

**Francis of Assisi, Friar d. 1226
Patron of Animals and of Ecology**

St. Francis was born in the hill country of central Italy in the town of Assisi around 1181. He was the only child of a prosperous cloth merchant, and grew up among the privileged sons of the town's wealthy families. His early youth was given over to a lively social life and dreams of knighthood to be won in the City's wars. He returned from his military service a changed man, and withdrew from his friends and former amusements in search of a new life.

While praying in the ruined church of San Damiano in the countryside, he heard the words: "Francis, rebuild my Church which you see falling down." Taking the word literally, he began to rebuild the little church with his own hands, begging in the streets for building supplies. This public humiliation led to a permanent break with his father. Francis gave away to the poor everything he had ever received from his family, even the cloths on his back. He embraced the poverty of the gospel, "sell what thou hast, give to the poor, and come and follow Me." Francis soon discovered that his calling was not to renew merely *a* church, but *the* Church. Others soon joined Francis, many from the elite sons of the city, and a community of brothers—friars—formed around him. In contrast to the comfort of the established monasteries and clergy, the first Franciscans lived in utter poverty among the poorest of the poor. Traveling through the towns and villages, Francis preached the gospel *pax et bonum*—"peace and good will with all people." His preaching was simple, but filled with an unaffected joy and excitement which cut across class and political divisions. Encountering him, people found their lives changed, feuds were healed, and a new spirit of devotion stirred in the churches of Italy. Soon stories of miracles, many involving his affection for animals, began to surround Francis.

In 1210 the great pope Innocent III recognized Francis' community Rule, consisting only of texts from the Gospels, and the Franciscan First Order, the "Friars Minor" or "little brothers." By the time of his death there were over 10,000 Franciscan brothers spread across Europe, apostles of a general renewal of the Church. The greater Franciscan community included a women's Second Order nicknamed the "Poor Clares" after St. Clare, the first Franciscan sister, and for the first time in history a Third Order with a simple Rule adapted for regular lay people committed to service, charity, and simplicity of life.

Francis spent his last years feeling that his Order had grown beyond him, and turned more and more to interior solitude. Two years before his death during a visionary encounter with the glorified Christ, he received the "stigmata", the five wounds of the crucified Lord, another first in Christian history. He was popularly acclaimed a saint in his own lifetime, and formally canonized only a year after his death in 1226.

Today there are both Roman Catholic and Anglican Franciscans at work across the world.



CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL

1117 Texas Avenue • Houston, Texas 77002 • 713-222-2593
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The Blessing of the Animals

in observance of the Feast Day of Saint Francis of Assisi



October 3, 2010

four o'clock in the afternoon

CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL

THE BLESSING OF ANIMALS IN HONOR OF ST. FRANCIS' DAY

When all have gathered bringing their pets and other animals, the officiant begins.

Officiant

We gather to honor the feast of St. Francis of Assisi, and to honor the animals who share our lives. St. Francis is the patron saint of animals and of ecology. Brother Francis gloried in the beauty of the world God created, and we recall many tales of his affection for animals and their trust in him. Today we thank God for the gifts of companionship and beauty which animals and pets bring to our lives and homes, and ask God's blessing on them.

THE COLLECT FOR ST. FRANCIS' DAY

Officiant

Let us pray. Most high, omnipotent, good Lord, grant your people grace to renounce gladly the vanities of this world; that following the way of blessed Francis, we may for love of you delight in your whole creation with perfectness of joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

A READING FROM *The Canticle of the Sun*

Most High, Omnipotent, Good Lord, yours is the praise, the glory, the honor, and all blessing.

To you alone, Most High, do they belong.

Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures, especially for Brother Sun, through whom you give us light. He is beautiful and radiant with splendor and his light teaches us of your Light, O Most High.

Be praised, my Lord, for Sister Moon and all the stars who shine so clear, so precious and so lovely in the heavens you formed.

Be praised, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air, the cloudy or clear and every kind of weather, by which you give sustenance to your creatures.

Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Water, who is so useful and precious and so pure.

Be praised, my Lord, in Brother Fire, by whom you light the night. He is beautiful and cheerful, full of power and strength.

Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Earth, our mother who sustains and nurtures us, and gives us all the fruits and flowers, and all the birds and beasts.

Be praised, my Lord, in all those who forgive others for your love's sake, and bear weakness and tribulation.

Blessed are those that live at peace with all for love of you, for by you, Most High, they will be crowned.

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

—*St. Francis of Assisi, c. 1225*

A PRAYER ATTRIBUTED TO ST. FRANCIS SAID BY *ALL PRESENT*

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let us sow love;

where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union;

where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;

to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

and it is in dying that we are reborn to eternal life. Amen.

Officiant

Let us pray. We give you thanks, most gracious God, for the beauty of earth and sky and sea; for the richness of mountains, plains, and rivers; for the songs of birds and the companionship of animals. We praise you for these good gifts, and pray that we may safeguard them for those who come after us. Grant that we may continue to grow in our grateful enjoyment of your abundant creation, to the honor and glory of your Name, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Officiant: Let us pray together.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name,

thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen

THE BLESSING OF ST. FRANCIS' MEDALS

Officiant

Let us pray. O God the King of Saints, we thank you for the life and example of Saint Francis, servant of poverty, gentleness, and peace. We ask your blessing upon all your creatures and upon these medals which we bless now in your Name. Grant that the animals we love may be kept safe from harm and continue to grace our lives, through Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. **Amen.**

Officiant: Let us bless the Lord.

People: **Thanks be to God.**

Officiant: We invite all who have animals to bring them forward now for a blessing.

The Service concludes with the Blessing of Pets and Animals; please bring your pet to a priest to be blessed. Everyone is invited to remain after the animals are blessed, to enjoy refreshments and conversation, and admire one another's animals.