

✠ ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI ✠

A Pilgrimage of Light, Love, and Simplicity

"Start by doing what is necessary; then do what is possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible."

Dedication

This book is lovingly dedicated to all who seek the quiet path of peace, the gentle way of compassion, and the simple joy of seeing God in every part of creation.

To those who listen for God in the ordinary moments of life, who notice the small blessings, who carry kindness into places of hurt, and who walk humbly with others as Francis once walked with his brothers.

May these pages bring you closer to the God who spoke to Francis through sunlight, wind, water, and the beating hearts of all creatures.

Acknowledgment of Inspiration

This book was inspired by Paula Wood OFS, whose bulletin entry planted the first seed that grew into this Franciscan story. Her simple act of sharing opened the door to a journey of prayer, reflection, and deep gratitude.
Created for parish devotional use.
All rights reserved
© 2026 Stanley Zapasnik

Table of Contents

Part I — The Life of St. Francis

1. **The Early Years**
2. **The Call at San Damiano**
3. **The First Brothers**
4. **The Road of Poverty and Joy**
5. **Francis and the Creatures**
6. **The Journey to La Verna**
7. **The Stigmata**
8. **The Canticle of the Creatures**
9. **The Transitus of St. Francis**

Part II — The Legacy

10. **Eight Centuries Later**
11. **The Peace Prayer**
12. **Closing Reflection**
13. **Final Blessing**

The Year of Saint Francis

Presented by Paula Wood OFS

The Church has entered a sacred moment in history. Pope Leo XIV has proclaimed a **Special Jubilee Year of St. Francis of Assisi**, beginning **January 10, 2026** and continuing through **January 10, 2027**, marking **800 years since the passing of our beloved Saint**.

This holy year is not simply a commemoration. It is an invitation.

"Indulgence is an encounter with God, not a spiritual shortcut."
— Pope Leo XIV

Throughout the Jubilee, the faithful are encouraged to seek **plenary indulgences** by making pilgrimages to Franciscan sites, entering into prayer, and embracing the spirit that shaped St. Francis's life: **peace, poverty, mercy, and care for creation**.

The Jubilee calls us to return to the Gospel with fresh eyes and renewed hearts. It is a chance to rekindle faith, strengthen our relationship with God, and deepen our unity with the Church.

Here in our parish — itself a Franciscan site — we hope many pilgrims will come seeking grace, reflection, and spiritual renewal.

The Life of St. Francis of Assisi

Few saints have captured the hearts of the faithful as deeply as **St. Francis of Assisi**. His simple devotion to the Gospel, his radical embrace of poverty, and his tireless work to renew the Church have shaped Christian spirituality for centuries. His influence stretches far beyond the years he walked the earth.

A Young Man with Knightly Dreams

As a youth, Francis dreamed of honor and glory on the battlefield. Around **1202**, he joined a military campaign against the neighboring city-state of Perugia. The adventure ended in disaster. Francis was captured, imprisoned, and left broken in both body and spirit.

It was during his long recovery that his life began to change. The dreams of knighthood faded, replaced by a growing desire to give everything to Christ. Friends noticed his distraction and distance. When they teased him about being in love, Francis answered simply:

"Yes. I am going to take a wife more beautiful and worthy than any you know."

The Leper Who Changed Everything

Francis had always feared lepers. Their presence filled him with horror. But one day, while riding near Assisi, he encountered a man afflicted with leprosy. Overcome with compassion, Francis dismounted, embraced the man, and kissed him. He gave him money — and when he looked again, the leper had vanished.

Francis realized he had embraced **Christ Himself**.

This moment transformed him. He began ministering to the leper colony outside Assisi, feeding the sick, tending their wounds, and kissing their sores. What once repulsed him became a source of spiritual consolation.

In his Testament, Francis wrote:

"When I was in sin, the sight of lepers nauseated me beyond measure; but then God Himself led me into their company, and I had pity on them."

He asked the faithful then — and asks us now:

Who are the lepers in your life?
Who do you need to embrace?

"Francis, Go and Repair My House"

While praying in the small church of **San Damiano**, Francis heard Christ speak from the crucifix:

"Francis, go and repair my house, which you see is falling down."

