

St Francis The Canticle of the Creatures – Death where is your victory?

We started our reflection on this Canticle with the focus of Sun and Moon and the four elements earth, air (wind), fire and water. In medieval times all matter was composed of these elements. Our second reflection looked at pardon and peace, from the broadest of canvases we moved to human relationship, our third and final reflection on the Canticle of the Creatures faces death.



Vanitas Still Life by Guercino,
(1591–1666) Public domain

These words were composed in the time of Francis' declining health and facing death. These words are a stark reminder of the reality of life and that life comes to an end, we cannot escape death.

'Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death, from whom no one living can escape.

Woe to those who die in mortal sin.

Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will, for the second death shall do them no harm.'

Verses 12-14

Francis had prepared for his death; toward the end of his life he was brought to Church of the Portiuncula, the home church of the Order where he was ministered to by his brothers. After a night of pain, he asked for the brothers to come in and he blessed each one of them after which he asked for some bread, he was too weak to break the bread, so the brothers broke and shared it. It was Francis' Last Supper.

Soon after this Francis asked one of the brothers to read the Passion narrative from John's Gospel. That evening, a Saturday, according to historical accounts, a flock of lark's flew around the cell where Francis laid. It was Francis' favourite bird 'because he often said . . . they constantly sang praises of God; just as good religious do . . . (Augustine Thomas O.P. page178)

Francis died on 3rd October 1226, aged 44 and was canonised by Gregory IX on 16th July 1228.

In medieval times life expectancy was 30 years but it could range between 45-60 years. Death was an ever-present concern in medieval times. We faced a situation with Covid where death for us was a real concern and changes us and our attitudes to life.

In the Canticle, Francis refers to the second death, a theme found in the Revelation to John or the Apocalypse, the last book in the Bible. The phrase is not used anywhere else in the Bible and there is no mention of a first death, Revelation is a complex book, written at a time when the early church was under severe persecution. The

author John, traditionally thought to be the apostle John, although some of the Church Fathers questions this. Revelation is an account of visions with vivid language and looking to the future events. The symbolic language should not be taken literally, nor should the symbolism be pictured realistically, *'Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.'* (Revelation 20:14)

I have put a link to Bible Gateway which has a short introduction to The Book of Revelation, at the bottom of this page should you wish follow this reference from the Book of Revelation.

The words of Francis towards the end of his life were pointing toward what we would perhaps call today a 'good death'. Firstly, Francis prepared by doing practical things, saying goodbyes and prayer. I know that death is not a topic at the top of a list of conversations to have. Talking about death, even using the word death seems to be a taboo subject. It's as if the word 'death' is being erased, photoshopped out of our vocabulary being replaced by 'passed away', 'passed on' or just 'passed'.

Our time of reflection will be about a 'good death'. Please don't switch off the page, stay with it. Francis uses the words 'praised' and 'blessed' in the context of death, words that you would associate more with life. Here's the point Francis wished to follow Jesus' way, Jesus' way of life.

Our starting point concerning a 'good death' is about how we responded to Jesus' words, 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. (John 3:16-17) These words are used in the Book of Common of Prayer service of Holy Communion introduced with these words 'Hear what comfortable words our Saviour Christ saith unto all that truly turn to him.'

**Link to Bible Gateway to the Book of Revelation page.
It is a long link; I have tested it and it works**

<https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&&p=18b3eed5a3b7d20eJmItdHM9MTcyMDEzNzYwMCZpZ3VpZD0xNGU0NmU1NC00NGQ2LTZmMTQ0MTJiMC03YWU1NDUzNjZINGMmaW5zaWQ9NTQyNw&pfn=3&ver=2&hsh=3&fclid=14e46e54-44d6-6f14-12b0-7ae545366e4c&psq=who+wrote+revelations+in+the+bible&u=a1aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuYmlibGVnYXRld2F5LmNvbS9wYXNzYWdlL2ludHJvLz9zZWZyY2g9UmV2ZWxhdGlvbiZ2ZXJzaW9uPU5BQlJF&ntb=1>

The whole text of the Canticle is at the end of this reflection should you wish to read it again.

The Canticle of the Creatures – Death where is your victory?



Medieval window in a graveyard
near Barnard Castle

[Neil Theasby](#) - [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0](#)



**Find your favourite space for this
time of prayerful reflection**

light a candle

**Slow down, breathe calmly, be
comfortable
and relax.**



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)

God so loved the world - The Poor Clare of Arundel



https://youtu.be/48fNRKoH6Js?si=oRTxopf3_YuBxQ6Q

A reading from Pauls' second letter to the church in Corinth

'Death has been swallowed up in victory.'

'Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?'

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God,
who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15 :55-57 NRSV)

Our closing reflection on Francis' Canticle the stark reminder that we cannot escape death. We are perhaps familiar with the words 'we all handle death differently'. I imagine that could apply to this reflection, some may move on while others may stop, pause and reflect on death. I hope you will be able to take some time to prayerfully reflection.

Christians are not immune from the deep pain at the death of a loved one. We know our faith teaches us that death is not the end but that does not stop us having a whole range of emotions and experiences.

Some questions:

- How are things between you and God?
- How are things with your friends and neighbours?
- How are things within your family?
- How are you physically, emotionally and spiritually?

It is worth spending time exploring these questions and looking to resolve any issues that need to be faced.

Let us now come in confidence and pray 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

We listen to the familiar and comforting words of Psalm 23 sung by John Michael Talbot



https://youtu.be/yNk2NUh9_vA?si=AeXo8QKLmIzGxkJO

The closing words of the Prayer of 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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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.

The Canticle of Creatures

The Laudato Si' translation

Verses 1-9

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honour and all blessing.
To You alone, Most High, do they belong
and no human is worthy to mention Your name.

Praised be you, my Lord, with all Your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun, who is the day,
and through whom You give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour;
and bears a likeness of You, Most High one.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,
in heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather
through which you give substance to your creatures.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister water,
who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother fire,
through whom You light the night,
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit
with coloured flowers and herbs.

Verses 10-11

Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love,
and bear infirmity and tribulation.
Blessed those who endure in peace, for by You, Most High, shall they be crowned.

Verses 12-14

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whom no one living can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin.
Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will,
for the second death shall do them no harm.

Verse 15

Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks and serve Him with great humility