

## THE INNER PRAYER LIFE OF SAINT FRANCIS

The prayers of the saints, when made available to us for reflection, give us an incredible insight into their very personal inner life with God. Fortunately, with Saint Francis of Assisi, and thanks to modern scholarship, those prayers have been gifted to us almost 800 years after our Holy Father Saint Francis died. It remains for us only to ask for the grace, as Saint Bonaventure would say, (Itin. 7:6) so that we too can be caught up in the humble and pure spirit of the little poor one – the poverello of Assisi.



### The Prayer Saint Francis taught to his Brothers

*Said on entering a church, or before the Blessed Sacrament or before any Cross. The Source for this prayer is found in The Testament 5 and its context is found in 1Celano 45 where the friars before they had the breviary asked Saint Francis how they should pray. He told them say the Our Father and then he gave them the following prayer.*

**W**e adore you, O Christ,  
here and in all your churches  
throughout the whole world,  
and we bless you,  
because by your holy cross  
you have redeemed the world.



### The Our Father of St Francis of Assisi

*When the friars asked him how they should pray Saint Francis said that they should say the Our Father, and the prayer above, but as we see below, the Our Father Saint Francis gave them was a veritable catechesis on the original Our Father given to us by Our Lord Jesus in the Gospel. Meditation on the Our Father was not unique to Saint Francis in medieval times, but there is a sense here that Saint Francis has shared with us the inner vision of his spiritual life.*

**O**UR Most Holy FATHER,  
Our Creator, Redeemer, Consoler and Saviour

WHO ARE IN HEAVEN:  
In the angels and the saints,  
enlightening them to love, because You, Lord, are light.  
Inflaming them to love, because you, Lord, are love.  
Dwelling in them and filling them with happiness,  
because you, Lord, are the Supreme Good, the Eternal Good  
from Whom comes all good  
without Whom there is no good.

HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME:

May our knowledge of you become ever clearer  
That we may know the breadth of Your blessings  
the length of Your promises  
the height of Your majesty  
the depths of Your judgements.

YOUR KINGDOM COME:

So that You may rule in us through Your grace  
and so enable us to come to Your kingdom  
where there is an unclouded vision of You  
a perfect love of You  
a blessed companionship with You  
an eternal enjoyment of You.

YOUR WILL BE DONE ON EARTH  
AS IT IS IN HEAVEN:

That we may love You with our whole heart  
by always thinking of You  
and with our whole soul  
by always desiring You  
with our whole mind  
by directing all our intentions to You  
and by seeking Your glory in everything  
and with our whole strength  
by spending all our energies and affections  
of soul and body  
in the service of Your love  
and of nothing else  
and may we love our neighbours as our selves  
by drawing them all with our whole strength  
to Your love  
by rejoicing in the good fortunes of others  
as well as our own  
and by sympathising with the misfortunes of others  
and by giving offence to no one.

GIVE US THIS DAY:

In memory and understanding, and reverence  
of the love which our Lord Jesus Christ had for us  
and of those things which He said and did and suffered for us.

OUR DAILY BREAD:

Your own beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

AND FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES:

Through Your ineffable mercy

through the power of the passion of Your Beloved Son  
together with the merits and intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary  
and all your chosen ones.

AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US:

and whatever we do not forgive perfectly,  
do You, Lord, enable us to forgive to the full  
so that we may truly love our enemies  
and fervently intercede for them before You  
returning no one evil for evil  
and striving to help everyone in You.

AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION:

Hidden or obvious  
Sudden or persistent.

BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL:

Past, present and to come.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit  
As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.



