



*some resources for*

# *The Feast of St. Francis*

*from Seeds of Hope Publishers*

# The Feast of St. Francis

*a liturgy*

by Katie Cook, OEF

**N**ote: The Feast of St. Francis of Assisi is October 4. The lectionary readings for that date for Year B are listed below:

Job 1:1, 2:1-10 or Genesis 2:18-24

Psalm 26 or Psalm 8

Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12

Mark 10:2-16.

However, the Roman Missal for the Feast Day itself lists Galatians 6:14-18 and Matthew 11: 25-30, and the 1975 Franciscan Lectionary calls for Psalm 104 and Galatians 6:14-18. We have incorporated these three readings, among others, because they encompass themes that Francis repeated many times.

In keeping with Francis' passion for servanthood, we have included footwashing in the service. For this part of the service, you may choose to ask two people to wash each other's feet. Depending on the size of your worshiping group, you may choose to invite all of the people to participate if they wish to. If you anticipate this, you may need several bowls and pitchers, as well as a number of towels. The participants should do this silently as someone reads.

We have suggested music by John Michael Talbot and Rich Mullins, but you might choose to select a hymn or choral piece to use instead. We have included a hymn that you might prefer to use (See page 5). As always with Sacred Seasons resources, we trust that you will adapt all of this to your congregation's needs and resources.

## Prelude

"Dance of Creation with Alleluia"  
from *Troubadour of the Great King*  
by John Michael Talbot  
(Sparrow Corporation, 1988)

## Call to Worship

ONE: Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me.

MANY: Let us worship now our God, the creator and sustainer.

ONE: Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all that God does for us.

MANY: Let us worship God, who crowns us with steadfast love and mercy.



art by Rebecca S. Ward

ONE: The Lord works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed.

MANY: Bless the Lord, O my soul. Bless God's holy name.

## Invocation

### Meditation on Madness

They say you are mad; did you know that? Mad. When you went off to war, they said you were fine—intelligent.... But now you are mad—because you sing with the birds, and—and you look at flowers. I think you were mad before. Not now.

—Clare of Assisi to Francesco  
Brother Sun, Sister Moon

## Old Testament Reading

Psalm 104

## Music for Meditation

"Lilies of the Field"  
from *Troubadour of the Great King*  
by John Michael Talbot  
(Sparrow Corporation, 1988)

### *Responsive Reading:*

"The Canticle of the Creatures"

ONE: Most High, Almighty and All-good Lord!  
All blessings, praise, all glory and honor  
are Yours!

MANY: Only to You, Most High, do they belong,  
And no one is worthy to say Your Name.

ONE: Be praised, my Lord, through all Your creatures!  
Brother Sun is the first.  
With him, you give us light of day.

MANY: For he is beautiful and radiant, he is  
full of splendor;  
He is the symbol of You, Most High!

ONE: Be praised, my Lord, for Sister Moon  
and all the Stars!  
You placed them in the sky;  
And made them bright and lovely and fair.

MANY: Be praised, my Lord, for Brother Wind  
and Brother Air,  
Cloudy, clear and all weather,  
By which You nourish all creatures.

ONE: Be praised, my Lord, for Sister Water!  
How useful she is, how humble;  
She is precious and chaste.

MANY: Be praised, my Lord, for Brother Fire,  
With him, You make bright the dark!  
He is beautiful, he is merry,  
He is powerful and strong.

ONE: Be praised, my Lord, for Sister Earth!  
She is the mother who governs us  
and gives us food.

For us, she makes all kinds of fruits;  
All colors of flowers, and sweet herbs.

MANY: Be praised, my Lord, for those who forgive  
because they love you;  
For those who bear sickness and trials.

ONE: They are happy, who accept all in peace,  
For they will be crowned by You, Most  
High!

MANY: Be praised, my Lord, for Sister Death!  
No mortal can escape her kiss.

ONE: Woeful are those who die in mortal sin.  
But happy are those who do Your will,  
For the Second Death will not  
harm them.

ALL: Praise and bless my Lord; Thank Him,  
And serve Him with great humility.

—Francis of Assisi, 1225

### *Reading from the Epistles*

Galatians 6:14-18

### *Gospel Reading*

Matthew 11: 25-30

### *Symbols of Servanthood*

Note: Two or more people wash each other's feet as  
someone reads the following scriptures. Since the  
passages are somewhat long, you might ask two people  
to read.

