

# St Francis of Assisi

## Feast Day - October 4



### Saint Francis of Assisi

#### Biography:

Saint Francis of Assisi was a Catholic friar who gave up a life of wealth to live a life of poverty. He established the Franciscan Order of friars and the women's Order of the Poor Ladies.

#### Early Life

Francis was born in Assisi, Italy in 1182. He grew up leading a privileged life as the son of a wealthy cloth merchant. Francis loved to learn and sing songs as a boy. His father wanted him to become a businessman and taught him about the French culture.

#### Going to Battle

About the age of nineteen Francis went to battle against the nearby town of Perugia. Francis was captured and taken prisoner. He was held prisoner in a dungeon for a year before his father paid the ransom and he was set free.

#### Visions from God

Over the next few years Francis began to see visions from God that changed his life. The first vision was when he was sick with a high fever. At first he thought that God had called him to fight in the Crusades. However, he had another vision that told him to help the sick. Finally, when praying in a church, Francis heard God tell him to "repair my church, which is falling in ruins."

Francis gave all his money to the church. His father became very angry with him. Francis then left his father's home and took a vow of poverty.

#### The Franciscan Order

As Francis lived his life of poverty and preached to people about the life of Jesus Christ, people began to follow him. By 1209, he had around 11 followers. He had one basic rule which was "To follow the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ and to walk in his footsteps". Francis was a devoted follower of the Catholic Church. He and his followers travelled to Rome to get the approval for their religious Order from the pope. At first the pope was reluctant. These men were dirty, poor, and smelled bad. However, eventually he understood their vow of poverty and blessed the Order.

#### Other Orders

The Franciscan Order grew as men joined and made vows of poverty. When a woman named Clare of Assisi wanted to take similar vows, Francis helped her start the Order of the Poor Ladies (Order of Saint Clare). He also started another order (later called the Third Order of Saint Francis) that was for men and women who didn't take vows or leave their jobs, but lived out the principals of the Franciscan Order in their daily lives.

### **Love for Nature**

Francis was known for his love of nature and animals. There are many stories about Saint Francis and his preaching to animals. It is said that one day he was talking to some birds when they began to sing together. Then they flew into the sky and formed the sign of a cross.

It was also said that Francis could tame wild animals. One story tells of a vicious wolf in the town of Gubbio that was killing people and sheep. The people of the town were frightened and didn't know what to do. Francis went to the town to confront the wolf. At first the wolf growled at Francis and prepared to attack him. However, Francis made the sign of the cross and told the wolf not to hurt anyone else. The wolf then became tame and the town was safe.

### **Death**

Francis became ill and spent the last few years of his life mostly blind. He died in 1226 while singing Psalm 141. He was declared a saint of the Catholic Church only two years after his death.

### **Interesting Facts about Saint Francis of Assisi**

- October 4 is observed as Saint Francis feast day.
- It is said that he received the stigmata two years before he died. This was the wounds of Christ from the cross including his hands, feet, and side.
- Francis travelled to the Holy Lands during the Crusades hoping to conquer the Muslims with love rather than war.
- Francis set up the first known Nativity scene to celebrate Christmas in 1220.
- He believed that actions were the best example, telling his followers to "Preach Gospel at all times and when necessary use words."

**Source:** [http://www.ducksters.com/history/middle\\_ages/saint\\_francis\\_of\\_assisi.php](http://www.ducksters.com/history/middle_ages/saint_francis_of_assisi.php)

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Viewpoints on the Environment - Pope Francis

"It means respecting each of God's creatures and respecting the environment in which we live. It means protecting people, showing loving concern for each and every person, especially children, the elderly, those in need, who are often the last we think about," he said in the homily of his inaugural Mass.

Francis, the former Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio of Argentina, took his name in honour of St Francis of Assisi, a symbol of poverty, charity and love of nature.

(Brazil) In a separate speech to bishops, the pope called for "respect and protection of the entire creation which God has entrusted to man, not so that it be indiscriminately exploited but rather made into a garden."

He also urged attention to a 2007 document by Latin American and Caribbean bishops that he was in charge of drafting, which underscored dangers facing the Amazon environment and the native people living there. The document also called for new evangelization efforts to halt a steep decline in Catholics leaving for other faiths or secularism.

"The traditional communities have been practically excluded from decisions on the wealth of biodiversity and nature. Nature has been, and continues to be, assaulted," the document reads. But let's look at what Francis actually said so far on the environment.

1. Address to the media:

Francis of Assisi. For me, he is the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects creation; these days we do not have a very good relationship with creation, do we? He is the man who gives us this spirit of peace, the poor man ... How I would like a Church which is poor and for the poor!

