

St Francis the Troubadour

In medieval Europe there were Troubadours and Jongleurs, Composers and performers. For students of Medieval music, these terms are the subject of debate. For our purposes, Francis had a French mother and a father who travelled to France frequently on business as cloth merchants, so Francis would have experience of French culture. There is an account of Francis using material from his father's shop to make a troubadour costume.

Traditional accounts of Francis were that he had a good voice and enjoyed singing. He would have been familiar with the medieval troubadours and their songs. The expression being a 'free spirit' is often used to describe Francis.

He did not lose this love for music, composing verse and singing on his conversion. Murrey Bodo refers to Francis singing, in French, these words by the 12th century French Troubadour, Arnaut Daniel de Riberac, born in Ribeyrac, Périgord. It is a secular piece but he sung it in the context to Lady Poverty and his new life.

Softly signs the April are
Before the coming of May
Joy is everywhere
When the first leaf sees the day.
And shall I alone despair
Turning from sweet love away?
Something to my heart replies,
You too were for rapture strung.
Why else the dreams that rise
Round you when the year is young.

There is also piece with the same opening lines:

'Softly signs the April are
Before the coming of May',

by another French Troubadour, Arnaut de Maroill of Mareuil-sur-Belle, also in Périgord.
They were both active around the same time.



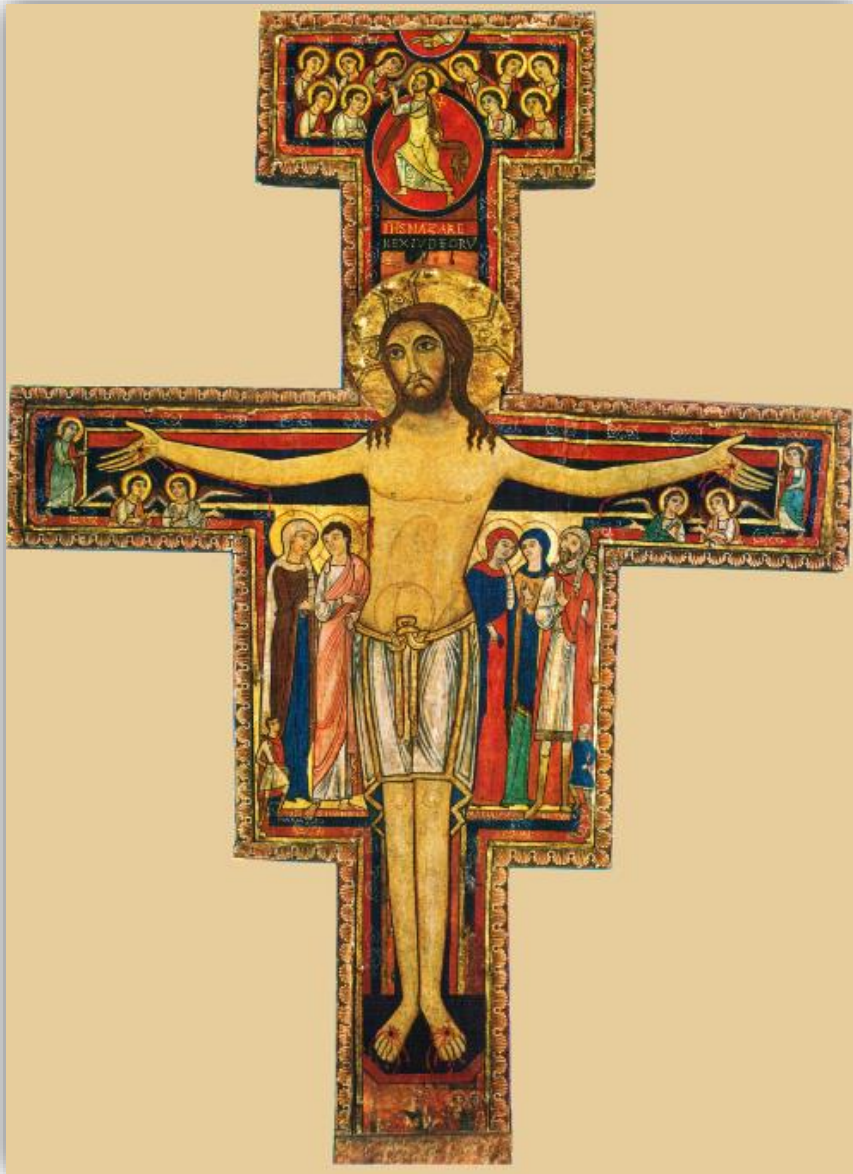
13th century, Italian image
Unknown author - Public domain

There are also stories of Francis countering the seriousness of this way of life by acts of fun and song. He would run through the woods, singing and skipping and have bouts of silliness and would mimic playing a string instrument.

The Troubadours and Jongluers, as did the Jesters bring colour, humour and entertainment amongst what could be a hard and dark time. The Troubadours and Jongluers, were less evident after the Black Death, bubonic plague of 1346 to 1353.

I recall spending a week living in community at St Hilda's Priory, Whitby the old Priory. We observed both the greater and lesser silences during the day, doing the duties set us. Then there was recreation, a time of laughter, fun and noise. The look of many of the sisters changed dramatically, especially those playing table tennis and the noise levels. It was a contrast to what has been before and then after an hour or, so it was back to the lesser silence.

It was a reminder that our spiritual journeys while a serious matter and at times challenging affairs, we need from time to time to let off steam and create space to order to continue our faith journey. There is a time for everything. Francis, the troubadour and holy fool had the wisdom to know there were times when he needed to lighten up for the sake of others. Francis so often taught by action rather than a lecture. He was effectively saying to his novices it's OK to be silly occasionally and not take yourself too seriously all the time and burden others.



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

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)

Verses from Ecclesiastes

Everything Has Its Time

To everything *there is* a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven:
A time to be born,
And a time to die;
A time to plant,
And a time to pluck *what is* planted;
A time to kill,
And a time to heal;
A time to break down,
And a time to build up;
A time to weep,
And a time to laugh;
A time to mourn,
And a time to dance;
And a time of peace. (chapter 3: NKJV)

Let's spend time and look at ourselves.

Do we take ourselves too seriously for too much of the time?

Does our behaviour become a burden to others?

Do we allow ourselves moments of silliness, time to chill out and allow our emotional muscle's time to relax?

We listen to John Michael Talbot and the track 'Troubadour'.

 **YouTube** <https://youtu.be/qXz7MQROY7Y?si=DXVdTh-TmRwxFOqI&t=2>

This prayer formed the basis of daily prayer for the early brothers and later sisters, 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

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(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)

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