

Francis of Assisi (Part 2)

Slide 1 The Easter Saint

The sanctity of Francis of Assisi is a many-splendored thing.

Slide 2 He is an **EVANGELICAL** saint, for he sought to imitate Christ by living in a most radical way the perfection of the Holy Gospel.

Slide 3 He is likewise an **ECCLESIAL** saint, a man who anchored his mission and his teaching in that of the mystical Bride of Christ, the holy Catholic Church.

Slide 4 Nature-lovers claim Francis of Assisi, the friend and brother of creation, as an **ECOLOGICAL** saint.

Slide 5 Those involved in dialogue with other religions hail the Sultan-visiting, peace-promoting Francis as the model of an **ECUMENICAL** saint.

Slide 6 But can the Poor Man of Assisi, who bore on his body the wounds of Jesus Crucified, be rightly called an **EASTER SAINT?**

Slide 7 The Road to Easter

For St. Francis, the spiritual Easter was not a one-time event, but a journey, a process. **Slide 8** Like St. Paul, Francis could declare: All I want to know is Christ and the power flowing from His Resurrection! This knowledge and power enabled Francis to take the Cross-road which leads to glory: sharing in (Christ's) sufferings by being formed into the pattern of His death, Francis hoped that (he) too might attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Phil 3:10-11)

Slide 9 The Encounter

Francis' road to Easter began with a profound encounter with Jesus Crucified. Praying before the crucifix in the church of San Damiano outside Assisi during the first years of his conversion, Francis heard Christ address to him the heart-shaking words: Francis, rebuild My house! The future saint felt a mysterious change in himself, but he could not describe it. This was the beginning of his spiritual Easter.

Slide 10 St. Francis journeyed to Easter transformation by contemplating and imitating Jesus in the mysteries of His poverty and humility. Seraphic love even compelled the Poor Man to ask Christ to grant him to feel in his body the pains of the Passion and to feel in his heart the love which urged Christ to die for sinners.

Slide 11 The Icon of the Crucified

In September 1224, two years before the Seraphic Patriarch's death, God answered his prayer with the imprinting of the Sacred Stigmata, making Francis an icon of the Crucified Jesus.

Slide 12 Yet, Francis' immersion in the mysteries of the Passion did not make him sad or somber. Rather, the sorrows of the Lord opened Francis to a deeper, truer joy. The wounds of Christ's Passion which the Poor Man bore were in truth signs of spiritual resurrection, God visibly confirming Francis' passage through death to life.

Slide 13 A New Creation

The Easter life is new life, - life in Christ. Again and again, the 13th century authors hail St. Francis as the new man. In him, new signs of sanctity appear, new prodigies are made manifest. **Slide 14** His religious family is a new flock in the Church, a new Order, living a new life. Francis proclaimed even in his body that if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature: the former things have passed away. Behold! They are made new! (2 Cor. 5:17)

Slide 15 All is Made New

Francis' Easter newness was the fruit of his union with the Crucified and Risen One. This union is the secret of the Little Poor Man's joy, his peace-making skills, his enthusiasm for the things of God, his unique relationship with creation. Illness, disappointment, pain, betrayal and misunderstanding still marked Francis' earthly pilgrimage. **Slide 16** But, he saw these sufferings in a new light. He understood that through them, God was making all things work toward an eternal good, an eternal Easter. And so in Francis and through him an unexpected joy and a holy newness came into the world.

Slide 17 Not I, but Christ!

St. Francis' mission of newness did not end with death. Those present at his funeral services saw his body, adorned with the wounds of Christ, shining with a marvelous brightness. In life, Francis bore in his body the likeness of the sufferings of Christ. **Slide 18** In death, his body presaged the glory of the future resurrection: The wounds he has, show forth/ Gifts of a newer kind. The power of this new life was also manifested in the wonders which occurred through his intercession: he shone with the new light of miracles after his death.

Slide 19 And Alleluia is His Song

Against this backdrop, the Easter references in St. Francis' writings shine with a new splendor.

When composing his devotional Office of the Cross, the Seraphic Father included a special Office for the Easter season. Yet even in the solemn Offices for Holy Week, the thought of Resurrection is present: Arise, my glory! Arise, lyre and harp! I will arise at dawn! I have slept and risen and my most Holy Father has received me in glory.

Slide 20 Christ made Francis, the Easter Saint, a singer of the new song of Redemption. In the "Exhortation to the Praise of God," the Poor Man sang as his own the hymn of those who stand before the Throne of God in heaven: Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power, glory and honor!

His song of Easter triumph is likewise that of the Church on earth: This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Slide 21 Conclusion

St. Francis of Assisi shows what can happen when the grace of Easter becomes effective in a Christian's life. He teaches us that every earthly suffering holds the seed of resurrection.

For Francis, Easter was a vibrant reality that gave light and hope and even energy for his daily journey with Christ to the Father. He teaches us that the real saints (the Easter saints) are the quite human, quite natural people in whom, through the Easter purification and transformation, what is human appears afresh in its total originality and beauty. (Pope Benedict XVI)

Slide 22 St. Francis of Assisi,
Man of the Gospel,
Icon of the Crucified,
Easter Saint,
pray for us!

Slide 23