### **The Prayer before the Crucifix**

*Traditionally said before the Crucifix of San Damiano. This brilliant prayer puts the human heart with all its desires at the center of conversion not as one might think today the mind. Then it rightly asks for the three theological virtues. These are not human virtues but Divine virtues which are a pure gift from God. Only then does Saint Francis ask for a “sense and knowledge”. In Italian the verb “sentire” to sense, engages all the senses: to feel, hear, see, smell, taste, but there is more here, he is asking for the gifts of the Spirit. He knows that this only comes from, “a spirit of prayer and devotion to which all things must give preference”. (before work RB Ch 5:2; before study Ep Ant 2)*

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



## Prayer of Commitment

*The title here of this prayer is arbitrary. The prayer is found at the end of Saint Francis' Letter to the Entire Order. 50-52. The letter was most probably written to be sent out with a copy of the Papal Bull "Quia populares tumultus" of December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1224, which gave the friars permission to celebrate the eucharist in their churches and oratories. If so Saint Francis had already received the stigmata and he had entered into his final transformation through grace. It is not surprising that here in this prayer we find the best expression of his Trinitarian life.*

**A**lmighty, eternal, just and merciful God,  
grant us in our misery the grace  
to do for You alone  
what we know You want us to do,  
and always to desire what pleases You.  
Thus, inwardly cleansed,  
interiorly enlightened,  
and inflamed by the fire of the Holy Spirit,  
may we be able to follow in the footprints  
of Your beloved Son,  
our Lord Jesus Christ.  
And, by Your grace alone,  
may we make our way to You,  
Most High,  
Who live and rule  
in perfect Trinity and simple Unity,  
and are glorified God all-powerful  
forever and ever.  
Amen.



## The Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

*This beautiful prayer contains the phrase "...you are the virgin made church..." which sounds so modern that scholars at first questioned its authenticity, but its integrity lies in the last six lines of the prayer and the reverence in which Saint Francis held the little church of the Portiuncula and in medieval images of the Blessed Virgin protecting the faithful under her mantle. In the Blessed Virgin are all the holy virtues which are the graces of the Holy Spirit, the wedding garments of heaven.*

**H**ail, O Lady,  
holy Queen,  
Mary, holy Mother of God:  
you are the Virgin made church  
and the one chosen by the most holy Father in heaven  
whom he consecrated

with his most holy beloved Son  
and the Holy Spirit the Paraclete,  
in whom there was and is  
all the fullness of grace and every good.

Hail, His Palace!  
Hail, his Tabernacle!  
Hail, His Home!  
Hail, His Robe!  
Hail, His Servant!  
Hail, His Mother!

And, hail all you holy virtues  
which through the grace and light of the Holy Spirit  
are poured into the hearts of the faithful,  
so that from their faithless state  
you may make them faithful to God.



### **Praises to be said at all Hours**

*The sources indicate that Saint Francis wanted the friars to use this set of praises before each hour of the Divine Office in the breviary. It sets the right attitude for saying the Liturgy of the Hours, which extend the Divine Liturgy of the Mass throughout the day and night. The great river of prayer that sweeps around the world continuously.*

**H**oly, holy, holy Lord God Almighty,  
Who is and Who was and Who is to come.  
And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

O Lord our God, You are worthy to receive  
praise and glory and honour and blessing.  
and let us praise and glorify Him forever.  
The Lamb Who was slain is worthy to receive  
power and divinity, and wisdom and strength,  
and honour and glory and blessing.  
And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

Let us bless the Father and the Son with the Holy Spirit.  
And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

Bless the Lord all you works of the Lord:  
And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

Sing praise to our God, all you His servants  
and you who fear God, the small and the great.  
And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

Let the heavens and the earth praise Him Who is glorious.  
And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

Every creature that is in heaven and on earth and under the earth  
and in the sea and those which are in it.  
And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.  
And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever.  
And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

Prayer:

**A**ll-powerful, most holy, most high, and supreme God:  
all good, supreme good, totally good, You Who are alone are good;  
may we give You all praise, all glory, all thanks, all honour:  
all blessing, and all good. So be it! So be it! Amen.



## **Holy Virgin Mary**

*Throughout the Office of the Passion composed by Saint Francis there is only this beautiful antiphon used in place of the usual varying antiphon, chapter, hymn, versicle, and oration which we find in the breviary. After his exquisite and courtly salutation at the beginning comes his request: "Pray for us".*

**H**oly Virgin Mary,  
among women  
there is no one like you born into the world:  
you are the daughter  
and the servant  
of the most high and supreme King  
and Father of heaven,  
you are the mother of our most holy Lord Jesus Christ  
you are the spouse of the Holy Spirit.  
Pray for us  
with Saint Michael the Archangel  
and all the powers of the heavens  
and all the saints  
to your most holy beloved Son, the Lord and Master.  
Glory be to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit.  
As it was in the beginning

is now and ever shall be  
world without end. Amen.