Isaiah 63:1-14

John 13: 1-20

### *Communion Scripture*

Note: Ask someone to read the following scripture and  
then distribute the elements silently, while the music  
plays.

Mark 14: 22-25

### *Communion Music*

"I See You"

from *The World as Best as I Remember It, Volume I*  
by Rich Mullins (Reunion Records, 1991)

or

"My God and My All"

from *Troubadour of the Great King*

by John Michael Talbot (Sparrow Corporation, 1988)

### *Passing of the Peace*

This will serve as a benediction.

I have done what was mine to do;

may Christ teach you what you are to do.

—St. Francis of Assisi ■

*You have as much  
learning  
as you put into practice,  
and you are as good a  
preacher as you do  
what you say.*

Franciscan Brothers Leo,

Rufino, and Angelo,

Legend of the Three Companions, ca 1244

# A Few Words about the Saint Everybody Seems to Love

by Katie Cook, OEF

art by Rebecca S. Ward

Long, long ago, when I was in college, one of my history professors said to the class that he didn't have much use for saints. Then he stopped, thought for a moment, and said, "Except for St. Francis. I have a great deal of respect for him."

In about thirty years of studying Francis and Franciscans, I have learned that this is true for many people—especially people for whom there is a great interest in the poor. He is popular among Catholics, Protestants, and even nonbelievers.

That is why we decided to include materials on the Seeds web site for celebrating the Feast of St. Francis. He is the patron saint for animals, the poor, Italy, and the environment. Many churches over the years have adopted a practice of blessing animals on or near the feast day, and the liturgy we have put together for this resource could easily include a pet blessing.

But, sometime during the compiling of the liturgy, it occurred to us that some of our readers might not be familiar with this 13th-century man. Here are a few things you might like to know about him. Until his twentieth year, "Francesco" Bernadone (born Giovanni Bernadone in 1181 or 1182, depending on whom you ask) was a lighthearted reveler—generous of nature, but generally unconcerned with the serious matters of life.

Then, in 1202, the city-state of Assisi was involved in a border dispute with nearby Perugia. Francis, son of a wealthy merchant, and his noble-born friends set forth to do battle.

Francis, who led a group of lancers in a disastrous assault on the bridge at San Giovanni (halfway between the two warring cities), was taken prisoner. In the Perugia prison for undetermined length of time—several months, probably—he contracted a deadly fever and was released.

Somehow, despite his illness and delirium, he found his way on foot back to Assisi. There he began a long recovery process in which no one knew whether he would live or die.

After Francis recovered from his fever, he acted strangely: he was preoccupied with the sun; he wandered through the meadows, talked to birds and beasts, embraced peasants, and generally abhorred the life of luxury he had once loved. Some of his friends began

to understand what he meant and what he now saw. Several of them took on the tonsure of penance and the humble shepherd's robe. The established society of the thirteenth century thought them to be mad; many still do.

During the wanderings that followed his recovery from the fever, Francis came upon an old ruined chapel in a meadow not far from Assisi. There he had a vision of Christ speaking to him from the crucifix which still hung on the remaining wall. He reported that he heard Christ say to him, "Do you not see that my temple lies in ruins? Go. Rebuild my church."

Immediately Francis began rebuilding San Damiano chapel by hand. What he may not have understood was that, during his ministry, he was instrumental in rebuilding the larger, unseen Church.

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Convinced that Christ and the Holy Apostles were beggars, Francis took on that life and was followed by a growing number of men. He helped his friend and associate, Clare of Assisi, organize an order for women. He founded a lay order for those who had families, or for some reason could not forsake their responsibilities, but who wanted to live a life of simplicity and minister to forgotten people.

Francis taught that the only way to lasting peace was through voluntary poverty. It is over possessions, he said, that most wars are fought. Following the words of the Sermon on the Mount to a radical degree, Francis disarmed would-be foes with his simplicity, his love for people, his humble spirit, and his attractive personality.

Poor people and lepers, considered to be the dregs of society, were uppermost in his mind.