Believing the Lord meant the crumbling building around him, Francis gathered cloth from his father's warehouse, sold it along with the cart and horse, and gave the money to the poor priest at San Damiano.

His father, **Pietro di Bernardone**, was furious. He beat Francis, chained him, and demanded repayment. The bishop of Assisi ruled that Francis must return the money — and Francis obeyed.

But he went further.

In the town piazza, Francis stripped off all his clothing and declared:

"Up until now I have called you father here on earth, but now I say: 'Our Father, who art in heaven.'"

A worker of the bishop gave Francis a simple frock. Francis marked it with a cross — his first habit.

A Life Rebuilt from Nothing

Francis wandered the countryside like a troubadour, owning nothing, relying entirely on the generosity of others. He returned to Assisi and rebuilt San Damiano stone by stone, begging for supplies and hauling rocks from a nearby quarry.

One day he heard the Gospel reading in which Jesus sends the disciples to preach without shoes or staff. Francis removed his shoes, gave away his clothing, and began preaching repentance with fiery joy.

People were moved. Young men joined him. In **1209**, Francis wrote a simple rule for his followers: **love poverty in everything** — in clothing, food, and daily life.

Soon, Pope Innocent III approved the growing band of mendicants. The **Franciscan Order** was born.

Francis and the Creatures of God

Stories of Francis's love for animals are legendary. Birds quieted themselves to hear him preach. A rabbit befriended him. He famously tamed the wolf of Gubbio, turning a feared predator into a companion of the townspeople.

A Growing Family of Faith

Francis and his friars worked for their food, begged when necessary, and welcomed everyone — especially the poor, the sick, and the lepers. Their community grew into the thousands.

Among those drawn to Francis's example was **Clare Offreduccio**, daughter of a noble Assisi family. Inspired by Francis's preaching, she fled her home at age 18 and received a rough woolen habit at the Portiuncula. Her father stormed the convent in rage, but Clare clung to the altar, showing her cropped hair as a sign of her commitment.

Sixteen days later, her sister Agnes joined her. Others followed. They lived in poverty and seclusion according to a rule Francis gave them. At age 21, Francis appointed Clare abbess — a role she held for life.

The Franciscan movement spread across Europe, forming communities in Spain, France, and beyond. Today, the Franciscans — men, women, and lay members — form the **largest religious family in the world**.

St. Clare, the Holy Land, and the Heart of Francis

St. Clare: A Life of Radiant Poverty

The story of **St. Clare of Assisi** continues as a shining mirror of Francis's own devotion. The Poor Ladies lived barefoot, slept on the ground, ate no meat, and kept long periods of silence. Their poverty was absolute — they owned nothing, not even in common, relying entirely on daily alms.

Clare, like Francis, eventually moderated some of the harshness of their early practices, reminding her sisters:

"Our bodies are not made of brass."

But she never wavered in her commitment to Gospel poverty. Even when the pope urged her to soften her rule, Clare replied with her characteristic strength:

"I need to be absolved from my sins, but I do not wish to be absolved from the obligation of following Jesus Christ."

Contemporary accounts glow with admiration for Clare's life at San Damiano. She washed the feet of her sisters, tended the sick, and emerged from prayer with a face so radiant that it dazzled those around her. For the last **27 years** of her life, she suffered serious illness, yet popes, cardinals, and bishops came to seek her counsel.

Francis remained her lifelong friend and spiritual guide. Clare followed his ideals faithfully, making the Gospel life real within the walls of her convent.

Francis in the Holy Land

St. Bonaventure's Life of St. Francis recounts extraordinary journeys Francis made to **Morocco, Egypt, and Jerusalem**. Though dates vary, Francis left friars behind to care for Christians in Palestine. These friars became the **Custodia Terrae Sanctae**, guardians of the holy places of Galilee and Jerusalem for more than **700 years**, serving both the sacred sites and the local Christian community.

Francis and Sultan Malik al-Kamil

One of the most remarkable episodes in Francis's life occurred in **1219**, during the Crusades. Francis and Brother Illuminato traveled to meet **Sultan Malik al-Kamil**, a devout Sunni Muslim known for his tolerance.

