

The Transitus of St Francis

Each year on October third, we remember the passing of St. Francis of Assisi from this life into God. To revisit the story of Francis' life and his passing into death is important to us. It helps us to renew our commitment to follow Christ through his example of living the Gospel life.

(Stand)

Leader Let us bless our Lord and God, living and true
All **To him we offer all praise, all glory, all honor, all blessing, and every good forever. Amen,**

Leader Brothers and sisters,
a very ancient tradition draws us together on the eve of this St Francis' Festival
to celebrate his Transitus:
the final stage of his journey home to God. While rejoicing in the saint's holy death and glorious entry into heaven,
we give thanks to God the Father,
that in his Son, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, we too can welcome death as our "sister", and trusting in his mercy,
can live now in the sure hope of resurrection.
Let us pray,

All **Lord God,
on this night you gave to our holy father Francis,
the Poverello of Assisi,
the reward of perfect beatitude. In your love, lead us
who celebrate his Transitus, to follow closely in his
footsteps,
and come, in our turn,
to worship you face to face,
in a joy that knows no ending. Amen**

THE NARRATIVE OF THE DEATH OF ST FRANCIS

(Sit)

Reader 1 St Francis was lying grievously ill and in pain in the Bishop's house in Assisi, when a doctor was called for the last time. He said to Francis:

Reader 2 "I must tell you, that according to our science, your malady is incurable and in my opinion, you will die at the end of September or the beginning of October".

Reader 1 Raising his arms to heaven, the sick man joyfully cried out:

Reader 3 "You are welcome, welcome, my dear sister Death,"

Reader 1 Then turning to a friar, he asked that Brothers Angelo and Leo be called to help him share this good news by singing beside his bed. In spite of their tears, the two brethren began to intone the Canticle of Brother Sun:

All sing **All creatures of our God and king,
Lift up your voices, let us sing:**

Alleluia! Alleluia!
Bright burning sun with golden beams,
Soft silver moon that gently gleams,
O praise him, O praise him,
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Reader 1 The friars sang the Canticle many times a day to comfort the saint's failing spirit, and sometimes through the night as well. Not all were pleased. Finally, Brother Elias came to Francis and said:

Reader 2 "Well-beloved Father, for my part I rejoice that you should be joyful; but I fear this city, which regards you as a saint, may be scandalized to see that you do not prepare yourself for death in quite another manner".

Reader 1 The saint smiled and replied:

Reader 3 "Leave me, good Brother, for in spite of what I endure, I feel myself so near to God, that I cannot hold myself from singing".

Reader 1 Responding to Francis' expressed desire, Br. Elias arranged for him to be carried to the Portiuncula. The magistrates of Assisi consented, and sent an armed escort. When the cortège reached Santa Maria le Mura, Francis raised himself on the litter, and seemed for some time to be contemplating this lovely and familiar view of the city, which he could no longer see. Then painfully he lifted his arm and blessed it:

Reader 3 "May you be blessed, dear city of God. Once you were a lair of brigands, but God has chosen you to become the home of those who know Him and who reverence His most blessed and glorious Name".

Reader 1 At the Portiuncula, St. Francis was given a tiny hut in the forest near to the Chapel of St Mary of the Angels. Again, he sensed the solitude of this beautiful place so often visited by the Spirit of God, and he rejoiced as he heard from within the chapel the friars sing:

All sing **Swift flowing water, pure and clear,**
Make music for your Lord to hear,
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Fire, so intense and fiercely bright,
Who gives to us both warmth and light,
O praise Him, O praise Him,
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Reader 1 This forest solitude was the right setting for Francis' "passing over" to God, for it was to be an event of radiant beauty. Francis took leave of this world with the same simplicity and courtesy that had marked all the events of his life. He forgot no one or nothing; his sons, his daughters, the places he loved, the Lady of his thoughts, all the creatures with whom he had been so united, shared in his farewells and benedictions. He recommended to his brethren the beloved Portiuncula:

Reader 3 "Brothers, this is a holy place. Hold it ever in veneration and never abandon it".

Reader 1 In honor of his Lady Poverty, he asked that he be laid naked on

the ground, and covering with one hand the wound in his side he said:

Reader 3 "My task is done; may Christ teach you to do yours".

Reader 1 His friars begged him to forgive them for any offences, and to bless them again. This he readily did, placing his hand successively on the head of each, and then he addressed himself to Bernard of Quintavalle:

Reader 3 "I absolve too, and I bless as far as I am able and even still more than I am able, all my absent brothers. See that these words reach them, and bless them in my name".

All sing **All you with mercy in your heart,
Forgiving others, take your part,
O sing now: Alleluia!
All you that pain and sorrow bear,
Praise God and cast on him your care:
O praise him, O praise him,
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!**

Reader 1 Nor did Francis forget Sister Clare, who he learned was weeping at the thought of losing her father and friend. He sent a message to his "little spiritual plant":

Reader 3 "I, the little brother Francis, wish to follow to the end the poor way which was that of our Lord and of His Mother, and I conjure you, my daughter, never to be separated from it".

