

Saint Francis of Assisi (born c. 1181, Assisi, Italy—died October 3, 1226; canonized July 16, 1228) was a revered Italian friar, deacon, and the founder of the Franciscan religious orders. He is one of the most venerated figures in Christian history, known for his life of radical poverty, humility, and deep reverence for nature and all of God's creation.

Key Aspects of his Life and Legacy

- **Early Life and Conversion** Born into a wealthy merchant family, Francis enjoyed a privileged youth and dreamed of knighthood. After being taken prisoner during a war and suffering an illness, he experienced a profound spiritual crisis. In his early twenties, he heard Christ speak to him from a crucifix in the dilapidated church of San Damiano, saying, "Francis, rebuild my Church, which as you see is falling into ruin". Taking this literally at first, he renounced his wealth in a dramatic public gesture, stripping off his clothes and family ties to embrace a life of ascetic poverty.
- **Founding of Orders** Francis's example of living the Gospel literally soon attracted followers. In 1209, he received papal approval to found the Order of Friars Minor (Franciscans). He later helped his friend, the noblewoman Clare of Assisi, establish the Poor Clares (the second Franciscan order for women), and a Third Order for laypeople who lived Franciscan principles in their daily lives.
- **Connection to Nature** Francis saw all of creation as a reflection of God and called all creatures "brother" or "sister". He famously preached to the birds and, according to legend, tamed a ferocious wolf in Gubbio by making a pact with the townspeople to feed it. Because of this, he is the patron saint of ecology and animals, and it is customary for churches to hold ceremonies blessing animals on his feast day, October 4th.
- **Stigmata** In 1224, while praying on Mount La Verna, Francis received the stigmata—the mystical wounds of Christ's crucifixion—making him the first recorded person in Christian history to bear them.
- **Other Contributions** Francis is credited with creating the first live Nativity scene (*crèche*) in Greccio, Italy, in 1223, using real animals to help people contemplate the birth of Jesus. His work, the *Canticle of the Sun* (or *Canticle of the Creatures*), is a renowned poem of praise to God through nature and an early work of Italian literature.
- His life and teachings continue to inspire millions, with Pope Francis taking his name in honor of the saint's commitment to the poor and creation