

Saint Francis of Assisi



- **Born:** 1182 in Assisi, Italy
- **Died:** 1226 in Assisi, Italy
- **Best known for:** Founding the Franciscan Order
- **Message is simple:** Live the Gospel... follow in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Biography:

Saint Francis of Assisi was a Catholic friar who gave up a life of wealth to live a life of poverty. He established the Franciscan Order of Friars and together with Clare of Assisi the women's Order of the Poor Ladies.

Franciscans today speak about Francis and Clare as co-loving the order into existence.



Early Life

Francis was born in Assisi, Italy in 1182. He grew up leading a privileged life as the son of a wealthy cloth merchant. Francis loved to learn and sing songs as a boy. His father wanted him to become a businessman and taught him about the French culture, but Francis wanted to be a knight.

As a teenager Francis was the 'young man about town'. He had friends, finances and lived life to the full. He was unaware of what God had in store for him.

Going to Battle

About the age of nineteen Francis went to battle against the nearby town of Perugia. Francis was captured and taken prisoner. He was held prisoner in a dungeon for a year before his father paid the ransom and he was set free. It is in his Perugia prison cell that his heart begins to turn towards God. Franciscans see this as his first conversion.

Visions from God

Over the next few years Francis began to see visions from God that changed his life. The first vision was when he was sick with a high fever. At first he thought that God had called him to fight in the Crusades. However, he had another vision that told him to help the sick. Finally, when praying in a church, Francis heard God tell him to "repair my church, which is falling in ruins."

This Francis gave all his money to the church. His father became very angry with him. Francis then left his father's home and took a vow of poverty.

The Franciscan Order | Brotherhood

As Francis lived his life of poverty and preached to people about the life of Jesus Christ, people began to follow him. By 1209, he had around 11 followers. He had one basic rule which was "To follow the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ and to walk in his footsteps". The first rule was basically scripture passages.

Francis was a devoted follower of the Catholic Church. He and his followers (Brothers) travelled to Rome to get the approval for their religious Order from the pope. This is the Rule. It is about the way of life of a Franciscan. At first the pope was reluctant. These men were dirty, poor, and smelled bad. However, eventually he understood their vow of poverty and blessed the Order.

In 2023 Franciscans around the world will celebrate 800 years since the Later Rule was approved. There will be great celebrations .

Other Franciscan Orders

The Franciscan Order grew as men joined and made vows of poverty. When a young woman named Clare of Assisi wanted to take similar vows, Francis helped her start the Order of the Poor Ladies (Order of Saint Clare). He also started another order (later called the Third Order of Saint Francis) that was for men and women who didn't take vows or leave their jobs but lived out the principals of the Franciscan Order in their daily lives.

These three orders are in Australian today.

Love for Nature

Francis was known for his love of nature and animals. There are many stories about Saint Francis and his preaching to animals. It is said that one day he was talking to some birds when they began to sing together. Then they flew into the sky and formed the sign of a cross. ‘

It was also said that Francis could tame wild animals. One story tells of a vicious wolf in the town of Gubbio that was killing people and sheep. The people of the town were frightened and didn't know what to do. Francis went to the town to confront the wolf. At first the wolf growled at Francis and prepared to attack him. However, Francis made the sign of the cross and told the wolf not to hurt anyone else. The wolf then became tame and the town was safe. The townsfolk and the wolf lived in peace, working together to .

This story is much deeper than just cutting a deal with a wolf. It is about community, fraternity, peace building, serving others and being flag bearers. This story asks people to reflect upon what ‘wolves’ are terrorizing the world today. Climate change is one such wolf. Can you think of others?

He called animals “brother” or “sister,” and he exhorted them to praise God. He would go through the streets and byways, inviting everyone to sing with him. And one time when he came upon an almond tree, he said, “Brother Almond, speak to me of God.” And the almond tree blossomed.

That is what St. Francis of Assisi did, and that is what he does for us once we are caught up in his life and teachings. He makes us blossom, wherever and whoever we are.

We, at Franciscan Schools Australia blossom because we see in Francis what could happen to us if we were to embrace the overflowing goodness of God revealed in everything that exists and let that embrace change us. Our schools in the Franciscan tradition embrace all of creation, speak of all of God’s gifts as ‘brother’ and ‘sister’,

embrace 'the other' of the world and with joy build peace in ourselves, our schools, our communities and the world.

Death

Francis became ill and spent the last few years of his life mostly blind. He died in 1226 while singing Psalm 141. He was declared a saint of the Catholic Church only two years after his death.

Goodness / Bonum

Francis and Clare of Assisi inspire all Franciscan school communities.

Francis referred to all of creation as good ~ *bonum* in Italian.

In his letter to Brother Leo, Francis writes: *You are Good, all Good, supreme Good, Lord God, living and true.*

Francis used to praise God the Artist in every one of God's works. Whatever joy he found in the created world he referred to their maker - God. He rejoiced in all the works of God's hands. Everything cried out to him, "He who made us is infinitely good!"

Therefore, in Franciscan schools we look for the good in others and in all we do.

Interesting Facts about Saint Francis of Assisi

- October 4th is observed as Saint Francis' Feast Day.
- It is said that he received the stigmata two years before he died on Mount La Verna. The stigmata was the wounds of Christ from the cross including his hands, feet, and side. Francis lived for two years with these marks upon his body before his death.
- Francis travelled to the Holy Lands during the 5th Crusade in 1219 hoping to convert the Sultan Malik al-Kamil and preach the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. This encounter saw Francis and Sultan recognise that both were devout. The Sultan was a very devout Sunni Muslim and living in the Sultan's camp for a couple of weeks Francis learns much about their faith. They become friends and show deep respect for each other. This demonstrates the strength of peace building and working together for the common good.
- Francis set up the first known Nativity scene to celebrate Christmas in 1220 in Greccio. In 2023 Franciscans around the world will celebrate the 800th anniversary of this event.
- Francis believed that actions were the best example, telling his followers to "Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words."
- The Peace Prayer is ATTRIBUTED to Saint Francis. There is no factual evidence that Francis constructed the prayer, but it is believed he inspired it.
- The Tau was very dear to St. Francis of Assisi. It resembles the cross and Francis used it as his signature. This sign invites everyone to conversion.

