

# **Saint Francis**

## **The Canticle of The Creatures**



### **800th Anniversary**

**St Ninians and St Cuthbert's Parish, Hamilton**

**Art Work Produced By Christine Mailey**

## Introduction To St Francis's Canticle of the Creatures

Although St Francis lived in the twelfth century, people today still turn to him as an example of how to live an authentic Christian life. Tonight we will spend some time using The Canticle, with illustrations and paintings and reflections, to understand what St Francis's relationship with creation was and reflect on how we ourselves view and treat nature.

Francis was almost completely blind and recovering from an illness when he composed the Canticle. And yet creation, through his mind's eye, came sharply into focus. His deep love for God's creatures is captured in this great prayer. He reveals the deep sense of family he felt for all creation. He addresses, for example, Brother Sun and Sister Moon. He even peacefully acknowledges "Sister Death," who would embrace him a few months later. In the Canticle, he realises his desire to sing of God's glory by praising Him for all the blessings that He has endowed on us through creation.

It is 800 years this year since he composed this great prayer..... so why is it so relevant today? Before answering this question, let's immerse ourselves in the prayer itself.

On the table are copies of the Canticle. Could you please read it thoughtfully. If you are familiar with it, try to approach it as though for the first time. Take a pen and mark anything that seems to speak to you. When you are ready, take the Canticle with you and go through to the other room. Wander around and continue your reflection with the help of Christine's art work. Take time to meditate and reflect on what you read and see.

You will return to your groups when you come back and be asked to share what section/s of the Canticle were most meaningful to you either through its words or illustrations or both.

After reading discussing the Canticle return to discuss round the table.

After The Discussion.....

So let's consider why is the Canticle so relevant today?

St. Francis lived in a time of incredible greed and amazing violence. People were being sacrificed in bloody, never-ending battles for economic supremacy. He knew this because he and his father were very much part and parcel of this economic venture that sacrificed people for profit.

After his conversion, however, he introduced people to a fraternal relationship with creation. When he looked at creation, he didn't see profit centres and cash cows. He saw

“Brother Wind ” and “Sister Water,” . He saw creation as a gift given from a loving God who endowed us with gifts to nourish, sustain and bond us to one another.

In today’s world, creation has become just another commodity. It can be used and abused, bought and sold on the open market, depleted for as much profit as we can extract from it, without regard for its deeper meaning and purposes. In response to all he saw happening in the world, Pope Francis wrote a letter. ...it was not just to Catholics, or to Christians, or men of goodwill but to everyone who shares our common home.

The letter is called Laudato Si, and it is an obvious reference to St Francis Canticle in which the opening line is Laudato Si’ Mi Signore.... Or Praise be to you my Lord.

It recognises that the crisis we are facing isn’t global warming, or the loss of biodiversity or the increasing social isolation or so many other things. These are real problems but are symptoms of a deeper crisis which is one caused by our broken relationships with one another, with Creation and most importantly with God Himself. By listening to the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor, we can start to respond to the crisis and mend our broken relationships.

Economists claim that we cannot lift up the poor and protect the environment at the same time. But the spirituality of St. Francis challenges this. It calls us to work cooperatively with one another and with creation to build a sustainable economy and move to a simpler lifestyle. Immediate profit can only lead to greater polarization of society and to increased levels of violence.

In his twenties as St Francis was praying in a dilapidated church, he heard God calling him to build his church. At first he thought he was being told to build the church he was in but came to understand it was the church in the world he was being asked to rebuild.

While waiting for an ecumenical service for COP26 delegates in Glasgow Cathedral to start, I was drawn in by the architecture of this ancient building. As the great columns reached upwards they branched into an overhead canopy like trees in a forest.. It struck me that the men who started to build these cathedrals would never have seen them completed . Nor would their children, their grand children or their great grandchildren..... yet they invested their efforts in a structure they would never see. Surely we are being called again to build a great cathedral. A cathedral of creation that would rise out of the debris we have turned the world into. We won’t see this work completed. Nor will our children, our grandchildren or our great grandchildren. But when they ask what did we do when we knew our world was in crisis, the answer will be that by following Christ and the spirituality of St Francis, we began to lay the foundation for the renewal of creation.



