising the face of Christ in those living in poverty, by living in a spirit of solidarity with them and by experiencing God throughout all of creation.

Francis truly understood the sacramental nature of all God's creation.

St Francis' was considered a revolutionary and his way of life attracted many. However, it was also disturbing to many others, and he faced suffering, hardship and ridicule as he spread his message. On the occasion of the World Day of Peace, January 1, 1990, Pope John Paul II said of St Francis of Assisi that he "offers Christians an example of genuine and deep respect for the integrity of creation." Francis' last years were a time of physical suffering and he died in 1226, and was laid to rest in the earth in his simple habit.