

Transitus of St. Francis of Assisi “passing over” from this life to the glory of heaven



INTRODUCTORY RITE

GREETING AND PRAYER

Leader In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All We adore you, Lord Jesus Christ, in all your churches in the whole world, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Leader Let us bless our Lord and God, living and true;

All To him we must attribute all praise, glory, honor, blessing and every good forever. Amen.

Leader Brothers and sisters, a very ancient tradition draws us together on the eve of St. Francis' Feast Day 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 his Spirit's power, we too can welcome death as our "sister," and trusting in his mercy, can live now in the sure hope of resurrection.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

All And with your spirit.

Leader Let us pray: 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.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.

All Amen. Amen. Alleluia!

THE NARRATIVE OF THE DEATH OF ST. FRANCIS

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 brothers began to intone the *Canticle of Brother Sun*:

All **All creatures of our God and King,
Lift up your voice and let us sing;
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Bright burning sun with golden beam,
Pale silver moon with softer gleam,
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, Brother 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 "Be blest of God, O holy city! On your account many souls shall be saved, many servants of God shall dwell in you, and from your midst many shall be chosen for the kingdom of life everlasting."

Reader 1 At the Portiuncula, 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 **Swift flowing water, pure and clear,
Make music for your Lord to hear,
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Fierce fire so masterful and bright,
Providing 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 brothers 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 "I have done what is mine; may Christ teach you what is yours."

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

Reader 3 “See, my son, I am being called by God. I forgive all my brothers, present and absent, all their faults and offenses, and I absolve them insofar as I am able. When you give them this message, bless them all for me.”

All **All you that are of tender heart,
Forgiving others, take your part.
Sing his praises! Alleluia!**
**All you that pain and sorrow bear,
Praise God, and on him cast 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 “Tell Lady Clare to put aside all her grief and sorrow over not being able to see me now. Let her be assured that before her death, both she and her sisters will see me and, because of me, they will be greatly consoled.”

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 because he was so weak.

More and more often the *Canticle of Brother Sun* was heard from the hut, with the new verses Francis had composed in praise of “our Sister Death of the Body”:

All **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,
Where Christ our Lord the way has trod:
O praise him! O praise him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!**

Reader 2 [*The Gospel according to John is proclaimed.*]

If no Deacon: A reading from the holy Gospel according to John (JN 13:1 – 15)
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If there is a Deacon: The Lord be with you.
A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

**And with your spirit.
Glory to you, O Lord.**

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. The devil had already induced Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot, to hand him over. So, during supper, fully aware that the Father had put everything into his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God, he rose from supper and took off his outer garments. He took a towel and tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel around his waist. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Master, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing, you do not understand now, but you will understand later." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus

answered him, "Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Master, then not only my feet, but my hands and head as well." 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." For he knew who would betray him; for this reason, he said, "Not all of you are clean."

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? You call me 'teacher' and 'master,' and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do."

The Gospel of the Lord.

All **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

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 Psalm 142 was prayed:

[Alternate verses beginning with the right side]

**With all my voice I cry to the Lord,
with all my voice I entreat the Lord.
I pour out my trouble before him;
I tell him all my distress
while my spirit faints within me.
But you, O Lord, know my path.**

**On the way where I shall walk
they have hidden a snare to entrap me.
Look on my right and see:
there is no one who takes my part.
I have no means of escape,
not one who cares for my soul.**



**I cry to you, O Lord.
I have said: “You are my refuge
all I have in the land of the living.”
Listen, then, to my cry
for I am in the depths of distress.**

**Rescue me from those who pursue me
for they are stronger than I.
Bring my soul out of this prison
and then I shall praise your name.
Around me the just will assemble
because of your goodness to me.**

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:
As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.**

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: “He died singing, in the forty-fourth year of his age, and the twenty-fifth of his conversion.” Immediately a multitude of crested larks flocked about the roof of the hut and 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 **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!**

Note: There are 4 parts: *Leader* (only on page 1); *Reader 1*; *Reader 2* (once as the physician, Brother Elias and proclaims the Gospel); and *Reader 3* (Francis)



[adapted from Pearl McGill, T.S.S.F., a Tertiary of the Western Australia Region; sources used: *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents* (Vol. I: The Saint; Vol. II: The Founder; Vol. III: The Prophet), Editors: Regis Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap.; J.A. Wayne Hellmann, O.F.M. Conv.; and William J. Short, O.F.M., 1999 – 2001; *The Words of St. Francis* by James Meyer, O.F.M., 1982]