2. Inauguration Mass (creation mentioned 6 times, environment twice):

The vocation of being a "protector", however, is not just something involving us Christians alone; it also has a prior dimension which is simply human, involving everyone. It means protecting all creation, the beauty of the created world, as the Book of Genesis tells us and as Saint Francis of Assisi showed us. It means respecting each of God's creatures and respecting the environment in which we live....

Please, I would like to ask all those who have positions of responsibility in economic, political and social life, and all men and women of goodwill: let us be "protectors" of creation, protectors of God's plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment.

3. Audience with religious leaders of other faiths:

The Church is likewise conscious of the responsibility which all of us have for our world, for the whole of creation, which we must love and protect. There is much that we can do to benefit the poor, the needy and those who suffer, and to favour justice, promote reconciliation and build peace....

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### Is "Green" a Christian Position?

by Fr. Richard Rohr

*Creation still retains the hope of being freed, to enjoy the same freedom and glory as the children of God. —Romans 8:21*

It is strange that two thousand years after Christians believed that the Eternal Word became 'matter' and lived among us (John 1:14), we would still need to justify or validate our love of the material world! Yet we do. After the Incarnation of God in Christ, our universe was supposed to be rearranged. The heavens were no longer to be seen as "up there," and we "down

here." Henceforth, we were supposed to find ourselves *in* the heavens! In fact, that is the very point—if you are a recipient of "salvation."

Yet to this day, most Christians still live inside of a largely pagan cosmology (I mean that quite seriously). It is a telling window into the early stage development, and actual immaturity, of most organized Christianity. One would think that if there were any religion which would really reverence materiality, physicality, embodiment, sexuality, the history and structure of life itself, animal, water, and earth care—it would have been the Christian religion. But not so. Many scientists and doctors tend to do it much better, to be quite honest.

There are actually bishops, priests, and laity who think that concern for this world and this earth is pagan, New Age, trendy, or unnecessary, some kind of diversionary tactic from the real work of exclusively human salvation. From this viewpoint, we are about an "evacuation plan" for humans into the next world. We really have not been too concerned about helping to create the "New Earth" that the Bible promised us in its very final words (Revelation 21:1), or to protect the creation that the Bible starts by calling "very good" (Genesis 1:31). God saw it as inherently good; for some reason, we did not.

For many believers, "green" is not only *not* Christian, it is secular, silly, unneeded, and in actual competition with the Gospel. Their belief is only for the next world and never for this one, too. They live in a split universe and, for some narcissistic reason, believe they are the only creation that God cares about. Why would that be true? No wonder that the salvation we have offered people is so tiny and ineffective, and barely touches the surface of human and social transformation. No wonder we have been on the wrong side of most social revolutions until very recently.

The Jewish Scriptures were already more wholistic and inclusive than such supposed believers in the Incarnation. Listen to the three young men in the fiery furnace, a Canticle that we Franciscan friars chanted every Sunday and major feast day, but never seem to have comprehended. Below is only a small part of this joyous affirmation of all creation's power to show forth salvation:

*Let the earth bless the Lord, praise and exalt God above all forever!*  
*Mountains and hills, bless the Lord,*  
*Everything growing from the earth, bless the Lord,*  
*You springs, bless the Lord,*  
*Seas and rivers, bless the Lord,*  
*You dolphins and all water creatures, bless the Lord,*  
*All you birds of the air, bless the Lord,*  
*All you beasts, wild and tame, bless the Lord, praise and exalt God above all forever.*

—Daniel 3:74-81

How could we miss this central point so totally after Jesus himself told us to do God's will "on earth as it is in heaven" in our primary spoken prayer, the "Our Father"? Buddhism does not believe that God entered our world and took on its clothing and disguise; neither does Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Confucianism, Taoism, or any of the other religions of the world. The consubstantial union between spirit and flesh is the unique doctrine of Christianity, and the very meaning of its living icon, Jesus. To believe in "the Christ" is to assert this radical union. It is our only real trump card, yet we have refused to play it. It is probably just too good to be true!

Walter Wink said many years ago that there are three basic world views, and then there is the Christian one:

1. The material world view: everything is matter and physical.
2. The spiritual world view: everything is spirit and consciousness.

The theological world view: the job of good people is to put matter and spirit together by

effort, morality, and ritual, and thereby please God and change themselves into something holy

3. The incarnational world view: matter and spirit are already and always have been one. They are the two sides of the same coin. *We do not make it happen, we learn to see it everywhere and always. It is the Great Epiphany and the major meaning of conversion.* This is the real and only Christian position.