Cardinal Hugolino, who became Pope Gregory IX, was a friend and admirer of Francis, and was closely associated with the organization of the primary Franciscan order. Hugolino and some of the brothers, Elias of Cortona and Pietro Cataneo, led the order away from the stark discipline of poverty which Francis had taught and which Innocent III had approved.

By 1221, Francis had washed his hands of the order and abdicated leadership, saying, "My free larks are imprisoned in the cages of their monasteries." In 1228, less than two years after Francis's death, Gregory IX canonized him as a saint, while supporting the interpretations of Brothers Elias and Pietro.

In September of 1224, Francis was resting on Mount Alvernia (sometimes spelled *Alverna*) in the Appenines at a retreat given to him and his followers by the Lord of Chiusi. It was there that he received the five wounds that Christ suffered on the cross.

According to most of the stories, the wounds, the first recorded instance of *stigmata* by some accounts, were given to him by Christ in a vision. Some believe that he asked a friend to inflict them upon his body. However the wounds were imposed, Francis did bear them for the remainder of his life. They were a source of considerable suffering and illness, and they certainly hastened his death.

On a missionary trip to Egypt and the East during 1219, Francis contracted trachoma. After this, the sun—which he had loved so much—was painful to his eyes.

Even so, during his last illness he composed his most famous poem, the "Canticle to Brother Sun" or the "Canticle of the Creatures." In it Francis praised God through all of creation, with a glorious roll call beginning with "Brother Sun" and ending with "Sister Death."

Francis had taught that, in dying, we are born to eternal life. When he knew that he was dying, he asked to be taken back to Assisi, to the Portiuncula (Little Portion) which he had rebuilt for his followers, the Friars Minor (Little Brothers), to live in.

He lingered for some months, suffering from the wounds of the stigmata, and from trachoma. The brothers first carried him to the court of Bishop Guido of Assisi, to whom Pietro Bernadone (Francis's father) had dragged Francis to be judged for giving all of Pietro's goods to the poor in 1219, and who now was moved to kiss the hem of Francis's dirty robe.

After a time, the brothers took him to the Portiuncula, where he asked to be laid naked on the bare ground, "for thus, in the arms of my dear Lady Poverty, I wish to die." At sunset on October 3, 1226, Francis died, surrounded by friends and a wealth of love.

A few suggested books for more information—or just good reading—are *St. Francis: The Journey and the Dream* by Murray Bodo, OFM; *Saint Francis of Assisi: An Omnibus of Sources*, a collection of primary sources (Franciscan Herald Press, 1972); *The Francis Book*, compiled by Roy M. Gasnick, OFM; *St. Francis of Assisi* by G. K. Chesterton; *Saint Francis of Assisi* by Paul Sabatier; *Saint Francis* by Nikos Kazantzakis. Suggested movies include *Brother Sun*, *Sister Moon* and *Francesco*.

—Katie Cook, editor of *Sacred Seasons and Hunger News & Hope*, is a longtime fan of St. Francis and is a professed member of the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans.

## All Creatures of Our God Above

All creatures of our God above  
Lift up your voice and show your love,  
O praise God! Allelujah!  
O Brother Sun with golden beam,  
O Sister Moon with silver gleam,  
O praise God! O praise God!  
Allelujah! Allelujah! Allelujah!  
O Brother Wind, Air, Clouds, and Rain,  
By which all creatures God sustains,  
O praise God! Allelujah!  
Thou rising morn, in praise rejoice!  
You lights of evening, find a voice!  
O praise God! O praise God!  
Allelujah! Allelujah! Allelujah!  
O Sister Water flowing clear,  
Make music for our God to hear,  
Allelujah! Allelujah!  
O Brother Fire who lights the night,  
Providing warmth, enhancing sight,  
O praise God! O praise God!  
Allelujah! Allelujah! Allelujah!  
Praise God from whom all blessings flow  
Praise God all creatures here below;  
O praise God! Allelujah!  
Praise God above, you heavenly host,  
Creator, Christ, and Holy Ghost;  
O praise God! O praise God!  
Allelujah! Allelujah! Allelujah!

—Lyrics adapted by Katie Cook from "All Creatures of Our God and King," taken from the "Canticle of the Creatures" (see page 13).

Music: Geistliche Kirchengesäng, Cologne, 1623;  
arranged by Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1906.