

October 4: EVENING PRAYER WITH ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

Theme - *Kinship with Creation*



INTRODUCTION

The harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations. As a result, the originally harmonious relationship between human beings and nature became conflictual (cf. *Gen 3:17-19*). The harmony which Saint Francis of Assisi experienced with all creatures was seen as a healing of that rupture. Through universal reconciliation with every creature, Saint Francis in some way returned to the state of original innocence. (*LS 66*)

In calling to mind the figure of Saint Francis of Assisi, we come to realize that a healthy relationship with creation is one dimension of overall personal conversion, which entails the recognition of our errors, sins, faults and failures, and leads to heartfelt repentance and desire to change. (*LS 218*)

I ask all Christians to recognize and to live fully this dimension of their conversion. May the power and the light of the grace we have received also be evident in our relationship to other creatures and to the world around us. [Let us] help nurture that sublime fraternity with all creation which Saint Francis of Assisi so radiantly embodied. (*LS 221*)

Brothers and Sisters in Francis, let us begin our Evening Prayer by uniting our hearts and voices with grateful songs to the Lord.

Opening Verse: O God come to my assistance...

HYMN: Burst Into Song/BlueGreen Planet – ML III # 471

PSALMS

Antiphon 1: Fields and vineyards, rocks and woods, and all the beauties of the field, flowing springs and blooming gardens, earth and fire, air and wind: all these he urged to love of God and to willing service. (1 Celano 81)

Psalm: Lord of the Universe – ML III # 496

Antiphon 2: With sweet tenderness he enjoyed contemplating in creatures the wisdom, power, and goodness of the Creator. (1 Celano 80)

Psalm: Wonderful Are Your Works - ML II # 265

Antiphon 3: He used to call all creatures by the name of "brother" and "sister" and in a wonderful way, unknown to others, he could discern the secrets of the heart of creatures like someone who has already passed into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. (1 Celano 81)

Psalm: Canticle of the Sun – ML I # 222

WORD OF GOD: Matthew 6:25-34 or Luke 12:22-32

Pause for Silent Reflection

2nd READING: From the Life of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano

‘Francis came to a certain place near Bevagna where a very great number of birds of various kinds had congregated - namely, doves, crows, and some others popularly called daws.’

When the most blessed servant of God, Francis, saw them, ... he left his companions in the road and ran eagerly toward the birds. When he was close enough to them, seeing that they were waiting expectantly for him, he greeted the birds in the usual way: ‘May the Lord give you peace’. He was quite surprised, however, because the birds did not take flight, as they usually do.

Filled with great joy, he humbly requested that they listen to the word of God and addressed them as if they were humans:

“My brother birds, you should greatly praise your Creator and love him always; he gave you feathers to wear, wings to fly, and whatever you need.”

“God made you noble among his creatures, and he gave you a home in the purity of the air”

“Though you neither sow nor reap, he nevertheless protects and governs you without your least care.”

At these words, the birds rejoiced in a wonderful way according to their nature. They stretched their necks, spread their wings, opened their beaks and looked at him. He passed through their midst, coming and going, touching their heads and bodies with his tunic. Then he blessed them and gave them permission to fly off to another place. The blessed father went with his companions along their way rejoicing and giving thanks to God, Whom all creatures revere by their devout confession.

Reflection:

The story of Francis' encounter with "Brother Birds" highlights important elements in Francis's personality:

- he addresses creatures as his brothers and sisters;
- he preaches to them;
- he delights in them;
- he shows care and affection towards them
- and they inspire him to pray.

Much interdependency exists between creation, humanity and God. Ever since he stood naked in the square of Assisi and handed back his clothes, publicly entrusting himself to his Heavenly Father, awareness of his relationship with others grew, including the most lowly of creatures.

In Francis' view, all creatures, separate in functions, worth, desires and beauty, are bound together in a harmonious interdependence ensured and presided over by the just and benevolent eye of God.

Francis was so aware that he was a dependent creature, the ultimate basis for his radical poverty. He recognized that "dominion over" others was the root cause of all evil and suffering in the world. For this reason he wanted his brothers to be subject to everyone, even to creatures.

He did not treat creatures as if he owned them, but lived with them, respecting their independence. For Francis, creatures had autonomous worth and they aided humans to give praise to God.

We need to remind ourselves and others that *the earth is finite* and that we must *live in a way that is fair and just towards future generations* of humans and other creatures. For Francis, the world was not made up of objects but of relationships, of cooperation rather than competition.

Today how can we bring Francis' spirit and example to our present situation?

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

- We believe that God creates all things, renews all things, and celebrates all things.
- We believe that Earth is a sanctuary, a sacred planet filled with God's presence, a home for us to share with our kin.
- We believe that God became flesh and blood, became a part of Earth, a human being called Jesus Christ, who lived and breathed and spoke among us, suffered and died on a cross, for all human beings and for all creation.
- We believe that the risen Jesus is the Christ at the core of creation reconciling all things to God, renewing all creation, and filling the cosmos.

- We believe that the Spirit renews life in creation, groans in empathy with a suffering creation, and waits with us for the rebirth of creation.
- We believe that with Christ we will rise and with Christ we will celebrate a new creation. Amen

Ant. Magnificat: Francis, full of the spirit of God never stopped glorifying, praising, and blessing the Creator and Ruler of all things in all the elements and creatures.(1 Cel 80). ML II # 255 or ML I #122

PRAYER OF PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING (in two choirs)

- Lord, how lovely it is to be your guest. Breeze full of scents; mountains reaching to the skies; waters like a boundless mirror, reflecting the sun’s golden rays and the scudding clouds.
- All nature murmurs mysteriously, breathing depths of tenderness. Birds and beasts of the forest bear the imprint of your love.
- What sort of praises can we give you? We have never heard the song of the cherubim, a joy reserved for the spirits above. But we know the praises that nature sings to you.
- We have beheld how silently in the moonlight the whole earth offers you prayer.
- We have seen how the rising sun rejoices in you, heard how the song of the birds is a chorus of praise to you.
- We have heard the mysterious mutterings of the forests about you, and the winds singing your praise as they stir the waters.
- We have understood how the choirs of stars proclaim your glory, as they move for ever in the depths of infinite space.
- You have brought us into life as if into an enchanted paradise.
- We can live very well on your earth. It is a pleasure to be your guest.
- Glory to you for the feast-day of life. Glory to you for the joy of dawn’s awakening and the quiet rest of evening. Glory to you for the new life each day brings. Glory to you, O God, from age to age. Amen.

AMA NAMIN (sung) **CONCLUDING PRAYER & BLESSING** (All)

Jesus Christ, teach us to empathize with Earth. Make our spirits sensitive to the cries of creation, cries for justice from the land, the seas, and the skies.

Jesus Christ, make our faith sensitive to the groans of the Spirit in creation, groans of longing for a new creation.

Jesus Christ, make our hearts sensitive to the songs of our kin, songs of celebration from the sea, the forest, and the air.

Christ, teach us to care. Amen

May the Spirit of God, who is above all and in all and through all, fill us with the

knowledge of God's presence in Earth and with the joy of Christ within us. Amen.

MARIAN HYMN: Hail Holy Lady – ML I # 220