

A Reading on Saint Francis of Assisi

St. Francis of Assisi, according to church history is regarded as the pre-eminent figure passionate about imitating Christ's life. He is known also as a patron saint of Italy, the founder of the Franciscan order of the Friars Minor, an admirer of nature and a servant to poor and destitute. The brown robe of the Franciscans is iconic. Francis of Assisi is a great, great figure in the church but known especially for connecting with fellow Christians and many people outside the Christian family. Francis, sometimes known as the Imitator of Christ, lived his life closely to what he believed the Gospels taught. His example inspires us to the possibility of lives totally centered in Christ's teachings. He was an enormously free and spontaneous person, yet he adhered faithfully to the Church, while living his life according to the Beatitudes of Matthew 5:3-12.

Born into a relatively affluent family, as an adult Francis intentionally became poor financially as well as poor in spirit as a means of spiritual growth through experience. He mourned his sins as few have mourned their sins. He was meek and perpetually in a state of self-denial. He had a hunger and thirst for righteousness, and was merciful, even bathing lepers. He kept his heart pure by public confession, and made peace between quarreling factions. He even suffered mocking and beatings with joy. Truly Francis was a most unusual person who brought in a breath of fresh air, reminding people that living our Faith means loving Jesus and following the Gospel.

Until Francis time, people wishing to dedicate their lives to God had only one choice: to leave the world and enter cloistered monasteries. This had been the practice for seven hundred years, with the "vowed" people trying to live ideal Christian lives by work, prayer, and meditation. Francis broke this mold by encouraging his followers to live a "Gospel" life while remaining "in" the world, rather than isolated from it. Francis did not envision his followers forming a community. Instead he wanted them to be traveling preachers much as the disciples of Jesus who were sent out two by two (see Luke 10:1) Francis and his followers traveled the countryside greeting people with the words, "The Lord give you peace," and exhorting them to repent of their sins and to love and fear God. The priests of the day usually spoke to their congregations in formal language, but Francis urged his followers to preach a simple, easily understood theology of love and compassion. The Church always wanted Francis to write a rule for his order, as the leaders of all the other orders had done. But he always felt the gospel was enough.

"If you will be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor."

"Take nothing for the journey"

"If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."

Those simple gospel imperatives become the basis for the Franciscan way of life and the foundation for the first Rule of 1209. Francis' rules were simply the repetition of gospel texts with some commentary and guidelines for regulating the life of the friars. Francis did not merely accept poverty, he pursued it. Some want to be poor for reasons of philosophy, ideology, or asceticism. Francis wanted to be poor because Jesus was poor and because his beloved Master so loved the poor. In other words, Francis stressed poverty so strongly, not for his own sake, but in order to become closer to God and nearer to the forgotten and suffering ones. Even today, the Lay Franciscans of the Third Order remain active throughout the world. They show Christ's love and compassion to the needy and hurting people in the modern world. They are called to *"To heal wounds, to unite what has fallen apart and to bring home those who have lost their way."*

A Prayer of Saint Francis

Almighty, eternal, just and merciful God, grant us in our misery and grace to do for you alone what we know you want us to do, and always to desire what pleases you. Thus, inwardly cleansed, interiorly enlightened, and inflamed by the fire of the Holy Spirit, may we be able to follow in the footprints of your beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. And, by your grace alone, may we make our way to you, Most High, who live and rule in perfect Trinity and simple Unity, and are glorified, God all-powerful, forever and ever.

Amen

Timeline of life of Saint Francis of Assisi

- 1181 - born in Assisi, baptized Giovanni di Pietro Bernardone, renamed Francesco by his father.
- 1202 - November War between Perugia and Assisi. Francis spends a year in captivity and becomes ill.
- 1203 - 1204 - A long period of illness and convalescence.
- 1205 - Francis sets out to join the army. Returns after a vision and message in Spoleto. Beginning of a gradual period of conversion.
- 1205 - Fall: Message of the Crucifix at San Damiano, Conflict with his father.
- 1206 - January/February: The trial before the Bishop, assumes hermit's habit and renounces his birth rights
- 1206 - Spring: Francis nurses the lepers at Gubbio.
- 1206 - Summer: Returns to Assisi and begins to rebuild San Damiano; end of conversion process
- 1207 - Summer to January or February: He repairs San Damiano, San Pietro della Spina; and Our Lady of the Angels "Portiuncula".
- 1208 - February 24 - Francis hears the Gospel for the Feast of St. Matthias. Changes the belt on his hermit's habit and begins to preach penance.
- 1208 - April 16 - Bernard of Quintavalle and the priest, Peter Catani join him. Others follow.
- 1208 - Fall and Winter: Francis is assured of the pardon of his sins and the growth of his fraternity. They go out two by two to preach penance.
- 1209 - During Mass in Chapel of St. Mary of the Angels gospel revealed Francis' task; words of Christ became the first rule
- 1212 - Clare of Assisi entered religious life and the Second Order was established
- 1217 - May 5 - Pentecost General Chapter of all the friars at the Portiuncula. First mission outside Italy.
- 1219 - May 26 - First friar missionaries leave for Morocco.
- 1219 - June 24 - Francis sails for the Holy Land.
- 1219 - Fall: St. Francis meets with the Sultan.
- 1220 - First Franciscan martyrs - the friars killed in Morocco.
- 1220 - Cardinal Hugolino appointed Protector of the Order.
- 1220 - Francis resigns as General Minister and friar Peter Catanii appointed.
- 1221 - Peter Catanii dies and at Chapter Bro. Elias becomes the Vicar.
- 1221 - 1222 - Francis goes on a preaching tour throughout Italy.
- 1223 - Francis goes to Fonte Colombo to write the definitive Rule for the Order of Friars Minor.
- 1223 - The first Christmas Crib midnight Mass at Greccio.
- 1224 - The long retreat of Francis at La Verna where he receives the Stigmata or wounds of Christ.
- 1225 - His eye problems turn worse, he undergoes medical treatment but without improvement. Almost blind he writes his "Canticle of the Creatures".
- 1225 - 1226 - Francis goes to Fonte Columbo where the doctors cauterize his temple in an unsuccessful treatment.
- 1226 - October 3, he dies there in the evening.
- 1226 - October 4, he is buried in San Giorgio Church.
- 1228 - July 16 , in Assisi, his friend Cardinal Hugolino now Pope Gregory IX canonizes Francis.