The two men met only once, for about two weeks, yet formed a deep mutual respect. The sultan recognized Francis's holiness immediately and gifted him an ivory horn, still displayed today in the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi.

Francis lived the Gospel literally:

"Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you."
(Matthew 5:44)

The sultan honored Francis, offered him gifts, and tried to persuade him toward worldly riches. But Francis rejected them as "so much dung." The sultan admired him all the more, seeing in Francis a man unlike any other.

Their meeting stands today as a powerful witness to peace, dialogue, and understanding — virtues as urgently needed now as they were during the Crusades.

Francis and the Blessed Virgin Mary

From his earliest days, Francis "burned with devotion toward the mother of all good." When he renounced the world, he placed himself under the loving protection of **Mary**, asking her to guide him in his new life of poverty modeled after her Son.

Thomas of Celano wrote:

"He embraced the Mother of Jesus with inexpressible love, since she made the Lord of Majesty a brother to us."

Francis honored her with praises, prayers, and affection beyond words. Most importantly, he appointed Mary as **Advocate of the Order**, placing all his friars under her wings so she might protect and cherish them.

St. Bonaventure added:

"Through her, we have obtained mercy."

For Francis, the Incarnation — God becoming flesh — was the foundation of his entire spiritual life. It was only natural that he held a profound love for the woman who brought Christ into the world and made Him our brother.

The Traditions and Devotions of St. Francis

The Franciscan Crown Rosary

Few people realize that the Franciscans have their own rosary, known as the **Franciscan Crown**. Its origin dates to the early 15th century, when a young man entering the Franciscan Order felt sorrow that he no longer had time to weave crowns of wildflowers for a statue of Mary — a devotion that had brought him great joy.

One evening, tempted to abandon his vocation, he received a vision of the Blessed Virgin Mary. She encouraged him to persevere and taught him a new form of prayer: meditating on **seven joyful events** from her life.

These became the **Seven Joys of Mary**:

1. The Annunciation
2. The Visitation
3. The Nativity of Jesus
4. The Adoration of the Magi
5. The Finding of Jesus in the Temple
6. The Appearance of the Risen Christ to His Mother
7. The Assumption and Coronation of Mary as Queen of Heaven

Instead of weaving flowers, the novice would now weave a **crown of prayers**. The devotion spread quickly and was officially established in **1422**.

The Tau Cross: A Sign of Conversion

Franciscans often wear a simple **Tau cross**, the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In Scripture, it is the mark placed on the foreheads of those chosen by God (Ezekiel 9:4). Pope Innocent III opened the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 with a homily on this passage — a moment that deeply moved Francis.

Eventually, Francis signed his letters not with his name, but with the **Tau**. Today, Franciscans wear it as a sign of ongoing conversion, a reminder of Francis's words:

"Let us begin again."

It symbolizes a journey never fully completed this side of heaven.

The Three Knots of the Franciscan Cord

The rope belt worn by Franciscans — the **cincture** — bears **three knots**, each representing one of the evangelical counsels:

- **Poverty**
- **Chastity**
- **Obedience**

These counsels, drawn from the Gospels, mark the path to spiritual perfection. The knots are both a physical reminder and a spiritual commitment.

Francis and the First Christmas Crib

Francis was profoundly moved by the humility of God, who entered the world as a poor child. In **1223**, he created the first **Christmas crib** in the village of Greccio so ordinary people could experience the mystery of the Incarnation in a tangible way.

On Christmas Eve, Francis invited villagers into a cave filled with straw and animals. He wanted them to feel the warmth of the animals, smell the hay, and understand that Christ was born into the same conditions they knew well.

A tradition tells us that during the liturgy, as Francis preached with deep love, the **child Jesus appeared** and rested in his arms.

The cave was cramped and unpleasant — yet it revealed the astonishing truth that **God chose to live among us**, sharing our human condition. For Francis, Christmas was the celebration of God's humility and love breaking into the world.