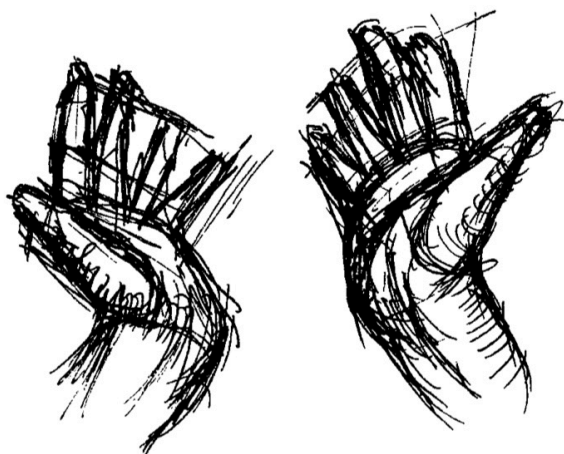


## Section 1

### THE CANTICLES OF THE CREATURES ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI

Most High, all-powerful,  
good Lord,  
Yours is the praise,  
the glory and the honor  
and every blessing

To You alone, Most High  
do they belong  
and no one is worthy  
to speak Your name.



The *Canticle of the Creatures*, written by St Francis, opens with “Laudato Si Mi Signore” or “Praise be to you, my Lord”. By calling his encyclical *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis directs us to the spirituality of St Francis. He invites us to see what St Francis saw..... that we are part of a cosmological framework in which everything is connected, related and integrated.

The gifts we receive from loved ones are treasured as tokens of love. Looking at the world today, can we, in all conscience, say that we have treasured the love we receive through God’s ongoing gift of creation?

## Section 2



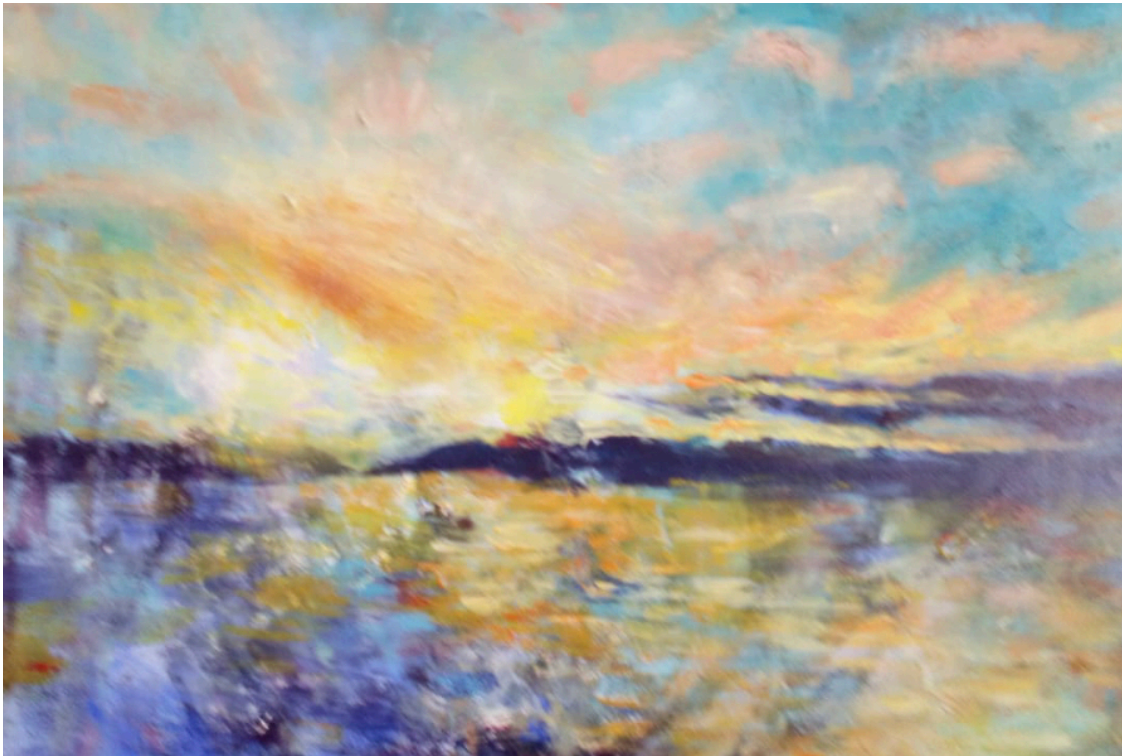
Be Praised . . . . .

my Lord, through  
all your creatures.

The Canticle of the Creatures was written by St Francis in 1224 just two years before his death. It is a spontaneous poem or prayer coming straight from his heart. He understood that the world is not only created by God but is also a reflection of God. His Canticle expresses his love for God through his love of creation. It sums up the whole of St Francis's spirituality.

