

# Francis of Assisi

## Biography / Overview

Francis of Assisi (c. 1181–1226 CE) was a preacher and mystic whose life and legacy have made him one of Christianity's most cherished saints. Born Giovanni di Pietro di Bernardone in the town of Assisi, he was raised in affluence as the son of a wealthy cloth merchant. He grew up in a wealthy family and had an early life of indulgence — until a spiritual awakening transformed his path entirely.

Abandoning material wealth and social status, Francis committed himself to a life of absolute poverty, compassion, and devotion to Christ. Around 1209, he founded the Order of Friars Minor (commonly known as the Franciscans), dedicated to preaching, aiding the poor, and embodying the humility of Christ. He also inspired the creation of the Poor Clares for women and a lay branch known as the Third Order.

Francis is remembered for his profound bond with the natural world, the stigmata he bore later in life, and his poetic *Canticle of the Creatures*, a song glorifying God through all aspects of creation. Canonized just two years after his passing, he endures as a symbol of peace, simplicity, and reverence for the environment.

Sources:

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Francis-of-Assisi>

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/francis-assisi/>

<https://www.franciscanmedia.org/franciscan-spirit/saint-francis-of-assisi/>

## Bibliography / Primary Sources

Key Texts (by or attributed to Francis):

*Canticle of the Creatures* (also called *Canticle of Brother Sun*): A lyrical expression of praise for God through the elements and living beings.

*The Earlier Rule* (*Regula non bullata*): A preliminary version of Franciscan guidelines focusing on gospel poverty.

*The Later Rule* (*Regula bullata*): The finalized Franciscan rule, approved by Pope Honorius III in 1223.

*The Testament*: A heartfelt reflection outlining Francis's vision and urging fidelity to his ideals.

*Letters and Admonitions*: Brief teachings and exhortations offering spiritual guidance.

*The Peace Prayer and Prayer before the Crucifix*: Although the Peace Prayer was likely composed after his death, it reflects Franciscan values.

### Manuscript Heritage:

While Francis wrote relatively little, his teachings and life story were faithfully recorded by early companions such as Brother Leo, Thomas of Celano, and St. Bonaventure. His life is also famously depicted in Giotto's frescoes at the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi.

### Birth Date / Death Date

Born: Around 1181 or 1182 CE, in Assisi, then part of the Duchy of Spoleto (modern-day Italy)

Died: October 3, 1226 CE, at the Portiuncula Chapel near Assisi

### Sources:

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Francis-of-Assisi>

[https://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint\\_id=50](https://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=50)

### Notable / Best-Known For

Founding the Franciscan Order, which profoundly shaped Catholic spirituality.

Embracing radical poverty and humility as living expressions of the Gospel.

Becoming the first known person to receive the stigmata — marks of Christ's Passion.

Composing the Canticle of the Creatures, one of the earliest pieces of vernacular Italian poetry.

Being named the patron saint of animals, ecology, and peace.

Seeking peace during the Crusades by meeting with Sultan al-Kamil in a bold act of interreligious outreach.

### Famous Quotes

“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love.” — Peace Prayer of St. Francis

“Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words.” — Commonly attributed, though not found in his original writings

“What you are before God, that you are and nothing more.” — Admonitions

“Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures, especially through my lord Brother Sun.” — Canticle of the Creatures

### Major Works / Textual Contents

#### Canticle of the Creatures

Written in the Umbrian dialect, this poetic work celebrates elements of the natural world as siblings — Brother Wind, Sister Water, and even Sister Death.

It embodies Francis's belief in a creation infused with divine presence and worthy of reverence.

### The Rule of St. Francis

Provides spiritual and practical guidelines for his followers, stressing poverty, manual labor, obedience, and compassionate ministry.

Encourages simplicity and total trust in divine providence.

### The Testament

Francis's final message to his brothers, reaffirming his call to live without ownership and maintain fidelity to his original vision.

Stresses reliance on God over material stability.

### **Influences / Intellectual Context**

Francis drew his deepest inspiration from the Gospels, especially the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. He embodied the ideals of the emerging mendicant movement, which responded to increasing urbanization and the wealth of the medieval Church with a call to simplicity and direct service.

Living in an age marked by the rise of scholasticism and theological formalism, Francis stood apart by modeling a lived theology — one rooted not in academic debate but in joyful, sacrificial action.

### **Legacy and Modern Significance**

Francis's life continues to inspire movements centered on peace, social justice, and environmental care. His order — the Franciscans — remains active across the globe in education, humanitarian work, and pastoral care.

His influence is reflected in the papal name chosen by Pope Francis in 2013, highlighting a renewed emphasis on humility and care for creation. In 1979, Pope John Paul II officially named Francis the patron saint of ecology, recognizing his prophetic voice in today's ecological crisis. Francis is celebrated not just for his spiritual discipline but for the joy, creativity, and humanity that permeated his life.

### **Modern Moments / Impact on 21st-Century Society**

#### Environmental Advocacy:

Francis is frequently invoked in conversations around ecological ethics and Christian responsibility for the planet.

#### Papal Leadership:

The 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'*, titled after Francis's *Canticle*, calls for global ecological conversion in his spirit.

#### Interfaith Relations:

His historic dialogue with Sultan al-Kamil serves as a powerful model for respectful, peaceful engagement across religious boundaries.

#### Peace and Nonviolence:

He is widely cited in pacifist and social justice circles, influencing both religious and secular efforts for global harmony.

#### Cultural Influence:

Francis's story has been retold in literature, visual arts, music, and cinema — most notably in Franco Zeffirelli's film *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*.

### **Suggested Reading and Resources**

#### A. Secondary Literature

Chesterton, G. K. *Saint Francis of Assisi*. Image Books, 1957.

Armstrong, Regis J. (ed.). *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents* (3 vols). New City Press, 1999–2001.

Short, William J. *Poverty and Joy: The Franciscan Tradition*. Orbis Books, 1999.

Delio, Ilia. *A Franciscan View of Creation: Learning to Live in a Sacramental World*. Franciscan Media, 2003.

#### B. Archival and Online Resources

Franciscan Media: <https://www.franciscanmedia.org>

Assisi Official Pilgrimage Site: <https://www.sanfrancescoassisi.org>

Catholic Encyclopedia: <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06221a.htm>

Project Gutenberg: <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/search/?query=Francis+of+Assisi>

Vatican Archives: <https://www.vatican.va>