### Let us bless the Lord

*We have not given the Office of the Passion here among his prayers, but it is a masterpiece of his own eclectic scriptural texts, which shows his mastery of the psalms but at the end of it, at each hour, Saint Francis would say this simple prayer:*

**L**et us bless the Lord.  
The living and true God;  
To Him let us always render praise,  
glory, honour, blessing and every good.  
Amen. Amen. So be it. So be it.



### The Canticle of all the Creatures

*The Legend of Perugia, 43, tells us that Saint Francis said, as he began to composed this truly magnificent poem: “I wish to compose a new hymn about the Lord’s creatures, of which we make daily use, without which we cannot live and with which the human race greatly offends its Creator.” However, as we read, sing or pray this canticle we see it is something far beyond that statement. The full artistic and mystical genius of Saint Francis of Assisi is given birth here by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and we find here one of the most beautiful poems ever written. In its original, Saint Francis uses the Italian dialect of Umbria giving the poem an even richer personal sense and flavour. See also note below.*

**M**ost High, all-powerful, good Lord,  
Yours are the praises, the glory,  
the honour and all blessing.  
To you alone, Most High, do they belong,  
and no man is worthy to mention your name.

Praise 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.

Praise be You, my Lord, through:  
**Sister Moon** and the **Stars,**  
in heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

Praise be You, my Lord, through:  
**Brother Wind**,  
and through the air, cloudy and serene,  
and every kind of weather  
through which You give sustenance to your creatures.

Praise be you, my Lord  
through **Sister Water**,  
which is very useful and humble  
and precious and chaste.

Praise be you, my Lord,  
through **Brother Fire**,  
through whom You light up the night  
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praise be You my Lord,  
through: **Our Sister Mother Earth**,  
who sustains and governs us,  
and who produces varied fruits  
and coloured flowers and herbs.

Praise be you my Lord,  
through those who give: **Pardon** for Your love  
and bear **Infirmity** and **Tribulation**.  
Blessed are those who bear it in **Peace**  
for by Your Most High, they shall be crowned.  
Praise be You, my Lord,  
through: **Our Sister Bodily Death**,  
from whom no living man 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.  
Praise and bless my Lord  
and give Him thanks and serve Him, with great humility.

*A great deal has been written about the Cantic of all the Creature. It seen as a hymn of universal fraternity which gthers all of creation to God. The Italian word “per” is difficult to translate because it can mean by, with or through. The cantic articulates our capacity as human beings to praise God on behalf of all creation, and with all creation, and through all creation. Some have suggested that there is a rich symbolism to be found in the verses of the text: Sir Brother Sun: God the Father; Sister Moon: Our Lord Jesus Christ the light in the darkness; The stars of heaven: The Saints; Wind, Water and Fire: The Holy Spirit; Our Sister Mother Earth: The Blessed Virgin Mary; Pardon and bearing Tribulation: Humanity redeemed and fully alive in Christ, ready to welcome Sister Death for she gives access to eternal life. Ultimately this cantic finds its fullest meaning in the hands and words of the priest at Mass: “through him, and with him, and in him, O God,*

*almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honour is yours, for ever and ever. Amen.”*

## **The Praises of God**

*Without a doubt this is one of the most precious of Saint Francis’ writings simply because we have the original small piece of parchment (called an autograph) with his writing on it in the Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi. Saint Francis gave this parchment to Br Leo at La Verna in 1224 after he had received the stigmata. It has a special blessing for Leo on one side and this prayer on the back. Only with the aid of infra-red technology and reference to early manuscript copies has the prayer been almost restored to us although on the edges and in the folds of the parchment words still remain obscure. It is after all almost 800 years old.*

**Y**ou are the holy Lord God Who does wonderful things.

You are strong. You are great. You are the most high.  
You are the almighty King.  
You, Holy Father, [are] the King of heaven and earth.

You are Three and One, the Lord God of gods;  
You are the good, all good, the highest good,  
Lord, God, living and true.