St. Francis, Lover of the Eucharist

Francis's devotion to the Eucharist burned with extraordinary intensity. In his Letter to All Clerics, he wrote:

"In this world there is nothing of the Most High himself that we can possess and contemplate with our eyes, except his Body and Blood."

For Francis, the Eucharist was both **compass and destination**. Thomas of Celano wrote that Francis "burned with a love that came from his whole being for the sacrament of the Lord's body."

He wanted everyone — friars, lepers, the poor, and all who longed for God — to share in this fire. His devotion ignited a love for the Eucharist that still burns in the hearts of Franciscans 800 years later.

Francis, the Eucharist, and the Birds

Eucharistic Reflections from St. Francis

The writings of St. Francis offer profound insight into his love for the Eucharist and his call to conversion. His words, simple yet piercing, invite us into deeper spiritual reflection.

"All those who refuse to do penance and receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ are blind, because they cannot see the true light, our Lord Jesus Christ."
— Letter to All the Faithful

Humility stands at the heart of Franciscan spirituality. Francis taught that only a humble, penitent spirit can be ready to receive the Body and Blood of Christ. His words may seem severe, but they reveal his burning desire for union with God — a union he wanted every soul to experience.

In another letter, Francis speaks tenderly of the Eucharist:

"In his love, God gives himself into our hands; we touch him and receive him daily into our mouths."
— Letter to All Clerics

Here Francis reminds us that the Eucharist is essential food for the journey. Receiving Christ — truly present — filled Francis with compassion for others and strengthened his resolve to live the Gospel with joy.

Francis and the Birds

One of the most cherished stories from Francis's life took place in the valley of Spoleto, near Bevagna. Francis was traveling with a few of his brothers when he suddenly stopped. Ahead of them, the trees and fields were filled with birds — doves, crows, rooks — an astonishing multitude, as if they had been summoned.

Francis left the road and walked toward them.

The birds did not fly away. They watched him. They waited.

When Francis reached the center of this great gathering, he began to preach to them as though they could understand every word. Thomas of Celano records his sermon:

"My sister birds, you owe much to God your Creator, and you ought to sing his praise at all times and in all places… The air is subject to you; you neither sow nor reap, and God feeds you. He gave you fountains and rivers to quench your thirst, mountains and valleys for refuge, tall trees for your nests… God dresses you and your children, for the Creator loves you greatly."

Francis named the gifts the birds had been given — gifts they may never have noticed. The air. The rivers. Their feathers. Their freedom. Their shelter.

Reflection

Have you ever had someone point out something good in your life that you had stopped noticing?
What was that like?

The birds listened with marvelous joy. Celano writes:

"The birds began to stretch their necks, extend their wings, open their beaks, and gaze on him attentively."

They did not flee. They moved closer. They stretched their necks toward him, eager to see and hear. Francis walked among them, and the birds parted gently to let him pass, closing in behind him again. His robe brushed their feathers.

Reflection

Have you ever had a wild creature stay close to you instead of running away?
What did it feel like?
What do you think made it happen?

Francis saw all creation as family — brothers and sisters who shared the same Creator. In the birds, he saw joy, freedom, and God's tender care. In Francis, the birds seemed to recognize a friend.

The World More Alive Than We Notice

And then something caught Francis's attention.

He realized the birds had **not flown away**. He had been so absorbed in speaking to them that he hadn't paused to marvel at the extraordinary fact that they were still there — listening, stretching their necks toward him, waiting.

Francis fell silent.

Standing in the middle of the flock, he looked around — really looked — and Thomas of Celano writes that Francis **"blamed himself for not having earlier made it a practice to preach to the birds."** He had walked past countless flocks in his life, not because he didn't love them, but because he had not been paying attention.

When Francis finally made the sign of the cross and gave the birds his blessing, the entire multitude rose into the air at once — a single, sweeping motion — and scattered in four directions: **north, south, east, west**, as though each had somewhere important to be.

Francis watched them go.

His companions, who had remained on the road observing everything, came to him quietly.

From that day forward, Celano writes, Francis made a habit of inviting **all creatures** — birds, fish, animals — to praise their Creator. He embraced all things "with unheard-of devotion and piety," speaking to them as if they had the power to feel, see, and understand.

