

# Celebrating the Canticle of Creatures

## Companion Community Resource

January 2025

This year we continue the celebration of the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of events in the life of Francis of Assisi. We have already commemorated the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Later Rule of St. Francis in 2022, Christmas at Greccio in 2023, the Stigmata of Francis in 2024, and now in 2025, the Canticle of Creatures.

The Canticle of Creatures is the very first work of literature in the Italian language. St. Francis composed it most likely during the winter of 1224-5 possibly while at the Church of San Damiano, in Assisi —as grace, born of suffering, urged him to praise and glorify the Most Holy Trinity even unto death. Francis was suffering immensely and nearly blind when he composed the work. His brothers and Clare of Assisi provided for his spiritual and physical needs during this time. It is said that Francis sang the Canticle, taught it to the brothers and dictated the words on parchment. The Canticle of Brother Sun first appears in the historical record in a reference made by Blessed Thomas of Celano in his Vita Prima, (First Life) written 1228 A.D.

G. K. Chesterton writes that the Canticle of Creatures "is a supremely characteristic work and much of Saint Francis could be reconstructed from that work alone". This Canticle witnesses the great love Francis has for creation. It shows the union of God and all God has created.

The term 'canticle' comes from the word *cantare* in Latin, meaning 'to sing'. Canticles were originally self-contained songs that were used within the liturgies of the Office and Mass to praise God. They are frequently drawn from the Scriptures and were frequently included after the 150 psalms in the many psalters from Anglo-Saxon England.

*Francis of Assisi was almost completely blind by the time he composed the Canticle of Creatures. Nevertheless, with the eyes of faith, and filled with gratitude, he contemplated the wonders of creation and perceived the presence of the Creator who gave them meaning. To him, all creatures, mirrors of the divine perfection, were brothers and sisters because they were the work and gift of the same Author. Together they constituted the chorus of creation, which contemplates, praises and thanks God the Creator, who gives generously and with goodness. (quote from 2 Celano)*

The Canticle is the final expression and confession of the Poverello's life. It summarizes his entire journey of conformation to Christ. His faith in God becomes a song of praise that proclaims the brotherhood and sisterhood and the beauty of all creatures.

Celebrating the Centenary of the Canticle of Creatures as a Franciscan Family leads us to a radical change in our relationship with creation: we shift from possessing creation to caring for our common home. Each of us are invited to respond sincerely to these questions.

- How do I want to live out my relationship with other creatures? As a ruler, a consumer or as a brother or sister?
- How can we “reintroduce the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world,” as Pope Francis urges us to do in his *Laudato si’* 11?
- The “ecological crisis is a summons to profound interior conversion.” *Laudato si’* 217 Taking care of our common home without taking care of our interior home—our heart—will not work. What in your life needs interior conversion with regard to creation?

**Let us pray:**

**All: With every creature that is in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea and everything in the universe, let us praise and glorify God forever.**

Praise to You, My Lord, with all your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun, Who is the day and through whom You give us light. And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor; and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.

**All: May Brother Sun, who gives us light and makes things grow, praise the Lord.**

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars, in heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

**All: May Sister Moon and all the stars which beautify the night, praise the Lord.**

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather, through which You give sustenance to Your creatures.

**All: May Brother Wind, which carries the clouds and causes the life-giving rain, praise the Lord.**

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water, which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

**All: May Sister Water, without which we would quickly die, praise the Lord.**

Praised by You, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom You light the night, and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

**All: May Brother Fire, which lights our way and heats our house, praise the Lord.**

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and produces varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs.

**All: May Sister Mother Earth, which gives us food to nourish our bodies and beautiful flowers to lift our spirits, praise the Lord.**

With every creature that is in heaven and in earth and under the earth and in the sea and everything in the universe, let us praise and glorify God forever. **Amen.**

From the Companion Resource Group: Gail Schultz, Michael Krueger, Mary Ellen Dunford, Doris Doherty, Vicky Freybler, Joan Weisenbeck, FSPA (Author this reflection)