You are love, and charity; You are wisdom, You are humility,  
You are patience, You are beauty, You are meekness,  
You are security, You are rest.  
You are gladness and joy, You are our hope,  
You are justice, You are moderation,  
You are all our riches, you are enough for us.

You are beauty, you are meekness  
You are the protector, You are our guardian and defender,  
You are strength; You are refreshment, You are our hope,  
You are our faith, You are our charity,  
You are all our sweetness, You are our eternal life:  
Great and wonderful Lord, God almighty, Merciful Saviour.

## **An Exhortation**

*Not so much a prayer as an exhortation this text is taken from the so called Second version of the Letter of the Faithful also called the “Later Admonition and Exhortation to*

*the Brothers and Sisters of Penance” 61. These brothers and sisters of penance are today the members of the Secular Franciscan Order.*

**L**et every creature  
in heaven, on earth, in the sea and in the depths  
give praise, glory, honour, and blessing to Him,  
who suffered so much for us,  
Who has given and will give in the future every good,  
and Who will continue to do so for the future.  
for He is our power and strength,  
Who alone is good,  
Who alone is almighty,  
Who alone is omnipotent, wonderful, glorious,  
And Who alone is holy,  
worthy of praise and blessing  
through endless ages.  
Amen



### **Exhortation to Preachers**

*This exhortation of Saint Francis is taken from the Rule of 1221 Chapter 17 Nos 17 & 18. It is a warning to preachers that any praise given to us for our sermons should be referred to the Lord from whom every good gift comes. Seculars would do well, in the light of this exhortation, to say to priests after a good sermon: “The Lord has blessed you father, it was a good sermon.” rather than “Thank you father for such a wonderful sermon!” and if it is a poor sermon perhaps a questioning prayer might be useful: “Sorry Lord, I think I totally missed what you were trying to say to me.”*

**L**et us refer all good  
to the Most High and supreme Lord God,  
and acknowledge that every good is His  
and thank him for every thing,  
He from whom all good comes.  
And may He the Highest and Supreme,  
Who alone is true God,  
have and be given and receive  
every honour and reverence,  
every praise and blessing,  
every thanks and glory,  
for every good is His,  
He Who alone is good.



## Prayer of Thanksgiving

*This lengthy prayer of thanksgiving comes from the Rule of 1221 Chapter 23. Nos 130-132. It is a prayer that engages all of heaven to praise and thank God the Father for every grace we have ever received or will receive in the future.*

All-powerful, most holy, most high and supreme God  
Holy and just Father  
Lord, King of heaven and earth  
we thank You for Yourself  
for through Your holy will  
and through Your only Son  
with the Holy Spirit  
You have created all things spiritual and corporal  
and, having made us in Your own image and likeness,  
You placed us in paradise.  
And through our own fault we have fallen.  
And we thank You  
for as through Your Son You created us  
so also, through Your holy love, with which You loved us  
You brought about His birth as true God and true man  
by the glorious, ever-virgin, most blessed, holy Mary  
and You willed to redeem us captives  
through His cross and blood and death.  
And we thank You  
for Your Son Himself will come again  
in the glory of His majesty  
to send the wicked ones  
who have not done penance and who have not known You  
into the eternal fire,  
and to say to all those who have known You  
and have adored You  
and have served You in penance:  
"Come, you blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom,  
which has been prepared for you  
from the beginning of the world.  
And because all of us  
wretches and sinners  
are not worthy to pronounce Your name,  
we humbly ask that  
our Lord Jesus Christ  
Your beloved Son  
in whom You were well pleased  
together with the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete,  
give You thanks  
as it pleases You and Him  
for everything,  
He Who always satisfies You in everything

through Whom You have done such great things for us.  
Alleluia!  
And through Your love  
we humbly beg  
the glorious Mother, most blessed Mary ever-virgin,  
Blessed Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael  
and all the blessed choirs of seraphim,  
cherubim, thrones, dominations, principalities, powers,  
virtues, angels, archangels,  
blessed John the Baptist,  
John the Evangelist,  
Peter, Paul,  
and the blessed patriarchs, prophets,  
the Innocents, apostles, evangelists, disciples,  
martyrs, confessors, virgins,  
the blessed Elijah and Henoch,  
and all the saints who were, who will be, and who are  
to give You thanks for these things  
as it pleases You,  
the supreme and true God  
eternal and living  
with Your most beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,  
and the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete,  
world without end.  
Amen. Alleluia.

