



All you birds of the air, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever. All you beasts, wild and tame, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever. (Daniel 3:80-81)

February 24, 2026

Hello Everyone —

As many of you may know, I am a great fan of birds — all types, colors and sizes. In fact, on our family farm, growing up I raised a variety of wild game birds for release back to nature on the farm property. I say this as background to my sharing of the following story from the life of **St. Francis of Assisi**.

Saint Francis was no stranger to walking great distances to share the Gospel. One story tells us that St. Francis and his companions were making a trip through the Spoleto Valley near the town of Bevagna. Suddenly, he spotted a great number of birds of all varieties. There were doves, crows and all sorts of birds. Swept up in the moment, St. Francis left his friends in the road and ran after the birds, who patiently waited for him. He greeted them in his usual way, expecting them to scurry off into the air as he spoke. But they did not move.

Filled with awe, he asked them if they would stay awhile and listen to the Word of God. He said to them: "My brother and sister birds, you should praise your Creator and always love him. He gave you feathers for clothes, wings to fly, and all other things that you need. It is God who made you noble among all creatures, making your home in thin, pure air. Without sowing or reaping, you receive God's guidance and protection."

At this, the birds began to spread their wings, stretch their necks and gaze at St. Francis, rejoicing and praising God in a wonderful way according to their nature. He then walked right through the middle of them, turned around and came back, touching their heads and bodies with his tunic. It has been said that the brothers who journeyed with him stood in amazement. Then he gave them his blessing, making the sign of the cross over them. At that they flew off and St. Francis, rejoicing and giving thanks to God, went on his way.

Later, St. Francis wondered aloud to his companions why he had never preached to birds before. And from that day on, he made it his habit to solicitously invoke all birds, all animals and reptiles to praise and love their Creator.

I want to take this opportunity to invite you to join with me and with Catholics around the world in celebrating a **Franciscan Jubilee Year** which began on January 10 and will run through January 10, 2027. The yearlong celebration marks the 800th anniversary of the death of St. Francis of Assisi, a holy man and mirror of the Lord Jesus who gave to the Church the Franciscan order.

Pope Leo XIV proclaimed the special jubilee year inviting the faithful to reflect on the life and enduring legacy of St. Francis whose profound commitment to the gospel, love for the poor, and reverence for all of creation continues to inspire and challenge believers eight centuries later.

In honor of this special occasion, Pope Leo composed the following “Prayer to Saint Francis for Peace.” May we pray it often and with sincere devotion.

Saint Francis, our brother, you who eight hundred years ago went to meet Sister Death as a man at peace, intercede for us before the Lord.

You recognized true peace in the Crucifix of San Damiano, teach us to seek in Him the source of all reconciliation that breaks down every wall.

You who, unarmed, crossed the lines of war and misunderstanding, give us the courage to build bridges where the world raises up boundaries.

In this time afflicted by conflict and division, intercede for us so that we may become peacemakers: unarmed and disarming witnesses of the peace that comes from Christ. Amen.

As I do for you, please pray for me,

Most Reverend Jeffrey S. Grob
Archbishop of Milwaukee

