



Sadao Watanabe, St. Francis and the birds

Saint Francis of Assisi

My name is Francis. I was born in the year 1181 in the city of Assisi, Italy. I had a very happy and carefree life growing up. My father was a wealthy businessman who bought and sold fancy clothes, told jokes, played musical instruments, and danced, danced, danced!

I wanted more than anything to win fame and glory by being a knight in shining armor. One day I got my chance! The city of Perugia was coming to attack Assisi. But Assisi lost to Perugia, and I was taken prisoner. Even in prison I laughed and told jokes to my fellow prisoners. I was very glad, though, when my father paid money so that I could be released.

I wanted to fight in war again. But one day God spoke in my heart as I prayed in the church of San Damiano (San Damiano was very close to Assisi). I was busy telling God about what I wanted to do in my life, when God said, “Francis, look around you. My church is falling apart. Repair it for me.”

Immediately, I was filled with an indescribable joy. Instead of being a knight, I would rebuild God’s church! But how would I get the money to buy the necessary materials to repair the church in San Damiano? Ah! Do you know what I did? I stole some of my father’s expensive fabric and sold it.

My father was furious. He took me before the bishop (the head religious leader in our city) and told him what I’d done. The bishop said, “Francis, you need to repay your father.” “Here,” I said gently, as I gave my father his money. “You may have your money, and you may also have all of the fancy clothes you have given me. I love you, Father, but more than anything I love my Father in heaven.” And then I stepped out of my clothes, and stood almost completely naked on the street! With just a small flimsy cloth covering my waist, I walked away, singing and dancing with joy.

From that time on, I wanted to live the life that Jesus had lived. I felt especially close to God when I spent time with poor people or with parts of the world that get taken for granted, such as animals, trees, the wind and the sun. I began to preach to everyone about how much God loved them and how beautiful God’s world was.

Gradually, other people wanted to live the simple and poor life of Jesus that I was living. I say “poor” but it was very rich in ways that many people never understood. These people started to call themselves “Franciscans.” I told the Franciscans that we had a couple of rules to follow: 1.) we owned no possessions, and 2.) we shared God’s love with everyone (including the birds,

the rich people, the grass of the field, the poor people—everyone!). And that’s what we did. Sometimes we preached the good news of God’s love by talking about it. Other times we preached that good news through the example of how we treated other people and God’s creation.

Living in poverty as I did can make life very difficult, and I grew quite sick around the age of 45. Some of my companions carried me to the palace of the Bishop. But I wanted to go back to the small, humble church of San Damiano. As the people carried me there, I sang for them a song I’d written called “The Canticle of Brother Sun.” On October 4, 1226, I died. Today, all these years after my death, there are still people called Franciscans around the world who try to follow Jesus by living lives of simplicity and joy.

Loving God, thank you for your servant Francis. Thank you for what he taught about living in your love. Help me to learn from him today. Amen.

Questions to think about...

- Which part of Francis’ story did you like best?
- Why do you think Francis was singing and dancing for joy when he walked away from his father and the bishop?
- Why do you think Francis made it a rule that he and the Franciscans could not own any possessions? How would your life be better if you didn’t own any possessions? How would it be worse?

*Discipleship Saint Francis of Assisi
Via www.vibrantfaithathome.org*

The Canticle of Brother Sun

By Saint Francis of Assisi

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.

Be praised, my Lord, through all your
creatures, especially through my lord
Brother Sun, who brings the day; and you
give light through him.
And he is beautiful and radiant in all his
splendor!
Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.

Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Moon
and the stars;
In the heavens you have made them bright,
precious, and beautiful.

Be praised, my Lord, through Brothers Wind
and Air,
and clouds and storms, and all the weather,
through which you give your creatures
sustenance.

Be praised, My Lord, through Sister Water;
she is very useful, and humble, and precious,
and pure.

Be praised, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom you brighten the night.
He is beautiful and cheerful, and powerful
and strong.

Be praised, my Lord, through our sister
Mother Earth,
who feeds us and rules us,
and produces various fruits with colored
flowers and herbs.

Be praised, my Lord, through those who
forgive for love of you;
through those who endure sickness and
trial.

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

Be praised, my Lord, through our Sister
Bodily Death,
from whose embrace no living person can
escape.

Woe to those who die in mortal sin!
Happy those she finds doing your most holy
will.

The second death can do no harm to them.

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