Not because he believed birds could follow a sermon.

But because he had discovered something in that field:

The world was more alive than he had been noticing.
It had always been this alive.
He had simply been walking past it.

Learning to See as Francis Saw

Francis and the Birds: What the Story Really Teaches

Here is the thing about Francis that this story reveals:

He was **not born a saint who noticed everything**.

He was a young man from a wealthy family who spent his early life chasing glory, wearing fine clothes, and dreaming of becoming a great knight. He was not, in those early years, someone who stopped on a road to look at birds.

What changed him was **practice**.

Attention is a habit. It has to be built.

The sermon to the birds didn't happen because Francis possessed a special spiritual power the rest of us lack. It happened because, at some point in his life, Francis decided that **everything in creation deserved to be looked at carefully** — and then, one afternoon on the road to Bevagna, he actually did it.

He stopped.
He left the road.
He walked toward the birds instead of past them.

That simple choice — to stop, to notice, to pay attention — opened a doorway into a world more alive than he had ever realized.

Reflection

What would it look like, in your ordinary life —
on the way to school, in your backyard, on a walk —
to stop the way Francis stopped?

What might you find?

— Chris Jeffcoat, OFS

Francis, the Stigmata, and La Verna

The Gift of a Mountain

On **May 8, 1213**, while preaching at the castle of San Leo, Francis's words struck the heart of a nobleman named **Count Orlando of Chiusi**. Moved by Francis's passion and holiness, Orlando offered him part of the great mountain rising above his castle — a place called **La Verna**.

Francis accepted the gift and traveled to the mountain. Its biting cold, rugged cliffs, and stark beauty immediately drew him in. La Verna was wild, austere, and solitary — the perfect place for **penance, prayer, and contemplation**.

Francis returned to La Verna **five more times**. Each visit became a period of deep withdrawal, silence, and communion with God. Small cells were built for the friars, and between **1216–1218**, the little church of **Santa Maria degli Angeli** was constructed.

La Verna was becoming a holy place — but its greatest moment was still to come.

A Forty-Day Retreat

Two years before his death, Francis returned to La Verna for what would become the most pivotal retreat of his life. He was fasting and praying a **forty-day Lent** in honor of two great feasts:

- **The Exaltation of the Holy Cross** (September 14)
- **St. Michael the Archangel** (September 29)

Francis entered this retreat with total devotion. He sought only Christ — crucified, risen, and present. The mountain's harshness suited him. Its silence suited him. Its loneliness suited him.

La Verna was becoming the place where heaven and earth would meet.

The Stigmata at La Verna

The Prayer for Two Graces

According to the Third Consideration on the Stigmata in the **Little Flowers of St. Francis (Fioretti)**, Francis prayed for two extraordinary graces during his retreat at La Verna:

1. **To feel in his own body the pain Christ felt during His Passion.**
2. **To know in his heart the love Christ felt for all humanity.**

These were not requests for glory or spiritual privilege. They were the deepest desires of a man who longed to be united with Jesus — in suffering and in love.

The Vision of the Seraph

St. Bonaventure describes the moment with reverence and awe. One morning, near the feast of the **Exaltation of the Holy Cross**, Francis was praying alone on the mountainside when heaven opened before him.

He saw a **Seraph**, fiery and brilliant, descending swiftly from the heights of God. The angel had **six wings**, and between those wings appeared the figure of a **man crucified** — Christ Himself — with hands and feet extended upon a cross.

Bonaventure writes:

"As the vision was disappearing, it left in his heart a marvelous fire and imprinted in his flesh a likeness of signs no less marvelous."

When the vision faded, Francis felt a burning love within him — and the marks of Christ's Passion appeared on his body:

- **Nail wounds** in his hands
- **Nail wounds** in his feet
- A **wound in his side**, shaped like a lance-thrust

These were not symbolic. They were real, visible, and painful — a mysterious union with the crucified Christ.

Francis had received the two graces he asked for:
Christ's suffering in his flesh, and Christ's love in his heart.

