

Saint Francis of Assisi

Giovanni Bernardone was born in Assisi, Italy, in 1181. once he had a new dream that invited him to renounce his dreams of war in order to follow Christ. Back in Assisi, he began his spiritual awakening. One day, as he was praying before a crucifix, he heard a voice asking him to "repair his ruined church." Taking the order literally, François will set about restoring ruined chapels and churches. He also devoted himself to the lepers and after some time two bourgeois of Assisi joined him.



Miracles of Saint Francis

The patron saint of animals, St. Francis of Assisi, built bonds of love with all of the kinds of creatures in the animal kingdom. However, Saint Francis had a special relationship with birds, who often followed him around and rested on his shoulders, arms, or hands as he prayed or walked around outside. Birds often symbolize spiritual freedom and growth, so some believers think that the miracle of the birds listening intently to Francis' message was sent by God to encourage Francis and his fellow monks to continue their work preaching the Gospel message of Jesus Christ, which focuses on how people can become spiritually free and grow closer to God. Here's the story of the famous bird sermon that Francis preached one day:

A Flock of Birds Gathers

As Francis and some companions were traveling through the Spoleto Valley in Italy, Francis noticed that a huge flock of birds had gathered in some trees beside a field. Francis noticed that the birds were watching him as if they were expecting something. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, he decided to preach a sermon about God's love for them.

Francis Speaks to the Birds About God's Love

Francis walked over to a spot beside the trees and began an impromptu sermon, reported the monks who were traveling with Francis and wrote

down what Francis said. Their report was later published in the ancient book *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*.

"My sweet little sisters, birds of the sky," Francis said, "you are bound to heaven, to God, your Creator. In every beat of your wings and every note of your songs, praise him. He has given you the greatest of gifts, the freedom of the air. You neither sow, nor reap, yet God provides for you the most delicious food, rivers, and lakes to quench your thirst, mountains, and valleys for your home, tall trees to build your nests, and the most beautiful clothing: a change of feathers with every season. You and your kind were preserved in Noah's Ark. Clearly, our Creator loves you dearly, since he gives you gifts so abundantly. So please beware, my little sisters, of the sin of ingratitude, and always sing praise to God."

The monks who recorded Francis' sermon to the birds wrote that the birds listened intently to everything Francis had to say:

"While Francis said these words, all those birds began to open their beaks, and stretch out their necks, and spread their wings, and bend their heads reverently toward the earth, and with acts and songs, they showed that the holy father [Francis] gave them great pleasure."

Francis Blesses the Birds

Francis "rejoiced" at the birds' response, the monks wrote, and "wondered much at such a multitude of birds and at their beauty and at their attention and tameness, and he devoutly thanked God for them."

The birds remained attentively gathered around Francis, the story goes, until he blessed them and they flew away—some heading north, some south, some east, and some west—going out in all directions as if on their way to pass along the good news of God's love that they had just heard to other creatures.

Saint Francis drives out the demons from the city of Arezzo

One day the town of Arezzo was in a riot. Francis, passing by, saw demons above the city, dancing like madmen and bringing the inhabitants to fight. He said to Brother Sylvestre: "Go before the gates of the city and command the demons, from the mighty God, to flee as soon as possible." Immediately, the demons fled, and the city found peace.

The Miracle of the spring

Too weak to make the road on foot, François went to Alverne on a donkey pulled by a peasant. Halfway, the exhausted peasant exclaims: "I can't take it anymore, I'm dying of thirst." With compassion, Francis descended from the donkey, knelt, prayed, and then said to the peasant: "Run to that rock. The Lord has just made a spring of living water spring out of it." Indeed, the peasant rushes to drink it greedily.

The Healing of the Wounded of Lleida

In the city of Llerda in Catalonia a certain man called Juan, who was devoted to blessed Francis, happened to pass by one evening on the road where there was concealed a deadly ambush—not for him, actually, for he harbored no hostilities, but for another man who looked like him and who often was in his company. One of the men who lay in ambush leaped out of hiding and, taking him for his enemy, stabbed him with deadly blows, wounding him repeatedly, so there was no hope of his recovery. The physicians pronounced his healing to be impossible. So, since he was beyond all human aid, he turned with all possible devotion to beg the protection of the blessed Father Francis, on whom (as well as on the blessed Virgin) he had called with great trust even in the middle of the ambush. Behold, as the poor man lay all alone on his bed, unable to sleep and moaning Francis' name over and over, it seemed to him that someone dressed in the habit of a Lesser Brother came in through the window and approached him. This person called him by name and said: "Since you have placed your trust in me, behold, the Lord will deliver you." When the wounded man asked him who he was, he answered that he was Francis. And as soon as he said this, he approached the man's wounds, undid the bandages, and seemed to anoint all the wounds with an

ointment. No sooner did he feel the gentle touch of those sacred hands, which had the capacity to heal by the power of the Savior's stigmata, than the flesh was restored and the wounds were closed, so that he was once again in perfect health. After doing this, the blessed Father disappeared. The man, feeling himself healed, burst out exultantly into shouts of praise to God and Saint Francis, and cried out for his wife. She hurried in at a run, and, as she saw the man standing up whom she had expected to bury the next day, she was utterly terrified and stunned, so that by her screams she gathered the whole neighborhood. The people of the household hurried in, and tried to force him back into bed, thinking he was in delirium, while he fought them off, insisting that he was cured, [saying] "Do not be afraid! Do not believe that what you see is false, because Saint Francis has just left this place and has cured me completely of every wound by the touch of those sacred hands." As the news of this miracle spread, the whole town hastened there. Seeing the power of blessed Francis's stigmata by means of such an obvious miracle, they were at the same time filled with wonder and with joy, and extolled Christ's standard bearer with loud cries of praise.

It was fitting indeed that the blessed Father, now already dead in the flesh, and living with Christ, should give health to a mortally wounded man by the wonderful manifestation of his presence and the gentle touch of his sacred hands, since he bore upon his body the brand marks of the One who, by His merciful death and wondrous resurrection, had healed the human race — which had been wounded and left half alive— healing us by the power of His wounds.

Francis died in Assisi on October 4, 1226 and was canonized two years later in 1228 by Gregory IX.