

Transitus of Saint Francis



Painting by Giotto di Bondone "First Master of the Renaissance" (1226 – 1337)

**St Francis of Assisi died
on the evening of the 3rd October 1226**

**It has long been a tradition
of prayer and devotion
for the friars to keep this night
as a remembrance
of his passing (Transitus) to God.**

After processing up to the foot of the altar, the ministers and readers kneel in silence, while the Franciscan habit is placed at the foot of the altar. Everyone else remains standing. The minister then goes to his place and begins as follows:

THE CEREMONY

Everyone remains standing until the narrator begins his reading.

Leader: In the name of the Father and the Son
and the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Leader: Let us bless our Lord and God, living and true:

All: **To him we offer all praise, all glory, all honour,
all blessing, and every good forever. Amen.**

(From The Office of the Passion)

Leader: Brothers and sisters,
a very ancient tradition draws us together
on this the eve of St Francis' Feast Day.
For over 800 years
we have celebrated his Transitus,
the final stage of his journey home to God.

While rejoicing in the saint's holy death
and his glorious entry into heaven,
we come to give thanks to God
for the inspiring example and life of St Francis,
and to pray that we too,
when our time of passing is near
can welcome death as our "sister"
trusting in the mercy of God.

Leader: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with you.

All: **And with your spirit.**

Leader: Let us pray:

Lord God, on this night
you gave to our holy father Francis,
the Poverello of Assisi,
the reward of perfect beatitude.
In your love, lead us who celebrate his Transitus,
to follow closely in his footsteps,
and come, in our turn,
to worship you face to face,
in a joy that knows no ending.
We ask this
through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, forever and ever.

All: **Amen. Amen. Alleluia!**

All sit down as the Narrator begins reading:

THE NARRATIVE OF THE DEATH OF ST FRANCIS

Narrator: St Francis was lying grievously ill and in pain in the Bishop's house in Assisi, when a doctor was called for the last time. He said to Francis:

Reader 1: (The Doctor) "I must tell you that medically your present illness is incurable and, in my opinion, you will most probably die at the end of September or the beginning of October."

Narrator: Raising his arms to heaven, St Francis joyfully cried out:

Reader 2: (Saint Francis) “You are most welcome - welcome, my dear Sister Death.”

Narrator: Then turning to a friar, he asked that Brothers Angelo and Leo be called to help him share this good news by singing beside his bed. In spite of their tears, the two brethren began to intone the Canticle of Brother Sun:

Direction: Two friars (or two voices) begin the singing then all take it up.

All Sing: **All creatures of our God and king,
Lift up your voices, let us sing:
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Bright burning sun with golden beams,
soft silver moon that gently gleams.
O praise him, O praise him,
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!**

Narrator: The friars sang the Canticle many times a day to comfort the saint’s failing spirit, and sometimes they sang through the night as well. However, not all were pleased with this continual singing. Finally Brother Elias came to St Francis and said:

Reader 3: (The Vicar General Brother Elias) “Well beloved Father, for my part I rejoice that you should be joyful; **but** I fear this city, which regards you as a saint, may be scandalised to see that you do not prepare yourself for death in quite another manner altogether”.

Narrator: The saint smiled and replied:

Reader 2: (Saint Francis) “Be at peace good Brother, for in spite of what I endure, I feel myself so near to God, that I cannot hold myself from singing.”

Narrator: Responding to Francis’s expressed desire, Br Elias then arranged for the saint to be carried down from the city of Assisi to the Portiuncula. The magistrates of Assisi consented, but sent along an armed escort. When the cortege reached Santa Maria le Mura, Francis raised himself on the litter, and seemed for some time to be contemplating this lovely and familiar view of the city, which in fact he could no longer see. Then painfully he lifted his arm and blessed the City of Assisi:

Reader 2: (Saint Francis) “May you be blessed, dear city of God. Once you were a place of violence, but God has chosen you to become a place of peace and the home of those who know Him and who reverence His blessed and glorious Name.”

Narrator: At the Portiuncula, St Francis was given a tiny hut in the forest, very near to the chapel of St Mary of the Angels. Again he sensed the solitude of this beautiful place so often visited by the Spirit of God, and he rejoiced as he heard from within the chapel the friars sing:

All Sing: **Swift flowing water, pure and clear,
Make music for your Lord to hear,
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Fire, so intense and fiercely bright,
who gives to us both warmth and light.
O praise Him, O praise Him,
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!**

Narrator: This forest solitude was truly the right setting for his passing, for Francis’ found such a wonderful consolation of the Holy Spirit in the midst of nature. He took leave of this world with the same simplicity and courtesy that had marked all the events of his life. He forgot no one; he remembered everything: his sons, his daughters, the places he loved, all the creatures with whom he had

been so united. These all shared in his farewells and benedictions. He recommended to his brethren the beloved Portiuncula Chapel:

Reader 2: (Saint Francis) “Brothers, this is a holy place where the angels love to come. Hold it ever in veneration, and never abandon it.”