The Feast of the Stigmata

The Church honors this sacred event each year on **September 17**, the **Feast of the Stigmata of St. Francis**. It is a day to remember:

- Francis's total surrender to Christ
- His burning love for the Crucified
- His desire to share Christ's compassion with the world

La Verna became forever marked as the mountain where heaven touched earth — where a humble friar was transformed by divine love.

The Long Suffering of Francis

The Return to Assisi

A month or so after receiving the Stigmata at La Verna, Francis finally returned to Assisi. His first stop was the monastery of **St. Clare and her sisters**, where a humble lean-to had been built against the side of the monastery to shelter him.

By this time, Francis was nearly **blind**. He suffered from **trachoma**, an eye disease he had contracted in Egypt during the Fifth Crusade in 1219. His body was failing in other ways as well. He showed signs of **tubercular leprosy**, and the wounds of Christ — the Stigmata — caused constant hemorrhaging.

Weak, frail, and heartbroken over the direction some friars were taking the Order, Francis lay in the darkness of his improvised hut for **over fifty days**. Field mice scurried over his body. His only companion was **Brother Leo**, his scribe, confessor, and one of the few friars who remained utterly faithful.

Francis's suffering became so intense that he cried out to God, begging for the grace to bear his pain with patience.

The Voice of God

God answered him.

According to the tradition, the Lord spoke to Francis with tenderness and clarity:

"Tell me, Brother: if, in compensation for your sufferings, you were given an immense and precious treasure — the whole earth changed into pure gold, pebbles into precious stones, and the waters of the rivers into perfume — would you not regard the pebbles and the waters as nothing compared to such a treasure? Would you not rejoice?"

Francis replied:

"Lord, it would be a very great, a very precious, and inestimable treasure beyond all else that one can love and desire."

Then the voice said:

"Well, Brother, be glad and joyful in the midst of your infirmities. As of now, live in peace as if you were already sharing my kingdom."

In that moment, Francis's pain did not vanish — but his heart was filled with peace. He understood that his suffering had become a doorway into the joy of God's kingdom.

The Canticle and the New Creation

Joy in the Midst of Suffering

The moment God spoke to Francis in his darkness, everything changed.

Immediately, Francis was filled with **joy**, because he understood that he was already living within God's kingdom. Though his body was failing, though pain surrounded him, creation itself had been transformed for him. He knew that when he died, he would not only join God in heaven — he would also see creation renewed, just as God had revealed.

What he had glimpsed in the vision, he would one day see with his own eyes.

His excitement was so great that the very next morning, Francis called his brothers together and **sang to them the "Canticle of the Creatures,"** which he had just composed. As he sang, his words revealed a new understanding of the universe — a vision of creation transformed, redeemed, and radiant with God's glory.

It was a vision of a world where pain and suffering no longer had the final word.

The Canticle of the Creatures

In his canticle, Francis praised God through the creatures of the world — and very specifically through the **four elements** of the universe:

- **Sister Earth**
- **Sister Water**
- **Brother Wind and Air**
- **Brother Fire**

He embraced them as family.

These creatures, transformed by grace, showed forth the goodness and glory of God. All of them — earth, water, wind, fire — had been redeemed by the mystery of the Incarnation, when God entered creation through Jesus.

Francis understood that we give glory to God not by becoming pure spirit, but by being **fully who we are**: creatures overflowing with the Spirit of God.

Rising Through Humility

St. Francis realized that by surrendering to his own humanity — his frailty, his creatureliness — he was already rising, even as he continued to live for two more years. It was as though he had turned, just as Jesus encouraged, and become a child again.

In his suffering, Francis discovered the deepest truth of his life:

To be small is to be lifted.
To be a creature is to be loved.
To surrender is to rise.

The Transitus of St. Francis

The Passing of Francis

On **October 3, 1226**, Francis of Assisi died.

Franciscans throughout the world remember this day as the **Transitus** — his passage from this life into the next. Every year, communities across the globe gather to celebrate this moment with storytelling, singing, candlelight, and often a reenactment of Francis's final hours. It is a way of keeping alive the spirituality Francis and his early companions entrusted to the Church.

