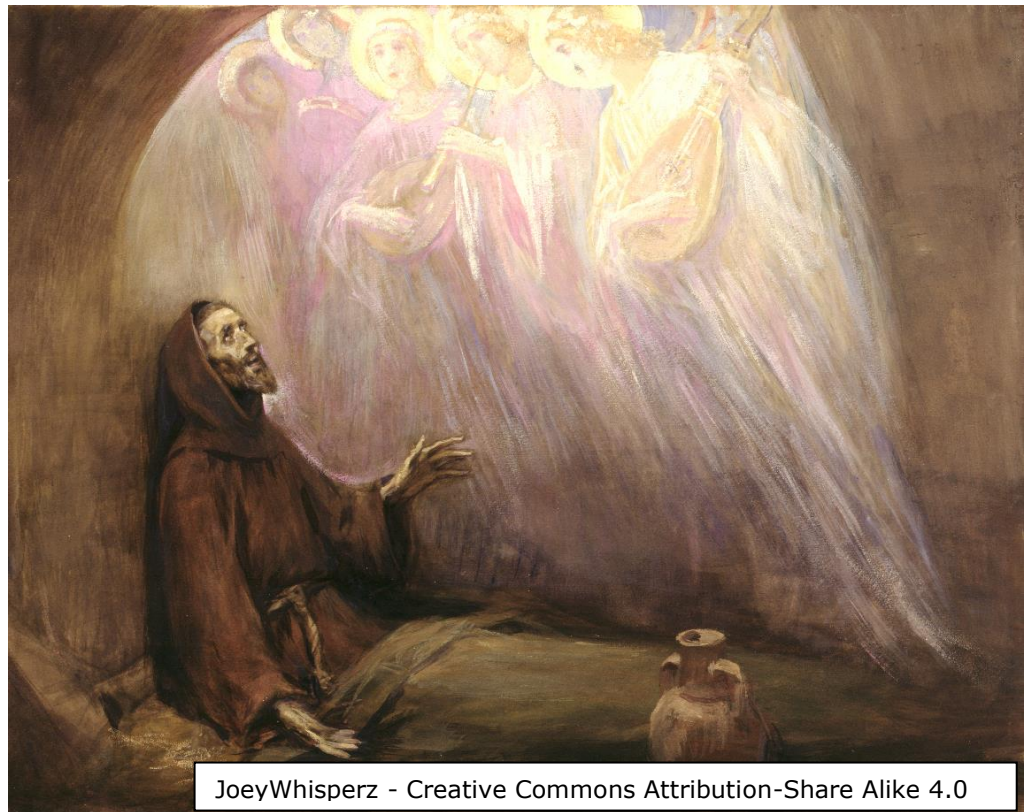


St Francis - not alone

Francis, the Poverello, 'Poor Little Man' had, following his conversion, set out to follow the words of Jesus to the rich young man. (Matthew 19:16-30, Mark 10:17-31 and Luke 18:18-30). It would not be an exaggeration to say he developed a love of poverty. His first steps along this journey of



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conversion was a solitary experience. Francis was to write 'The Lord gave me some brothers' and so Francis was to become the leader of group of men who were committed to a life of poverty. This group later was to be called Friars Minor or Lesser Brothers. The title means literally they were to see themselves as lesser than their brothers. Francis was also to be a Lesser Brother, a truly radical stance.

Amongst Francis' first followers was Bernard, described as one of the wealthiest young men of Assisi. Bernard was fascinated by Francis and having spent a lengthy period with Francis, decided he wanted to join Francis' way life. Around the same time another person from Assisi, Peter, wanted to join Francis. Peter was not wealthy. These two men saw in Francis a life of solitude, prayer, and penance a genuine way of life that they wished to be part of.

Francis was not prepared for this and was not sure how to continue, he described his dilemma simply as 'There was no one to tell me what to do.' It clearly had been a moment of uncertainty. It was one thing not to make decisions that directly impacted on his way of life him, it was something different to have a responsibility for others who wished to follow you.

This dilemma was resolved by the three men visiting a parish priest and seeking his assistance in taking the right step. The priest took the Altar Missal, the book of prayers and readings for the celebration of daily mass, during the Church Year, and offered some words of commentary. He would have randomly opened the Missal, three times, doing what was termed *Sortes biblicae* and offer some words of commentary, (There is an explanation at the end of this reflection wish to read it.)

First reading, Mark 10:21 (Full reading Mark 10:17-21)

'Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.'

Followed by Luke 9:2,3 (Full reading Luke 9:1-9)

He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. ³ And He said to them, "Take nothing for the journey, neither staffs nor bag nor bread nor money; and do not have two tunics apiece.

