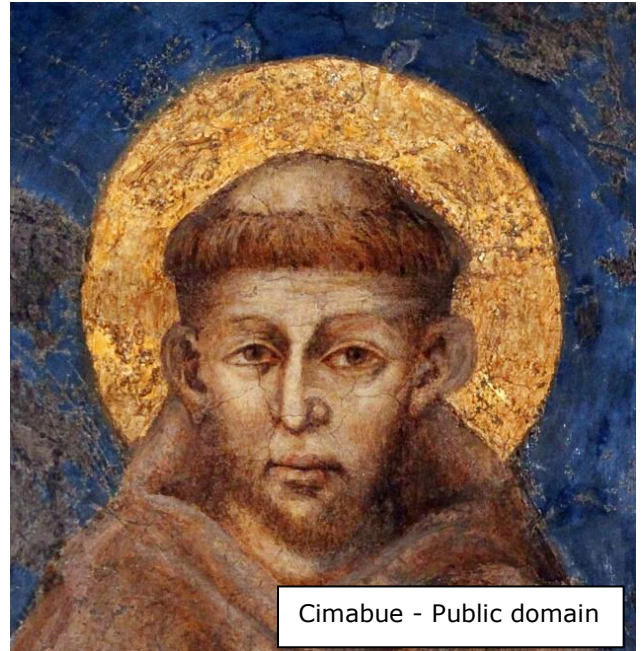


# Francis

## The Beginning

This series of reflections focuses on some of the events and characteristics of Francis, the Poverello, ("Poor Little Man"), the Holy Fool and the Troubadour of God. Three phrases associated with Francis

Whilst the reflections contain biographical material, they are intended to be devotional and not a biography of St Francis. I give details, later, of two books written in different styles.



Born Francesco di Pietro di Bernardone in 1181/82 in Assisi, Spoleto, Italy, died October 3, 1226, in Assisi aged 44/45.

Francis had a privileged upbringing, his father was a wealthy cloth merchant and landowner, his mother, Pica di Bourlemont, was French, from Provence and a noble woman. That is all that is really known about his mother.

My first memory of hearing about Francis was as a child. The story of him stripping in front of a bishop and him talking to animals was all I remembered about Francis of Assisi. I imagine I am not alone in only having the most basic of information about him. It was not until the 1980's that I took a closer interest in this man called Francis. As a family we started to worship at a church dedicated to St Francis.

I later bought Murray Bodo's book, 'Francis, The Journey and the Dream', I started to appreciate and understand Francis as a man who took the Gospel of Jesus seriously and sought to live out the Gospel. I returned to this book, although to a later addition, the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition (2011), I also turned to 'Francis of Assisi, The Life' by the historian Augustine Thompson OP (2013). This book has a different style but one I see as complementary.

Francis' journey was from a rebellious playboy son to a soldier. In 1202 fighting broke out between Assisi and Perugia. It was one of many conflicts Perugia got involved in. His time as a soldier was short, followed by a year as a prisoner. His father paid a ransom and Francis returned to Assisi in 1203 a changed man, he was seriously ill and was suffering from what we would call today Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Much of 1204 was spent convalescing with a period in the hills in Spoleto. Spoleto is about 45 km / 29 miles from Assisi. In either late 1204 or in spring 1205, Francis embarked on another military encounter. Not far from Assisi at Spoleto, Francis had a

## Books on Francis

There are close to 240 biographies of Francis. The first appears only years after his death.

Two books I have found to be helpful.

Murray Bodo O.F.M Catholic Franciscan priest  
**'Francis, The Journey, and the Dream' (1972, 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary edition 2011)**

I would describe this as a devotional book that takes you on a journey of discovery of the dreams that helped form Francis' life.

With poet's pen and a dreamer's imagination, Bodo inspires many to follow Francis on the journey of gospel living (Daniel P, Horan O.F.M.)

Augustine Thompson OP, Catholic Dominican friar. The Dominicans are often considered the twin of Francis's own Friars Minor).

### **Francis of Assisi, The Life (2013)**

It is in two complementary parts—a standalone biographical book, which I used, and an examination of the historical sources about Francis.

Writing in 2020 Thompson wrote:

'The Francis I came to know proved a more complex and personally conflicted man than the saint of the legends. Nevertheless, this Francis became for me an amazing and holy man'.

Two different books but one Francis, both can inspire to follow Francis on the journey of gospel living.