Clergy of all stripes seem to prefer the third “theological” worldview. It allows us priests and preachers to feel necessary and gives us a job to do. It keeps the laity running after the carrot on the stick, which we always hold out in front of them. But, less cynically, I think the Incarnational worldview demands some degree of inner experience of the same. You cannot just “get it” intellectually or as an abstract doctrine. You have to have had some level of unitive experience, God experience, or what many would call basic mysticism. Even nature mysticism or love mysticism are good starters. Once you have this experience, not only is the Green revolution not anti-Christian, or a nice parallel to Christianity, I think it is *the direct child of Christianity!* It is the Incarnation come to full unfolding, implication, and consciousness. Yes, of course, people are often involved for self-interested motivation, but does that make it wrong itself? We see in the Scriptures that Yahweh is quite willing to use Balaam’s ass, Cyrus the Persian, and unwilling prophets to do God’s holy will.

God is so humble and so patient that God does not wait until humans can develop pure and perfect motivation. *You do not need to believe in God to do God’s will or to give God glory.* Apparently Daniel is saying that dolphins, springs, and mountains are doing it quite well, and have been for millions and billions of years before we even showed up. Was God not glorified until we came? Was God not in love until we came? If so, God had nothing to do for at least 34 billion years.

I hope to develop this theme on more practical levels in the months and years ahead, but here I just want to lay the theological foundation, and let you absorb it—and enjoy it—before we go further. It is a major paradigm shift for most Western and cultural Christians. Listen to the wisdom of Solomon:

*How dull are all people who, from the things-that-are, have not been able to discover He-Who-Is, or by studying the good works have failed to recognize the Artist. . . . Through the grandeur and beauty of the creatures, we may by analogy, contemplate their Author.* —Wisdom 13:1, 5

In other words, matter is the outer form and spirit is the inner source of everything we know and see. Today quantum physics, astronomers, and molecular biologists seem to be discovering the same thing, but from completely different starting points. Paul said the same. He knew his Scriptures from Genesis to the Book of Wisdom to the prophet Daniel. It is time for us to *believe* as widely and deeply and completely as he did. And remember that Paul only articulated what Jesus had already lived by action and lifestyle:

*Ever since God created the world, his everlasting power and deity—however invisible—have been there for the mind to see in the things that God has made.* —Romans 1:20

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A Resource List : Compiled by Kate Lawry in 2015  
Former Diocesan Religious Education Resource Centre

## FOR ADULT REFLECTION

*Compassion: living in the spirit of Francis* / Ilia Delio (2011)

*For the love of animals: Christian ethics, consistent action* / Charles Camosy (2013)

*The gift of kindness: inspiring true stories of rescued farm animals* / Pam Adhern (2013)

*From Teilhard to Omega: co-creating an unfinished universe* / Ilia Delio (2014)

*The unbearable wholeness of being: God, evolution and the power of love* / Ilia Delio (2013)

*Ten Commandments for the environment: Pope Benedict XVI speaks out for creation and justice* / Woodeene Koenig-Bricker (2009). The teaching on creation and environmental responsibility by 'The Green Pope', with a collection of quotes and theological reflections such as, the preface for 'Commandment ten: It's all a gift':

*Francis; the journey and the dream* / Murray Bodo (2011). This text has been described as 'the favourite book' about St Francis!

*The gift of Saint Francis* / John Davis and Don McMonigle, illustrations by Lynne Muir (2003). The authors and illustrators reveal the legacy of St Francis in stories, prayer and pilgrimage.

*Jesus and the natural world: exploring a Christian approach to ecology* / Denis Edwards (2012). This text is in all Catholic primary schools.

*Partaking of God: trinity, evolution and ecology* / Denis Edwards (2014)

*Go to the ant: reflections on biodiversity and the Bible* / Ghillean T Prance (2013)

*An Inconvenient text: is a green reading of the Bible possible?* / Norman C Habel (2009)

*Looking to Francis: the man from Assisi and his message for today* / John Bohrer and Joseph Stoutzenberger (2012)

*Landscapes of prayer: finding God in your world and your life* / Sacred Silf (2011)

*Reclaiming Francis: how the saint and the pope are renewing the church* / Charles M Murphy (2014).

