

GO

AND

REBUILD



MY

CHURCH



Saint Francis of Assisi

The Life of Francis of Assisi began in the year 1181. His Parents, Peter and Pica Bernardone, baptized him with the name John or Giovanni. There were high expectations on the part of both parents for Francis. Even though Francis had other brothers and sisters in the Bernardone Family, both parents felt that this very special son would accomplish great deeds. While Francis' mother felt that her son would grow to be a very special man, Francis' father felt that he now had the son who would inherit the family cloth business and become very wealthy.

Because Peter Bernardone traveled to France to purchase cloth items to restock his store in Assisi, he decided that this new son of his would be nicknamed Francis. As Francis grew and matured, he received his Elementary School instruction from the priests at Saint George School. Francis seemed to be more interested in becoming a Troubadour or a Knight who would rescue the poor and defeat evil of any kind. In his teenage years he was very popular with his friends. Francis was always a high spirited young man who was always dressed in the finest clothes and sang merrily with his friends after an evening of wining and dining. He was always courteous to both the rich and the poor. He would often go out of his way to give a beggar food or coins from his pocket. When his friends would ask him who he would eventually choose to marry, Francis would respond that he would marry a beautiful princess.

Francis accepted the challenge of signing up to battle against the local town of Perugia, Italy. During this time Feudal Law was still in vogue and from time to time the leaders of towns would decide to invade a neighboring town to do battle. There was always a festive mood of elaborate clothing and stories of past battles that always ended with fame and fortune. Francis knew that this would not be a true war, but more of a skirmish. Just the same, he wanted to be remembered as a true Knight of Assisi who would help to conquer Perugia and, thus, become famous. Francis never reached any of the action to become a hero for he was captured and kept in a prison in Perugia for more than one year. His Father refused to pay the ransom to have him freed because Peter Bernardone was not that pleased that his son Francis was not becoming the shrewd businessman that he was. Francis often gave away money

to the poor from the till and actually had taken money from the shop to buy a horse and Knight's armor for this conflict with Perugia.

Francis found his time in prison not only confining, but he suffered from both physical and mental sickness as a prisoner of war. When he was released from prison, Francis found that the illness that he suffered from caused him to think more of his Spiritual life and pursue this goal as his true calling. When he would speak to many of his friends, who were those close companions who ate and drank with him before his time of being a prisoner of war, many of them no longer wanted to associate themselves with him. Francis had changed in their eyes and was no longer the singing, fun-loving, rich young man who treated his friends to meals and wine. Although they did remember him as someone who treated them well, they still remembered how Francis always was the first to donate money to beggars and those in need.

Realizing that his friends and family had shunned him because of his change of heart, Francis spent most of his time in prayer, helping the poor and visiting the sick. There is an incident which is seen as the moment when Francis truly opened his heart to God's will for him. While walking outside of Assisi one day, Francis saw that there was a Leper ahead of him on the road. Lepers were still shunned at this time in history because of the virus that slowly destroyed their bodies. Francis' first thought was to run away and remove himself as far from this Leper as possible. It was then that Francis remembered his own promise to God, while imprisoned, to help the poor and the sick. With that memory in mind, Francis approached the Leper and embraced him. Francis then gave him all the coins he had.

When Francis was still young, at age 23, he found himself one day in a wayside chapel outside of Assisi kneeling in prayer. This chapel was known as St. Damian's. It had been abandoned for a number of years and Francis saw that the roof had holes in it. One of the walls was crumbling and the altar was in need of repair. As he knelt before the Cross of San Damiano, he heard a voice

say, "Go, Francis, and repair my house, which as you can see is falling into ruin." Francis looked around and began to realize that the voice he heard had come from the Cross of Christ Crucified. Francis immediately began to repair the roof, walls and the interior of the Chapel. He still begged for food, visited the sick, asked for donations to help him rebuild this chapel and to give to the poor. As he worked, the news began to spread about how Francis was living and what he was doing. When he did speak to those he met at the Chapel or met on the road, Francis spoke only of the need for all to do penance, have brotherly love and to be at peace with God.

The many friends from his past with whom he ate and drank and walked the streets of Assisi would sing and recite poetry about falling in love, being a courageous Knight and planning for a life of security with a home, wife and children. Because of who Francis had become, many of these friends ignored or criticized or made fun of Francis because he no longer seemed to believe that what they were doing was important.

Eventually, some of these friends came to speak with Francis and they joined in helping him with the Chapel's renovation. Francis spoke about how happy he was doing God's will, how he truly was now one of God's courageous Knights, and that he did not seek fame and fortune, but now sought a life of obedience and poverty to imitate the life of Jesus Christ.

Some of these friends remained with Francis and were joined by others who had heard about what was happening outside the walls of Assisi to bring greater honor and glory to God. As the number of Brothers grew, Francis asked all of them to spend a day in prayer, asking God to inspire them to continue His work. At the end of the day, Francis randomly opened the Bible and his hand came to rest on the quote from the Gospel of Matthew. Francis' finger pointed to the quote: ""And as you go, preach saying, "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the Lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely have you received, freely give. Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts. Nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals nor staffs, for a worker is worth his food."" *Matthew 10: 7–10*. Immediately, Francis felt that God was calling not only himself, but

the brothers who were with him to a life of service, prayer, poverty and good works. Thus, they became known as the "Friars Minor" or "Little Brothers."