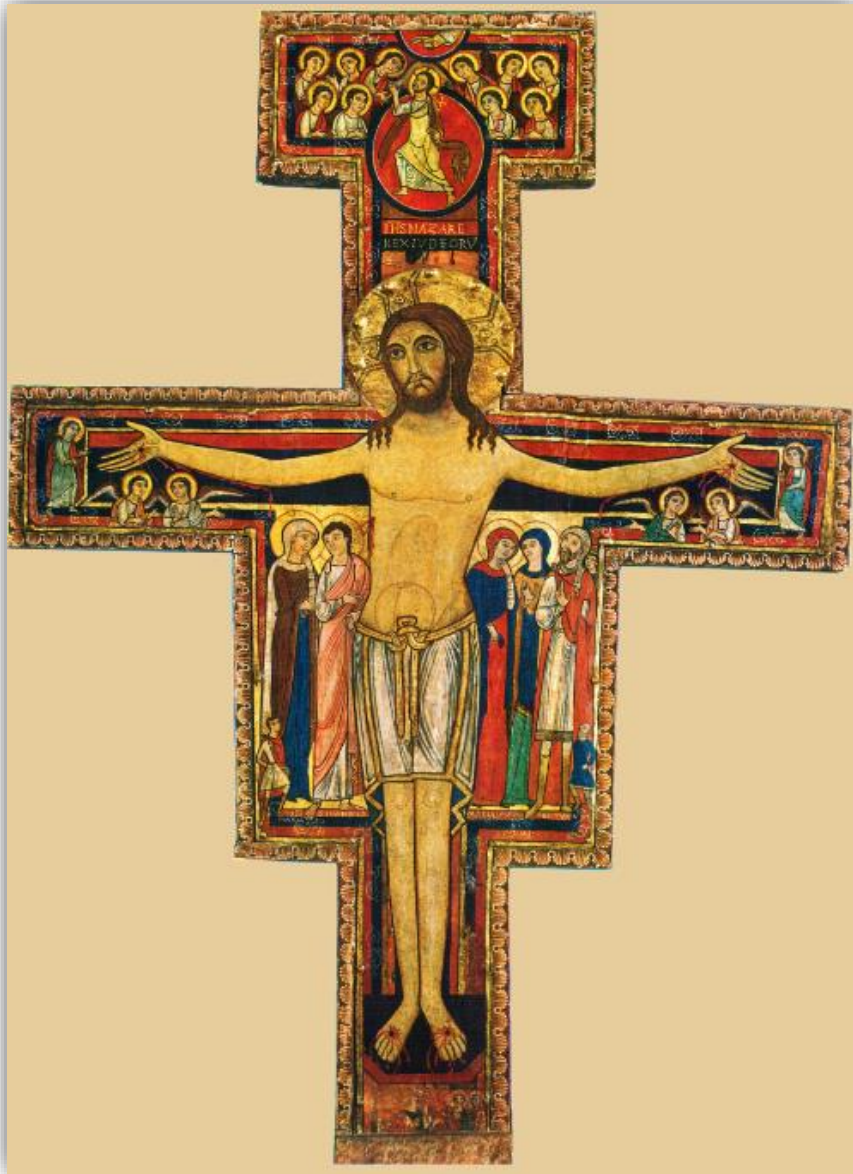
Ending with, Matthew 16:24-25 (Full reading Matthew 16:24-28)

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

Augustine Thompson wrote: 'Taken as a whole, the three passages called for a shockingly radical renunciation of the world: give all to the poor, take nothing on the journey, and embrace the Cross. They carefully committed the text to memory. These texts would become the core of what Francis would call his 'form of life,' . . . Although not a single person present realised it, they had taken the first step in founding the Franciscan Order. (Francis of Assisi – The Life, page 27)

On their web page the Anglican Society of Saint Francis (SSF) describe how St Francis found profound inspiration in the '*poor naked Christ*' and, *eschewing the greed and emptiness of the world, passionately desired to share their 'pearl of great price' (Jesus) with all people in word and in action prioritising especially those considered 'untouchable' or 'unimportant.'* The SSF continues to witness to the love Jesus and follow Francis' example.

How do we hear this radical story today? What is our reaction, does it make us feel uncomfortable to hear about Francis, a rich young man who turned his back on his family's wealth to follow Jesus? Every generation has had to face this challenge and find a response. It had never been easy and along the way we have our failures but there are achievements. Every time we choose to slow down and go for a simpler way of life, every time we choose to be less extravagant, every time we reject greed can be moments when the gospel comes to life and moves from just words on a page.



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

Not alone

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)

https://youtu.be/Y_Q34inR8A?si=s4aqOCVU312fr2ea

A reading from Matthew

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. (16:24-25)

Part of the third reading of the **Sortes biblicae** Francis, Bernard and Peter undertook under the guidance of the parish Priest. You may wish to read whole reading. These will be familiar words, we will have heard them read many times, they do not get easier!

I suggest you spend some time thinking about the words, return to the three readings, above, and read them slowly.

What are they saying to you, is there something I could change? I repeat words that I wrote earlier.

'How do we hear this radical story today? What is our reaction, does it make us feel uncomfortable to hear about Francis, a rich young man who turned his back on his family's wealth to follow Jesus? Every generation has had to face this challenge and find a response. It had never been easy and along the way we have our failures but there are achievements. Every time we choose to slow down and go for a simpler way of life, every time we choose to be less extravagant, every time we reject greed can be moments when the gospel comes to life and moves from just words on a page'.

Pause

Let us prayer in confidence using the words of Saviour gave us:

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

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



God so loved the world from the Poor Clare Sisters of Arundle
<https://youtu.be/uSEoXXW6NSA?si=CUeNRU3awNcZNIxI>

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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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

Sortes biblicae

Sortes biblicae is a method of divination, of attempting to get guidance for the future. It was sometimes referred to as biblical lots or a biblical lottery. It was unorthodox way and was to be condemned by early Church Councils. It seemed, however, to be a fairly common practice in the Medieval times but then declined.

This does appear to be a regular practice for Francis. Perhaps more a response to a specific situation of Francis getting guidance on how to proceed now that two men wished to follow him and the way of poverty.

Today you can get Scripture Promise Boxes. These boxes are filled with rolled up slips of paper with Bible verses

The Missal used is now in the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland, USA. It is thought that there was not a complete Bible at San Nicola, so the Missal was used by the parish priest, who would explain the reading. *

* Francis of Assisi – The Life ; Augustine Thompson O.P. page 26.