*The Prophet Elijah and the Patriarch Henoch, or Enoch, are included in this litany. Enoch was the seventh patriarch before the flood and the great-grand father of Noah. He lived for 365 years (the perfect life) and the text from Genesis reads: Enoch “walked with God: and he was no more; for God took him”. (Gen 5:21-24) the meaning is that Enoch was taken body and soul into heaven just as Elijah also was taken to heaven in a fiery chariot.*



### **An Exhortation to Contemplation**

*The title is not found in the sources. The source for this exhortation is the Rule of 1221 Chapter 23. Nos. 9-11. This is the summary of all that Saint Francis has been trying to teach in the previous Chapter 22. With all subtilty Saint Francis has warned the brothers not to be distracted even by what seems to be good to do, but focus on the Lord. “In that holy love which is God, I beg all my brothers ... as they overcome every obstacle and put aside every care and anxiety, to strive as best they can to serve, love, honour, and adore the Lord God, with a clean heart and a pure mind, for this is what He desires above all things. And let us make a home and dwelling place [within us] for Him Who is the Lord God Almighty Father Son and Holy Spirit.”*

Therefore;  
Let us desire nothing else  
let us wish for nothing else  
let nothing else please us  
and cause us delight  
except our Creator and Redeemer and Savior,  
the one true God,  
Who is the Fullness of Good all good, every good, the true and supreme good  
Who alone is Good,  
merciful and gentle,  
delectable and sweet  
Who alone is holy,  
just and true,  
holy and right ,  
Who alone is kind,  
innocent,  
pure  
from Whom and through Whom and in Whom  
is all pardon,  
all grace,  
all glory  
of all the penitent and the just  
of all the blessed who rejoice together in heaven.  
Therefore  
let nothing hinder us  
nothing separate us  
or nothing come between us.  
Let all of us  
wherever we are  
in every place  
at every hour,  
at every time of day,  
everyday and continually  
believe truly and humbly  
and keep in our heart,  
and love, honor, adore, serve,  
praise and bless  
glorify and exalt  
magnify and give thanks  
to the most high and supreme, eternal God  
Trinity and Unity  
the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit  
Creator of all  
Savior of all who believe in Him  
and hope in Him  
and love Him  
Who is without beginning and without end  
unchangeable,

invisible,  
indescribable,  
ineffable,  
incomprehensible,  
unfathomable,  
blessed, worthy of praise,  
glorious, exalted on high,  
sublime, most high,  
gentle,  
lovable,  
delectable  
and totally desirable above all else  
forever.  
Amen.



### **Prayers Recommended by Saint Francis**

*In the earlier Rule of 1221 St Francis requested: “Each day the Miserere (Psalm 50) and one Our Father, should be said for the faults and failings of the friars, together with the De Profundis (Psalm 129) and an Our Father for the dead friars.” There is no doubt when we look at his writings that Saint Francis knew almost, if not entirely, all the psalms off by heart. The Divine Office was the goldmine where he found the treasure to articulate his relationship with God. At the end of his life, almost blind, he did not need a breviary to say his prayers and with the friars joining in he began spontaneously Psalm 141:*

**W**ith all my voice I cry to the Lord,  
with all my voice I entreat the Lord.  
I pour out my trouble before him;  
I tell him all my distress  
while my spirit faints within me.  
But you, O Lord, know my path.

On the way where I shall walk  
Look on my right and see:  
there is no one who takes my part.  
I have no means of escape,  
not one who cares for my soul.

I cry to you, O Lord.  
I have said you are my refuge,  
all I have in the land of the living.  
Listen, then, to my cry  
for I am in the depth of distress.

Rescue me from those who pursue me

for they are stronger than I.  
Bring my soul out of prison  
and then I shall praise your name.  
Around me the just will assemble  
because of your goodness to me.