With the blessing of this small community of men, Francis walked to Rome to meet with Pope Innocent III. When Francis was introduced to Pope Innocent III, the Pope looked at this young 27 year old man, dressed in a beggar's tunic with a rope around his waist, and was reminded of a dream that he had recently. In this dream, Pope Innocent III had witnessed a man dressed like Francis holding up the tottering Lateran. The Pope immediately asked Francis how he wanted to live his life for the Glory of God and Francis stated that he and his followers wanted to serve Christ by living in Poverty, Chastity and Obedience to Pope Innocent and his successors. Pope Innocent III approved Francis and his followers becoming the "Order of Friars Minor" and asked Francis to write up their rules and promises and how they would live the Gospel Life and that he, Pope Innocent III, would sign their request.

As the number of Friars grew and they began to spread through Italy, Francis and his followers continued to use their talents, bringing the Gospel Message to God's People. By their assistance, Churches were repaired. The Friars began teaching and preaching that the Kingdom of God is near and how we should prepare our hearts and souls for that event. The Friars continued to live and pray in community and they begged for food as well as alms for the poor.

Francis Bernardone was indeed a talented, simple soul who continued to lead the Friars with an example of Prayer, Sacrifice and Humility. He was the author of many songs and poems about the beauty of creation and the wisdom of God as our Creator. Francis could see in the simple beauty of a flower, the Hand of God. He had great respect for all of creation and is the patron saint of Creation. There are numerous stories about Francis speaking loudly to all of creation, reminding all of the earth's creatures to always give praise to their Creator.

The travels of Francis brought him to numerous countries in Europe where he established the Franciscan presence by inviting and receiving many to live his life as a Friar Minor and spread the Gospel Message of the Crucified Christ.

Francis had always held the Eucharist as the most import-

ant Sacrament of Baptized Christians. He always stopped and visited Churches and spent hours before the Tabernacle in prayer. The beautiful princess that Francis bragged about to his friends in his teenage years became the Blessed Mother. Our Blessed Mother was always referred to by Francis as “Lady Poverty.” This Franciscan title for Our Blessed Mother reminds each and every one of us that the Holy Family lived in poverty, always seeking and desiring to fulfill the Father’s will by seeking first the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Crusades were still taking place in the Holy Land during the life of Francis. During the year 1212, Francis embarked for Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and the Holy Land. His desire to “Preach to the Saracens” gave Francis the opportunity to become a man of peace, who helped to put an end to some of the violence that this conflict had caused. Francis sought to speak with the leader of the Saracens to ask for an end to this conflict. The Sultan was so impressed by Francis’ words and humble message that, although he did not convert to the Roman Catholic Faith, he allowed the Friars to be the Guardians of all of the Shrines and Churches in the Holy Land that Christians regarded as most important to their faith. The Friars still enjoy this privilege today.

The influence that Francis had on other men to join the Order as Friars Minor did not only influence men to become Priests and Brothers. Clare of Assisi approached Francis with the desire to begin an Order of Sisters who would follow the Rule of Saint Francis and imitate the Franciscan way of living the Gospel life in Poverty, Chastity and Obedience. The Poor Clare’s are still today an active, prayerful Religious Order of Women who have dedicated their lives to “Christ Crucified.”

Francis also influenced married couples and single men and women to live the Gospel life by dedicating themselves to Christ and the Church as Secular Franciscans. These are couples and individuals who wish to draw themselves closer to the vows they share as husband and wife through living their vows of love for each other and teaching their children about the life of Jesus Christ. Even single men and women are able to share, as are married couples, in the teachings of Francis that allow all of us to live and work for the coming of God’s Kingdom.

Two years before his death in the year 1224, Francis’ health was in a very frail state. He had decided to spend some time in prayer on retreat in the mountains of Italy. On the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, September 14, Francis beheld a vision of

Christ Crucified. As he continued to pray and sacrifice, he became imprinted with the five wounds of Christ, the Stigmata. There appeared on his body the visible wounds of the Crucifixion. An early writer of Francis’ life stated that these wounds had always been imprinted on the heart of Francis.

Within two years of receiving the Stigmata, Francis’ health continued to fail. The Friars gathered around the small hut that Francis was in to begin to pray for him as “Sister Death” drew near. On October 3, 1226, Francis returned to God the Father as a Loving Disciple of Jesus Christ.

The Life and Death of St. Francis should inspire all of us to live our lives as the Hands, Feet and Heart of Christ Crucified. Our Goal in Life should be: **“GO AND REBUILD MY CHURCH.”**

SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI
A Saint for Our Time

- Born in Assisi, Italy 1181 or 1182
 - Parents: Peter & Pica Bernardone
 - Baptismal Name: John Bernardone
 - Early Life: Businessman, Troubadour, Knight (Age 20)
 - Prisoner of War (Age 21)
 - “Francis, Go and Rebuild My Church” (Age 23)
 - Francis and the Leper (Age 25)
 - Matthew 10:7-10 (Age 26)
 - Pope Honorius, III (Age 27)
 - The Order Grew/The Poor Clares/The Third Order (Age 35)
 - Francis Receives the Stigmata (Age 43)
 - Death: October 3, 1226 (Age 45)
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