Returning to the Porziuncola

As his physical strength faded, Francis asked to be taken back to the **Porziuncola**, the "Little Portion," the tiny chapel of **St. Mary of the Angels** on the plain below Assisi. This was the hearth of the Order — the place where the Franciscan movement had begun, where Francis had prayed, preached, and welcomed his earliest brothers.

He wanted to die where everything had started.

Francis asked to be laid **naked on the ground**, so he could die in perfect poverty, owning nothing, just as Christ had died on the cross. He believed that in this place, in this posture, **Sister Death** would be able to find him and embrace him gently.

He told his brothers:

"I have done what is mine to do; may Christ show you what is yours to do."

These were among his final words — simple, humble, and full of trust.

Sister Death

In the Canticle of the Creatures, Francis had already welcomed death as a sister. He saw her not as an enemy, but as a doorway into God's embrace. When she came for him, she found him exactly where he wished to be:

Poor, peaceful, surrendered,
and resting in God's most holy will.

Francis died singing, surrounded by his brothers, wrapped in the love of the God he had served with his whole heart.

Epilogue — The Living Legacy of St. Francis

Eight Centuries Later

St. Francis of Assisi died in **1226**, but his approach to life did not.

Eight hundred years later, in **2026**, the Franciscan movement he began continues to flourish. There are nearly **30,000 Franciscan friars** serving around the world — preaching, teaching, caring for the poor, tending creation, and living the Gospel with the same simplicity Francis embraced.

This anniversary year marks the **800th anniversary** of the death of the man born Giovanni di Pietro di Bernardone — a man whose short life changed the Church forever.

A Worldwide Commemoration

In honor of this milestone, Francis's remains were placed on display at the **Basilica of Saint Francis in Assisi** from **February 22 to March 22, 2026**. Pilgrims from around the world came to pray, to give thanks, and to reflect on the enduring power of Francis's witness.

Francis's life was brief — born in **1182**, died in **1226** — and less than **twenty years** were spent in active ministry. Yet by the time of his death:

- his brothers had traveled throughout **Europe**,
- across the **Mediterranean**,
- into **North Africa**,
- and the Order had already seen its **first martyrs**.

The seed he planted grew with astonishing speed.

A Spirit That Still Breathes

Eight centuries later, the Franciscan spirit remains unmistakably alive:

- in the friars who walk city streets and mountain paths,
- in the sisters who pray and serve in quiet communities,
- in the lay Franciscans who live the Gospel in ordinary homes,
- in the countless people inspired by Francis's love of creation, peace, and poverty.

Francis's life ended, but his way of seeing — his way of loving — continues to shape hearts across the world.

The Canticle of the Creatures

St. Francis of Assisi

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honor, and all blessing.
To You alone, Most High, do they belong,
and no human is worthy to mention Your name.

Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures,
especially **Sir Brother Sun**,
who is the day and through whom You give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor;
and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars.
In heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene,
and every kind of weather,
through whom You give sustenance to Your creatures.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,
who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom You light the night,
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains and governs us,
and who produces various fruit
with colored flowers and herbs.

Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love,
and bear infirmity and tribulation.
Blessed are those who endure in peace,
for by You, Most High, shall they be crowned.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whom no one living can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin.
Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will,
for the second death shall do them no harm.

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

The Peace Prayer (Summary & Key Lines)

The Peace Prayer expresses the heart of Franciscan spirituality: becoming a channel of God's peace in a world filled with hurt. It asks God to help us bring love where there is hatred, hope where there is despair, and joy where there is sadness. It ends with a call to self-giving — finding life by giving it away.

Two key lines from the prayer:

"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace."
"Where there is hatred, let me sow love."

Summary of the rest of the prayer:

The prayer continues by asking God to help the person bring pardon where there is injury, faith where there is doubt, and light where there is darkness. It encourages seeking to console rather than be consoled, to understand rather than be understood, and to love rather than be loved. It concludes with the Franciscan truth that in giving we receive, in pardoning we are pardoned, and in dying we are born to eternal life.

