
TRANSITUS OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

**A Vigil Memorial Service Celebrating Francis' "Passing over" from
this life to the glory of Heaven.**



3rd of October

The Transitus of St. Francis of Assisi

(Words of Welcome and Introduction)

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. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.

All: Amen.

(All sit down as the narration begins)

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:

Leader : "You are welcome, welcome, my dear sister Death."

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

All Stand and 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!

(All sit down after the Song)

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 scandalised to see that you do not prepare yourself for death in quite another manner.”

Reader 1: The saint smiled and replied:

Leader : “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, Bro. Elias arranged for him to be carried to The Portiuncula. The magistrates of Assisi consented and sent an armed escort. 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:

Leader: “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 2: 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 Stand and 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!**

(All sit down after the Song)

Reader 1: 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 place 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:

Leader: “Brothers, this is a holy place. Hold it ever in veneration and never abandon it”.

Reader 1: In honour 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:

Leader: “My task is done, may Christ teach you to do yours”.

Reader 2: 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:

Leader: "I absolve too, and 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 Stand and 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!**

(All sit down after the Song)

Reader 1: He then gave them his Testament. He remembered everything that the Lord had said to him, simply and plainly. And Brother Angelo wrote it down:

The Testament of St. Francis is read when all are seated. (*OFS member reads the testament*).

Testament of St. Francis of Assisi

The Lord gave to me, Brother Francis, thus to begin to do penance; for when I was in sin it seemed to me very bitter to see lepers, and the Lord Himself led me amongst them and I showed mercy to them. And when I left them, that which had seemed to me bitter was changed for me into sweetness of body and soul. And afterwards I remained a little and I left the world.

After that the Lord gave me, and gives me, so much faith in priests who live according to the form of the holy Roman Church, on account of their order, that if they should persecute me, I would have recourse to them. And I do this because in this world, I see nothing corporally of the most high Son of God Himself except His most holy Body and Blood, which they receive and they alone administer to others. And I will that these most holy mysteries be honoured and revered above all things and that they be placed in precious places. Where so ever I find His most holy Names and written words in unseemly places, I wish to collect them, and I ask that they may be collected and put in a becoming place.

And the Lord gave me so much faith in churches that I would simply pray and say thus: "We adore Thee Lord Jesus Christ here and in all Thy churches which are in the whole world, and we bless Thee because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world."

And when the Lord gave me some brothers, no one showed me what I ought to do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the form of the holy Gospel. And I caused it to be written in few words and simply, and the Lord Pope confirmed it for me. And those who came to take this life upon themselves gave to the poor all that they might have and they were content with one tunic, patched within and without, by those who wished, with a cord and breeches, and we wished for no more.

I wish to work and I wish firmly that all the other brothers should work at some labour which is compatible with honesty. Let those who know not how to work, learn, not through desire to receive the price of labour but for the sake of example and to repel idleness. And when the

price of labour is not given to us, let us have recourse to the table of the Lord, begging alms from door to door. The Lord revealed to me this salutation that we should say: "The Lord give thee peace."

And I wish to obey the, minister general of this brotherhood strictly and the guardian whom it may please him to give me. And I wish to be so captive in his hands that I cannot go or act beyond his obedience and his will because he is my master.

And whoever shall observe these things may he be filled in heaven with the blessing of the Most High Father and may he be filled on earth with blessing of His Beloved Son together with the Holy Ghost, the Paraclete, and all the Powers of heaven and all the saints. And I, Brother Francis, your little one and servant, in so far as I am able, I confirm to you within and without, this most holy blessing. Amen.

Reader 2: Grateful and respectful, the brothers listened to the wonderful deeds which the Lord had performed among them.

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:"

Leader: "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 con-jure you, my daughter, never to be separated from it."

Reader 1: Then he added:

Leader: "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 2: 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:

Leader: "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 Stand and 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 had trod:
O praise him, O praise him,
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!**

Reader 1: Finally he ordered the book of the Gospels to be brought and commanded that the Gospel according to St. John be read from the place where it begins: “Before the feast of the Passover.....”

Leader: Reads the **Gospel of John 13:1-5**. All stand for the Gospel (*Short reflection follows while all are seated*).

Reader 2: 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. He was recalling that most holy supper which the Lord celebrated as his last supper with his disciples. Thereby he showed the deep love which he had for his brothers.

(Bread is brought to the altar. The Leader blesses the bread with hands extended)

(All stand for the blessing of the bread)

Leader: Almighty most high and supreme God, Father, holy and just, Lord, king of heaven and earth, we give you thanks for yourself. By your own holy will you created all things spiritual and physical, made us in your own image and likeness, and gave us a place in paradise, through your only Son in the Holy Spirit

All: We praise you Father for all creation and its restoration in Christ Jesus.

Leader: Holy Father above all, this evening, we give you thanks for the memory of your blessed servant and our father, Francis of Assisi. May this bread, which Sister Earth has given and our brothers’ hands have moulded, be for us a participation in his lived memory that we walk as brothers and sisters following the footsteps of the poor and humble Christ.

All: For yours, Heavenly Father,
is the kingdom and the power and the glory,
through Jesus Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
now and forever. Amen.

(All are seated as the Bread is shared with all present, meanwhile a Hymn is sung, Breaking Bread 346, 326)

Reader 1: At dusk on the next day, “she to whom no one willingly opens the door,” presents herself, and Francis saw her enter. The little poor man received her courteously:

Leader: “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:

Leader: “It is she who is going to introduce me to eternal life.”

Reader 2: They placed him on the ground in a coarse sack-cloth to honour the sombre guest, his head was covered with ashes and dust. Then with failing voice he intoned Psalm 142, and those around Him continued with him:

Meditative Song: *(all join in singing and remain seated)*

- 1. Loud is the cry that I make to the Lord
Loud is my prayer for his mercy and help,
Loudly I place my complaint before him,
Tell him of all I endure in my heart.**
- 2. Ready to faint is my heart within me,
You alone know, my Lord, what I go through.
There in my path they have laid me a trap,
None can I find by my side as my friend.**
- 3. Means of escape there is none for me now,
No one on earth is concerned about me.
That is why now I entreat you, my Lord,
Lord, you are all I have left in this world.**
- 4. Listen, my Lord, to my cry of distress
Rising from depths of depression and woe.
Save me from those who pursue me, my Lord,
Strong are they while I am weary and tired.**
- 5. Out of this prison, O lead me to joy,
Lead me to freedom, to praising your name.
Then shall I sing of your goodness and love.
Sing in the gathering of all of your friends.**
- 6. Glory to Father and glory to Son,
Glory to Spirit, the Three who are One;
Ages echoing to ages reply,
Glory for ever and praise to our God.**

Reader 1: There was 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.”

Silent Pause *(All Kneel)*

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 stand for the final blessing)

Leader: The Lord be with you

All: And with your Spirit

Leader: May the Lord bless you and keep you!

All: Amen!

Leader: May his face shine upon you and be gracious to you!

All: Amen!

Leader: May he look upon you with kindness, and give you his peace!

All: Amen!

Leader: May Almighty God bless you, the Father, and the Son, + and the Holy Spirit!

All: Amen.

Concluding Hymn (Breaking Bread: 522)

Wish you all a Happy Feast of St. Francis of Assisi

