

The Transitus of St. Francis of Assisi

October 3

Preparations:

In the gathering space, there is a San Damiano Crucifix prominently displayed along with a Bible or Book of the Gospels and a stand on which a large candle can be placed. Additional candles, flowers etc. may be strategically placed to create a festive environment. Hymns listed can be changed as needed. A leader, narrator, reader and candle bearer are needed. If desired, there can be several narrators.

Hymn Suggestions:

In a Dream (Hutmacher)	Seek Ye First (Laferty)
Remember Your Love (Ducote)	Shepherd Me, O God (Haugen)
Jesus Remember Me (Berthier)	Prayer for Guidance (Talbot)
Blessed Are They (Haas)	Those Who See Light (Elze)
Open My Eyes, Lord (Manibusan)	In Perfect Charity (Debruyn)
Praise and Thanksgiving (Zaragoza)	Canticle of the Sun (Haugen)
God of Day and God of Darkness (BEACH SPRING)	

Story of the Death of St. Francis:

Sources for alternate readings:

- *The Life of Saint Francis* by Thomas of Celano (was called 1 CELANO),
- *The Second Book*, Chapters VIII and IX, pp. 277-284
- *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul* by Thomas of Celano (was called 2 CELANO), The Second Book, Chapters CLXII and CLXIII, pp. 387 ff.
- *Bonaventure's Major Life*, Chapter XIV
- *Bonaventure's Minor Life*, Chapter VII
- *The Assisi Compilation* (was called *Legend of Perugia*), #4-8, 11-14

Texts from *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Volume 1: The Saint, Volume 2: The Founder, Volume 3: The Prophet* are used with permission. (Copyright © 1999, 2000, 2001 Franciscan Institute of St. Bonaventure University, St. Bonaventure, NY. Published by New City Press, 202 Cardinal Rd., Hyde Park, NY 12538 www.newcitypress.com).

Reflection and Sharing:

*This segment can include or be replaced by a **homily/reflection.*

Leader: From the earliest days of the Franciscan Order, the followers of St. Francis have gathered on the anniversary of his death to celebrate his transitus, that is, St. Francis' passage from earthly life into everlasting life. Here in this place, we, too, gather to celebrate the light which Francis was to his world. But, this celebration is not only a memorial, a remembering of one who has gone before us. It is also a celebration of the spirit of Francis in our midst today, in each of us. This is a time when we, inspired by Francis, consider how we can be light for our world.

Hymn: In a Dream (Hutmacher)

During the hymn, the candle bearer carries a large lighted candle symbolizing the light of St. Francis' life to the candle stand.

Narrators: The Story of the Death of St. Francis

Given as numbers 1, 2, 3 on page 5 of this service or from an alternate reading.

Reading: John 13: 1-17

Narrators: Continuation of the [Story of the Death of St. Francis \(See below\)](#)

Response: Psalm 142. *Pray antiphonally.*

I pray, I plead,
I cry for mercy, Lord;
I pour out all my troubles,
the story of my distress.
My spirit fails me.

You know the road I walk
and the traps hidden from me.
See what they are doing!
No one befriends me
or cares for me.

There is no escape,
so, I turn to you, Lord.
I know you are my refuge,
all I have in the land of the living.
I am pleading, hear me!
I have no strength.
God, rescue me!

They hunt me down,
and overwhelm me.
Free me from this cage!

Then I will praise your name
and gather with the just
to thank you for your kindness.

Glory be to God, our Creator, to Jesus, the Christ,
and to the Holy Spirit
as it was in the beginning, is now,
and will be forever. Amen.

The English translation of Psalm 142 is from The Liturgical Psalter © 1994, International Committee on English in the Liturgy Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.

Leader: In John's Gospel we heard Jesus' words, "What I just did was to give you an example: as I have done, so you must do." St. Francis has told us, "I have done what is mine to do. May Christ teach you what is yours." Take time to consider these mandates. How has my life changed since I met Francis? Who is St. Francis for me?

After some time for quiet reflection, take a few moments to share what you wish of your reflection with the person next to you. At the conclusion of the sharing, we will light candles as a sign of Christ's light, passed on through Francis, now shining in us. When all the candles are lit, we will remain seated and sing.

Hymn: Blest Are They (Haas)

Intercessions: *All stand.*

Response: Merciful One, hear our prayer.

That Christians of every culture, race, and nation joyfully bring the gospel
to the whole world, we pray...

That all of us as followers of Christ, show compassion to people who are poor or
suffering, we pray...

That those who serve the common good, elected officials and public servants, might
serve in wisdom and love, we pray...

That all who work, nurture, teach, sustain and guide may recognize the good they do, and
be themselves nurtured and sustained, we pray...

That all of us who are called to prayer and contemplation find refreshment, wonder and
transformation in the experience, we pray...

Leader: Loving and Merciful God, you have gifted your mystical body with the life of Francis, a light for us on our journey to you. Continue to pour out your Spirit on all creation, reconciling all in love and in the peace which you promised us. We ask this in your name. Amen.

Leader: As a sign of the blessing and peace we are for each other, let us extend our hand in blessing and pray...

All: May God bless and protect you,
May God look on you with mercy,
May God give you peace.

Leader: Let us offer each other a sign of that peace.

After a sign of peace is exchanged, the leader concludes...