*Peace of heart / Francis of Assisi forward* by Caroline Myss (2009)

*Ask the beasts: Darwin and the god of love* / Elizabeth A Johnson (2014)

*Experiencing scripture: intimacy with ancient text and modern faith* / Anthony F Campbell (2012)

*Inventing Peace: a dialogue on perception* / Wim Wenders & Mary Zournazi (2013)

*Creation in crisis: Christian perspectives on sustainability* / editor Robert S White (2009)

*Creation is groaning: Biblical and theological perspectives* / edited / Mary L Coloe (2013) Garden of Eden: champions of climate change / Deborah Hart (2015)

*Greening your church : a practical guide to creation care ministry for parishes, dioceses, and religious communities* / Norman Levesque (2014)

*Eco faith: creating & sustaining green congregations* / Charlenen Hosenfeld (2008)

### **PRAYER FOCUS and LITURGY**

*Aspects of the heart: the many path ways to a good life* / Joan Chittister (2013)

*Finding your hidden treasure* / Benignus O'Rourke (2010)

*Heartlines: prayer resources for a contemporary spirituality* edited by Maurice Ryan (2013). Text includes themes for liturgy or reflection taken from prayers attributed to Saint Francis.

*'It's all good' liturgy from 50 prayer services for middle schoolers for every season of the Church year* / Connie Clark (2012)

*God of the snadpit/ 50 prayers for children, young people, school staffs and their Christian school communities* / Rachele and Gabby Tullio (2013)

*A time to pray for justice and peace : prayer celebrations for youth* / David Haas (2006)

'Creation ' from *Celebrating with children : volume 1* /Robert Borg (2012)

*Guided meditations for young Catholics* / Glynnis Hope B Dawson and music by John Dawson (2013).

### **JOURNALS for ADULTS**

*Resurgence & Ecologist: environment, activism, social justice, arts, ethical living* published by The Resurgence Trust, UK

*Earthsong : ecology, spirituality and education* published by Earthsong Project, Australia

*EREOMOS: exploring spirituality in Australia* published by the Eremos Institute, Australia

### **AUDIO CDs**

*Following the path: the search for a life of passion, purpose and joy* / Joan Chittister

### **MUSIC CDs**

*Ultimate chant: music of ethereal beauty* published by Naxos Rights International (2008) (various artists)

*Gurrumul : Rrakala Winanjara : the song peoples sessions* / Warren H Williams and the Warumungu Songmen (2011)

*Simply Gregorian: 4 cd's of haunting songs and melodies* published by Union Square Music Ltd (2006)

*All shall be well: his Celtic music* / Keith Duke, Lucy Bunce & Kevin Duncan (2011)

*Let your light shine* / Andrew Chinn (2009)

*Tree of life* / Marty Haugen & Marc Anderson (2009)

*1,2,3, God loves me* / Michael Mangan (2014)

*God of Surprises: new music for liturgy and prayer* / Michael Herry FMS (2008)

### **DVDs**

*Francis of Assisi / Franciscan Friars* (2007)

*Assisi pilgrimage: walking in faith with Francis and Clare* / Greg Friedman (2006)

*Holy mystery: a celebration of the new universe story* / Monica Brown & Mary Teresa McCormack (2011). The story of creation of the universe has been told in so many different ways down through the ages, through image and myth, through music, song and dance. And so was it told when recorded live at the spirit Dream in Burning Hearts Gathering, Friday 27th May 2011 at Sydney Showground

*Mother earth: resource kit of songs hymns mantras movies and prayer rituals in celebration of creation* / Monica Brown & Hilary Musgrave (2009)

*The man who planted trees* / Jean Giono & Frederick Back (2004)

*Margaret Rizza - Her music for joy : uplifting music and images*

*Great Southern Land* / Ivan O'Mahoney and Stephen Simpson (2012).

*Orbit : Earth's Extraordinary Journey* DVD presented by Kate Humble and Dr Helen Czerski

*Brother Francis presents the Rosary : a special way to pray*

Animated DVD

*Our earth our home: creation spirituality for the 21<sup>st</sup> century* / Elizabeth A Johnson, Emmy Silivus & Mary Burke (2011).

*Pardon, Peace and Stories of Reconciliation* DVD Franciscan Communications

*The stations of the forest* / Columbian Mission Society 2011). Following the format of 'The Stations of the Cross' this prayerful resource laments the stages in the death of a part of God's Creation, the rainforests. It incorporates issues related to rainforest destruction: extractive industries, loss of biodiversity and climate change. Released for the 'International Year of the Forests,' it invites you to reflect on our place in the Australian landscape in a similar manner and take hope-filled action. A booklet accompanies the DVD, providing the script, an agenda for meetings, a reflection for each of the Stations, and prayers. Ideal for senior students and adult groups.

#### **WEBSITES:**

<http://www.caritas.org.au/>

<http://catholicearthcare.org.au/>

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