Pope Francis encourages us to pray, reflect, dialogue and work together for the good of our common home. He reminds us that God calls us to love life in communion with the rest of creation. He calls us to an "ecological conversion" through listening, by living a simpler lifestyle and by practicing a spirituality of loving awareness of communion with God who permeates all creation in beauty, truth, and goodness

### Section 3



SIR BROTHER SUN.....

... Who is the day through  
whom You bring us light.

And he is lovely, shining  
with great splendour,  
for he heralds You, Most High.

The Bible is not the only book we received from God. St Augustine said, "Some people, in order to discover God, read books. But there is a great book: the very appearance of created things. Look above you! Look below you! Note it. Read it. God, whom you want to discover, never wrote that book with ink. Instead He set before your eyes the things that He had made. Can you ask for a louder voice than that? Why, heaven and earth shout to you: "God made me!"

In the Canticle, St Francis honours creation for helping humans understand God's love for us more fully. Our Christian understanding is that God is love. There are two primary expressions of God's love given into creation: The Word made flesh and the world itself. Bonaventure writes that the world and everything in it becomes, in creation, a little word of God. Thus the world is sacramental. The world is sacred. Bonaventure however warns us that a failure to see and love creation with God's eyes can have disastrous consequences for us:

**Therefore open your eyes; alert the ears of your spirit; unlock your lips, and apply your heart so that in all creatures you may see, hear, praise, love, and adore, magnify, and honour your God lest the entire world rise up against you. (Bonaventure, Itinerarium Mentis in Deum,(II.15)**





Praise be You, my Lord  
through SISTER MOON  
and STARS.....  
In Heaven You have  
formed them,  
lightsome and precious  
and fair.....

While praying, St Francis heard God say : '.. if you want to know My resolve, you must despise and hate all the material possessions that you loved and craved ... and from the things you once hated, you will draw great sweetness and immense gentility.'

Later, Francis encountered a leper. Up to this point he despised, feared and avoided such people but in the man's pain, he now saw the pains of Christ's passion. He felt embraced by God's love, the beauty of giving oneself and the joy of living in fraternity.

When he recognised God in this man, in the most unlikely of places for him, Francis could not help but see that God was everywhere: in animals, in water, in every blade of grass, in the stars and in the moon. And if God is everywhere, what joy and wonder!

## Section 5



And praised be You, my Lord,  
through Brother Wind  
through air and cloud,  
through calm  
and every weather  
by which you sustain  
your creatures.

St Francis called "creatures, no matter how small, by the name of 'brother' or 'sister'". Such a conviction cannot be written off as naive romanticism, for it affects the choices which determine our behaviour. If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously. The poverty and austerity of Saint Francis were no mere veneer of asceticism, but something much more radical: a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled. LS12



## Section 6



Praised be You  
my Lord,  
through Sister Water,  
so useful and humble,  
precious and chaste.

St Francis saw no boundaries between the natural world and the supernatural one or between the secular and the sacred. To him, God was in everything. He regarded all living creatures, the air they breathe, the water they drink, the earth, the sun, the moon and the stars, as brothers and sisters. By using the titles Brother and Sister, he expressed his belief in the unity and equality of all of creation. No element of creation is superior to any other. Everything created deserves love and respect.

## Section 7



Praised be You, my Lord  
through Brother Fire,  
by whom you light up  
the night, and he is  
handsome and merry,  
robust and strong.

Francis's journey to Christ began with the gaze of the crucified Jesus. Francis experienced this in a special way in the Church of San Damiano, as he prayed before the cross .... On that cross, Jesus is depicted not as dead, but alive! Blood is flowing from his wounded hands, feet and side, but that blood speaks of life. Jesus' eyes are not closed but open, wide open: he looks at us in a way that touches our hearts.



## Section 8



Praised be You, my Lord  
through our Sister, Mother Earth,  
who sustains us and directs us  
bringing forth all kinds of fruits  
with coloured flowers and herbs

In his encyclical, *Laudato Si*, which takes its title from St Francis of Assisi's *Canticle of the Creatures*, Pope Francis asks all believers to return to the beautiful and meaningful custom of giving thanks before and after meals. That moment of blessing, however brief, reminds us of our dependence on God for life; it strengthens our feeling of gratitude for the gifts of creation; it acknowledges those who by their labours provide us with these goods; and it reaffirms our solidarity with those in greatest need. *Laudato Si*, 227



## Section 9



Praised be You, my Lord  
through those who forgive  
for Your love . . . . .  
And who bear sickness  
and trial.