The Peace Prayer

Inspired by the Spirit of St. Francis

Two of its most beloved lines express the heart of its message: After the Canticle of the Creatures, another prayer has become closely associated with the Franciscan heart — a prayer of peace, healing, and gentle transformation. Though written centuries after Francis's death, it reflects the very spirit he carried into the world.

"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace."
"Where there is hatred, let me sow love."

The rest of the prayer unfolds like a quiet walk through Francis's own life. It asks God to help us bring pardon where there is injury, faith where there is doubt, and hope where there is despair. It invites us to carry light into places of darkness and joy into places of sadness.

It teaches that the deepest peace comes not from being understood, but from understanding; not from being loved, but from loving. It reminds us that in giving, we receive; in pardoning, we are pardoned; and in surrendering our lives to God, we find eternal life.

This prayer, though not written by Francis himself, has become a doorway into his way of seeing the world — a world where peace begins with small acts of mercy, kindness, and humility.

Placed after the Canticle, it becomes a gentle echo of Francis's own voice, inviting every reader to live the Gospel with simplicity and joy.

Closing Reflection

Walking in the Footsteps of Francis

As you reach the end of this story, pause for a moment.
Let the life of Francis rest quietly within you.

His journey was simple, yet profound — a life shaped not by power or wealth, but by listening, noticing, and loving. He discovered God in the leper, in the poor, in the birds, in the mountains, in the wind, and finally in Sister Death herself. Everything became a doorway into grace.

Francis invites us to see the world the same way.

He reminds us that holiness is not found in grand achievements, but in small acts of kindness, in forgiveness offered freely, in joy shared generously, and in the courage to live with an open heart. He teaches that creation is not a backdrop to our lives, but a family we belong to — brothers and sisters who reveal the beauty of God.

As you close this book, consider where Francis's spirit might be calling you:

To notice the quiet gifts around you.
To bring peace where there is hurt.
To offer compassion where there is loneliness.
To live simply, gratefully, and gently.
To trust that God is already near.

May the life of St. Francis inspire you to walk your own path with humility, joy, and love — and may you discover, as he did, that every step becomes a prayer.

Final Blessing

As you finish this journey with St. Francis, may the grace that shaped his life rest gently upon yours.

May the Lord bless you and keep you.
May He fill your heart with the quiet joy Francis carried, the joy that comes from seeing God in all things.

May you walk lightly upon the earth, with gratitude for every creature, every breath of wind, every ray of sunlight, every gift of Sister Water and Brother Fire.

May you find peace in simplicity, strength in compassion, and courage in love.

May Christ guide your steps, as He guided Francis, into places where healing is needed, where kindness can take root, and where hope can be restored.

And may the Spirit of the Most High shine through your life in small acts of mercy, gentle words of forgiveness, and a heart open to God's will.

Go forth in peace.
Go forth in joy.
Go forth in love.

About the Author

Stanley Zapasnik who finds joy in bringing faith to life through gentle, contemplative writing. Inspired by the simplicity and warmth of Franciscan spirituality, he has spent years crafting devotional reflections, parish resources, and creative projects that help others see God in everyday moments.

Living in South Carolina, Stan draws inspiration from quiet places, small blessings, and the beauty of creation — the same gifts that shaped the life of St. Francis. His work blends history, prayer, and reflection, offering readers a peaceful space to slow down and rediscover the presence of God. This book grew from a desire to honor the spirit of the Little Poor Man of Assisi and to share his light with anyone seeking peace, humility, and joy. Stan hopes these pages bring comfort, clarity, and a renewed sense of God's closeness.

Publisher's Page

© 2026
All rights reserved.

This book was created as a devotional and educational resource for parish use. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means — electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise — without prior permission, except for brief quotations used in reviews or parish bulletins.

Scripture quotations, prayers, and historical references are used respectfully within their traditional devotional context.

This work was inspired by the life and spirituality of
St. Francis of Assisi (1182–1226)
and shaped by the Franciscan tradition of peace, humility, and joy.

Special acknowledgment is given to
Paula Wood OFS,
whose bulletin entry first sparked the creation of this book and opened the door to a journey of reflection and gratitude.

Published in South Carolina
in the spirit of Peace and All Good.

✠ Pax et Bonum ✠