Abbreviations

**O.F.M** – The Order of Friars Minor also known as the Franciscan Order.

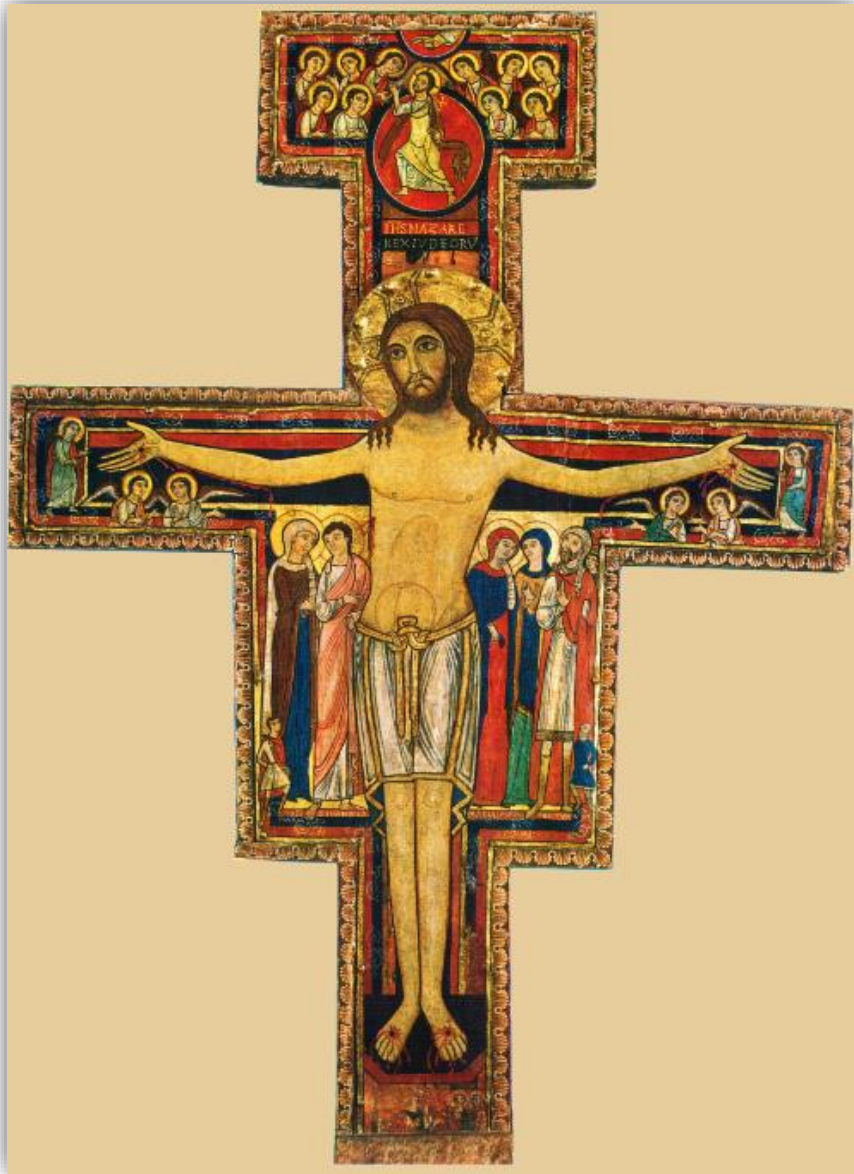
O.P. – Order of Preachers (Latin Ordo Praedictorium).

There are also Anglican Franciscan and Dominican Orders

vision which led to his return to Assisi. Francis' return to Assisi was not easy for him with people questioning and not understanding his reasons.

In late 1205, Francis went to the church San Damiano where he was to spend time in prayer and where the crucifix would become central to his conversion.

We are familiar with people having dramatic conversion experiences - St Paul's blinding light encounter on the Damascus Road. Francis' conversion was gradual.



The Cross of San Damiano played a significant part in Francis' spiritual development.

## The beginning of a journey

Find your favourite space for this time of prayerful reflection

light a candle and look upon the San Damiano cross.

Slow down, breathe calmly, be comfortable and relax.

Set aside 10 minutes or more

Sense the presence of God in this stillness.

Prayer does not always require words

Recall Jesus' words about using many words.

'And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.' (Matt.6:7)



### Our opening prayer

Most High, glorious God,  
enlighten the darkness of my heart  
and give me true faith,  
certain hope, and perfect charity,  
sense and knowledge,  
Lord, that I may carry out  
Your holy and true command.

Amen

(The Anglican Society of St Francis)

Our first song is "Make Me a Channel of Your Peace" it is the familiar setting by Sebastian Temple . While associated with St Francis of Assisi, these words never appear in any of his writings. We hear Chet Valley Churches sing Make me a channel.



<https://youtu.be/g8eorCEMIK4?si=Ngztih17ZPXj8Q0C>

**Psalm 121** New King James Version

### **God the Help of Those Who Seek Him**

I will lift up my eyes to the hills—  
From whence comes my help?  
My help *comes* from the LORD,  
Who made heaven and earth.  
He will not allow your foot to be moved;  
He who keeps you will not slumber.  
Behold, He who keeps Israel  
Shall neither slumber nor sleep.  
The LORD *is* your keeper;  
The LORD *is* your shade at your right hand.  
The sun shall not strike you by day,  
Nor the moon by night.  
The LORD shall preserve you from all evil;  
He shall preserve your soul.  
The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in  
From this time forth, and even forevermore.

### **Time for some silent prayerful reflection.**

Where did your faith journey start?

Did anything special happen? It does have to be dramatic, it could a gentle word, the warm smile of encouragement.

Was anyone an influence on you and your faith journey?

What stories do you remember?

In the silence of your heart give thanks

Just rest in the presence of God

This prayer formed the basis of daily prayer for the early brothers, who could not read or write. They would say the 'Paternoster', the Lord's Prayer

Let us pray in confidence using the words our Saviour gave us:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name;  
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done;  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil. Amen

### **The closing words attributed to St Francis**

O Divine Master,  
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console;  
to be understood, as to understand;  
to be loved, as to love with all my soul.  
For it is in giving that we receive;  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

*Fr Derek Akker*

≈≈≈

(Derek is a retired Anglican Parish Priest and a member of the congregations of All Saints & St James. Prior to his ordination he was accredited as a Methodist Preacher in 1968 and served within the Methodist Church until returning to the Anglican Church in the mid 1980's)

≈≈≈

Parish of Kirklees Valley, Bury, (All Saints, Elton & St James, Woolfold) - In the Diocese of Manchester

While I seek to use only reliable sources when using websites, I cannot guarantee that the content on these websites is or will remain accurate or appropriate.

**Image** - San Damiano cross - Unknown author - Public domain