Much of what Francis experienced, we experience today. God is marginalized in our society. Individualism has broken human relationships. Victims of poverty, violence and injustice cry out unheard. The family is in upheaval. The Church is infected with a spiritual worldliness. The conversion of Francis however, is a source of hope for us today

Reflecting on the Easter message, we see that leaving the tomb means dying to our selfishness, rejecting the idols of money, time, success and the greed which cause us to abandon the most fragile and the poorest among us .

Christ's own words help us identify the poorest among us.... whatsoever you do to the least of your brothers, so you do unto me. We can choose instead to revive our common home with gifts of forgiveness, simplicity, authenticity, unity and building better relationships with God, our fellow man and with creation.

## Section 10



Blessed are those who endure  
in peace  
for by You, Most High  
they will be crowned

For St Francis a difference in religious beliefs was not a source of division but an opportunity for dialogue and mutual respect. Before speaking of peace, he taught his followers to have great peace in their own hearts. In this way, no one could be provoked to anger by what they said.

People are drawn to peace and kindness. Peace comes from the heart. Transforming ourselves from within, also transforms our relationships with others. Such peace is possible only through the sacrifice of one's very self. People are truly peacemakers who, regardless of what they suffer in this world, preserve peace of spirit and body out of love for Christ.

## Section 11



Praised be You, my Lord  
through our Sister, Bodily Death  
from whom no living being  
can escape.

The question of death is the question of life, and keeping the question of death open, perhaps, is the greatest human responsibility so as to keep the question of life open...But the oblivion of death is also its beginning, and also, a culture that forgets death begins to die within. He who forgets death has already begun to die."

Pope Francis, Video Message To Young People, Mexico 2019



## Section 12



Noe to those who die  
in mortal sin.  
Blessed are those whom death  
will find in Your most holy will,  
for the second death shall  
do them no harm.

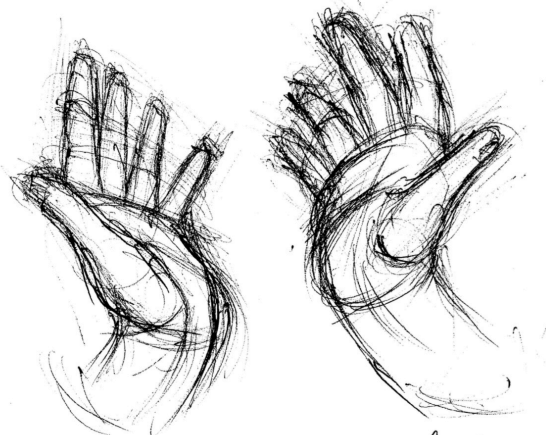
The cross does not speak to us about defeat and failure; paradoxically, it speaks to us about a death which is life, a death which gives life, for it speaks to us of love, the love of God incarnate, a love which does not die, but triumphs over evil and death. When we let the crucified Jesus gaze upon us, we are re-created, we become "a new creation". Everything else starts with this: the experience of transforming grace, the experience of being loved for no merits of our own, in spite of our being sinners. That is why Saint Francis could say with Saint Paul: "Far be it for me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal 6:14).

We turn to you, Francis, and we ask you: Teach us to remain before the cross, to let the crucified Christ gaze upon us, to let ourselves be forgiven, and recreated by his love.

Excerpt from Pope Francis's Homily on St. Francis of Assisi's Feast Day at the Basilica of Francis

## Section 13

THE CANTICLES OF THE CREATURES :  
ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI.



O praise and bless my Lord  
Thank Him and serve Him  
humbly but grandely!

For St Francis the Incarnation of Christ reveals the goodness of the created world. Creation and Incarnation are so intimately connected that we cannot understand our relationship to creation without understanding our relationship to Jesus Christ. The deeper St Francis grew in his relationship with Christ, the more he found himself intimately related to the things of creation as a brother. His relationship with Christ changed his internal focus. He came to realize he was related to all things no matter how small, because everything shared in the goodness of God, the source of his own life. Francis discovered that he was part of the cosmic family of creation.

### Pope Francis

I believe that Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically. He is the patron saint of all who study and work in the area of ecology, and he is also much loved by non-Christians. He was particularly concerned for God's creation and for the poor and outcast. He loved, and was deeply loved for his joy, his generous self-giving, his open heartedness. He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.