Reader 1 Then he added:

Reader 3 "And say to Lady Clare, that I forbid her to give way to sadness, for I promise her that she and her sisters will see me again".

Reader 1 Francis also sent a message to his friend, the Lady Jacoba of Rome, that she should come in haste with what is needed for his burial. Before the courier left the room, a brother ran in to announce her arrival, and Francis cried weakly:

Reader 3 "God be praised, let the door be opened, for the rule forbidding women to enter here does not apply to Brother Jacoba!"

Reader 1 The Roman Lady had carried with her all that was needed for the saint's burial, and a box of almond biscuits, which Francis tried to, but could not eat. More and more often the Canticle of Brother Sun was heard from the hut, with the new verse Francis had composed in praise of "our sister Death of the Body":

All sing **And you most kind and gentle death,
Waiting to hush our final breath,
O praise him, Alleluia! You lead back home the child of God,
By way that Christ the Lord has trod:
O praise him, O praise him,
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!**

Reader 1 On Friday 2nd October, Francis asked for bread, and he blessed it and, like Christ at the last Supper, distributed it to all present, while the Gospel of St John was read beginning at the Passion.

John 13:1-15

1 Before the feast of Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father. He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end.

2 The devil had already induced Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot, to hand him over. So, during supper,
 3 fully aware that the Father had put everything into his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God,
 4 he rose from supper and took off his outer garments. He took a towel and tied it around his waist.
 5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel around his waist.
 6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Master, are you going to wash my feet?"
 7 Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing, you do not understand now, but you will understand later."
 8 Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me."
 9 Simon Peter said to him, "Master, then not only my feet, but my hands and head as well."
 10 Jesus said to him, "Whoever has bathed has no need except to have his feet washed, for he is clean all over; so you are clean, but not all."
 11 For he knew who would betray him; for this reason, he said, "Not all of you are clean." 12 So when he had washed their feet [and] put his garments back on and reclined at table again, he said to them, "Do you realize what I have done for you? 13 You call me 'teacher' and 'master,' and rightly so, for indeed I am.
 14 If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet.
 15 I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.

Reader 1 At dusk on the next day, "she to whom no one willingly opens the door", presented herself, and Francis saw her enter. The little poor man received her courteously:
 Reader 3 Be welcome, my Sister Death"
 Reader 1 and he begged a brother to announce as a herald of arms does, the solemn arrival of his expected guest; for he added:
 Reader 3 "It is she who is going to introduce me to eternal life."
 Reader 1 They placed him on the ground in a coarse sack-cloth to honor the somber guest, his head was covered with ashes and dust. Then with failing voice he intoned Psalm 142, and those around him continued with him:

Psalm 142

With a loud voice, I cry out to the Lord,
 With a loud voice, I beseech the Lord.

My complaint I pour out before him;
 Before him I lay bare my distress.

When my spirit is faint within me,
 you know my path. Along the way I walk
 they have hidden a trap for me.

I look to my right hand, but no friend is there.
 There is no escape for me; no one cares for me;

I cry out to you, Lord,
 I say, "You are my refuge,
 my portion in the land of the living.

Listen to my cry for help,
for I am brought very low.

Rescue me from my pursuers,
for they are too strong for me.

Lead me out of my prison,
that I may give thanks to your name.

The just shall gather around me
because you have been good to me.

Glory to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever.

Reader 1 There was a great silence. Evening had already stolen into the hut. Francis lay motionless. The final stage of his Transitus had begun. One of his biographers wrote:

Reader 2 "He died singing, in the forty-sixth year of his age, and the twenty-fifth of his conversion".

Reader 1 Immediately a multitude of crested larks flocked wheeling about the roof of the hut and for long, with their sad chirping, bewailed the loss of their friend. At the same hour, a Brother, one of no small fame, saw a shining star, borne on a white cloud, mounting towards heaven. The soul of the Little Poor Man was flying to eternal happiness.

All:

O most holy soul, at your departure the heavenly host comes to meet you, the angelic choir rejoices and the glorious Trinity welcomes you, saying: remain with us forever.

Leader

All Let's kneel and pray the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory be.

O God, you granted our blessed Father Francis the reward of everlasting joy; grant that we, who celebrate with tender devotion the memory of his death, may at last come to the same eternal joy; through Christ our Lord. Amen

(Stand)

All sing

**Let all things their creator bless,
And worship him in humbleness,
O praise him, Alleluia!
Praise God the Father, praise the Son,
And praise the Spirit, three in one;
O praise him, O praise him,
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!**

THE END
AND THE BEGINNING