Leader: In the footsteps of Christ, Francis did what was his to do. Let us celebrate this gift and go forth in the footsteps of Francis, to do what is ours!

Hymn: God of Day and God of Darkness (BEACH SPRING)



The Story of the Death of St. Francis

Narrators:

1. At this time Francis was staying in the palace of the Bishop of Assisi, and he therefore asked the brothers to take him as quickly as possible to the place of St. Mary of the Portiuncula. For he wished to give back his soul to God in that place where, as has been said, he first knew the way of truth perfectly. The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano, The Second Book, Chapter VII #108, p. 277 or The Assisi Compilation, # 5, p. 120.
2. Then blessed Francis, despite the overpowering burden of his sickness, praised the Lord in a great joyful outburst of body and soul, saying to his companion: “Since I must soon die, have Brother Angel and Brother Leo come and praise our Sister Death for me.” Both arrived and, forcing back their tears, sang the “Canticle of Brother Sun” and of the other creatures, which the saint had composed during his sickness for the glory of God and for the consolation of his soul and of that of the others. The Assisi Compilation, # 7, p. 121.
3. While therefore the brothers were weeping very bitterly and grieving inconsolably, the holy father commanded that bread be brought to him. He blessed and broke it and gave a small piece of it to each one to eat. Commanding also that a book of the Gospels be brought, he asked that the Gospel according to St. John be read to him from the place that begins: “Before the feast of the Passover.” He was recalling that most holy supper which the Lord celebrated as his last supper with his disciples. He did all of this in reverent memory of that supper, showing thereby the deep love he had for his brothers. The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul by Thomas of Celano, The Second Book, Chapter CLXIII, #217, p. 387.

Reader: John 13:1-17

Narrators:

4. Then [Francis] spent the few days that remained before his death in praise, teaching his companions whom he loved so much to praise Christ with him. He himself, in as far as he was able broke forth in this psalm, “I cried to the Lord with my voice: with my voice I made supplication to the Lord.” He also invited all creatures to praise God. He exhorted death itself, terrible and hateful to all, to give praise, and going joyfully to meet it, he invited it to make its lodging with him.
5. Then Francis said to the brothers: “When you see that I am brought to my last moments, place me naked upon the ground just as you saw me the day before yesterday; and let me lie there after I am dead for the length of time it takes one to walk a mile unhurriedly.” The hour therefore came, and all the mysteries of Christ being fulfilled in him, he winged his way happily to God. The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul by Thomas of Celano, The Second Book, Chapter CLXIII, #217, p. 388.

****Suggested Homily:**

As we gather this evening to “remember” the death of St. Francis, to whom might we address that same question? *“What do you miss the most?”* Might Clare respond: “I miss the deep conversations we had because our hearts were so in tune,” and then laugh at the remembrance of the time she and Francis shared a meal and were so wrapped in God that the townsfolk thought the area was on fire and came rushing down with pails of water to put out the flames?

“What do you miss the most?” Perhaps Maseo would say: “I miss Francis’ humble gestures of love,” and then recall the story of Francis waiting for him to bring back word from Clare and Sylvester as to how he should spend his days, in contemplation or in activity. Maseo would remember that, rather than rushing at him for an answer, Francis greeted him, washed his feet tenderly, cooked him a meal, and only then knelt down before Maseo to hear God’s will for him.

“What do you miss the most?” What would Francis’ father say? How would his mother respond? What about Lady Jacopa?

There is a line from the fairy tale *The Tinker King* which states: “Everything dies a little when something dies a lot.” Francis’ passing from this world constituted a particularly brilliant reflection of God’s beauty no longer physically present to us. What a loss!

And in our loss, in the first decade of this 21st century, people like ourselves around the planet gather tonight for the 780th time since Francis’s death to ask the question one more time. *“What do we miss the most?”* and *“What does our world miss the most?”*

As we sit here tonight, “memories” come back that find us “dying a little” all over again because Francis died “a lot.” We encounter our own fears and yearnings as we stand before the darkness and the shadow of death in Iraq and North Korea and Iran.

Filling our news and our very beings, we listen with heavy hearts to the death toll in Philadelphia city streets alone. We mourn in solidarity with Iraqi and Afghan and Palestinian and Israeli mothers who have all “died a little” because their children have been terrorized and have “died a lot.”

But, in the face of this evil, we remember Francis who encountered the Sultan peacefully, who reconciled opposing factions in Assisi, who lifted hearts with his greeting of “Good Morning, Good People,” who envisioned a world of no enemies where everyone was sister and brother and who stripped himself of everything to make this happen more easily, who allowed his suffering to transform him into a most faithful mirror of Christ, and who could even face death singing—and, all of a sudden, WE HAVE HOPE.

We realize that our God is, indeed, not only a God of day but also a God who holds us during the darkness and that Francis’ imitation of the foot-washing Christ is just the antidote we and our world need in response to the oppression and brokenness that surround us.

As we ponder “*What do we miss the most?*” we are challenged by our own responsibility to “fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ.” (*1 Colossians 24*) Through the intercession of St. Francis and through the legacy that he has passed down to us, what we miss the most God’s Spirit has given us the power to supply!

“I have done what is mine to do,” Francis would remind us tonight, *“may Christ teach you what is yours to do.”* (2C, 214)

- Sister Anne Amati, OSF