Narrator: In honour of his Lady Poverty, he asked that he be laid naked on the ground, and covering with one hand the wound in his side he said:

Reader 2: (Saint Francis) “My work is done. My task is over. May Christ teach you to do yours.”

Narrator: His friars begged him to forgive them for any offences, and to bless them again. This he readily did, placing his hand successively on the head of each, and then he addressed himself to Bernard of Quintavalle, his first follower.

Reader 2: (Saint Francis) “Br Bernard, I absolve you too, and through you,

I bless as far as I am able,
and even still more than I am able,
all my absent brothers.
See that these words reach them,
and bless them in my name.”

All Sing: **All you with mercy in your heart,
Forgiving others, take your part,
O sing now: Alleluia!
All you that pain and sorrow bear,
Praise God and cast on him your care:
O praise him, O praise him,
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!**

Narrator: Nor did Francis forget Sister Clare, who he learned was weeping at the thought of losing her father and friend. He sent a message to his little spiritual plant.

Reader 2: (Saint Francis)

“I, little brother Francis,
wish to follow to the end
the poor way which was that of our Lord
and of His Mother,
and I ask you too, my daughter,
never to be separated from it...”

Narrator: Then he added:

Reader 2: (Saint Francis) “And say to Lady Clare, that I forbid her to give way to sadness now, for I promise her that she and her sisters will see me again.”¹

Narrator: Francis also wished to send a message to his friend, the Lady Jacoba in Rome, that she should come in haste with what is needed for his burial, but before the courier could leave the room a brother ran in to announce her arrival, and Francis cried weakly:

Reader 2: (Saint Francis) God be praised, let the door be opened, for the rule forbidding women to enter here does not apply to **Brother** Jacoba.

Narrator: The Roman Lady had carried with her all that was needed for the saint’s burial, and a box of almond biscuits, which she knew St Francis enjoyed, but although he tried to, he could not eat any of it.

¹ This prophecy was fulfilled when the body of St Francis was brought to the little convent of St Damiano so that the Poor Clares could say farewell to their blessed father Francis.

More and more often, the Canticle of Brother Sun was heard from the hut, with the new verse Francis had composed in praise of Sister Death of the Body.

All Sing: **And you most kind and gentle death,
Waiting to hush our final breath,
O praise him, Alleluia!
You lead back home the child of God,
By way that Christ the Lord has trod.
O praise him, O praise him,
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!**

Narrator: On Friday 2nd October, in remembrance of the Last Supper of his dear Lord Jesus, St Francis asked for bread to be brought and he blessed it and distributed it with great difficulty to all who were present.

(Bread is blessed and quietly distributed to those present)

Then he asked that the Gospel of St John be read beginning at the Passion. (Ch 13:1f)

A priest vested in white stole reads the Gospel. All stand.

Priest: The Lord be with you.

All: **And with your spirit.**

Priest: A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to John.

All: **Glory to you O Lord.**

They were at supper, and ... Jesus knew that the Father had put everything into his hands, and that he had come from God and that he was returning to God, and he got up from the table, removed his outer garment and, taking a towel, wrapped it around his waist;

he then poured water into a basin
and began to wash the disciples feet
and to wipe them with the towel he was wearing.
He came to Simon Peter, who said to him,
“Lord are you going to wash my feet”?
Jesus answered, “At the moment
you do not know what I am doing,
but later you will understand”.
“Never!” said Peter “You shall never wash my feet.”
Jesus replied, “If I do not wash you,
you can have nothing in common with me”.
“Then Lord,” said Simon Peter “not only my feet,
but my hands and my head as well!”
Jesus said, “No one who has taken a bath needs washing,
he is clean all over.” ...
When he had washed their feet and put on his clothes again
he went back to the table and sat down.

Priest: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ

Narrator: At dusk on the next day, she to whom no one willingly opens the door, presented herself, and Francis saw her enter. The little poor man received her courteously:

Reader 2: (Saint Francis) “Be welcome, my Sister Death.”

Narrator: And he begged a brother to announce as a herald of arms does, the solemn arrival of his expected guest, for he added:

Reader 2: (Saint Francis) “It is she who is going to introduce me to eternal life.”

Narrator: Then at his wish they placed him on the ground in a coarse sack-cloth, so as to honour his sombre guest, Sister Death.

Then his head was covered with dust and ashes as he requested. With failing voice he intoned Psalm 142, and those around him joined with him and continued:

The 2nd Reader only intones the Latin or the 1st English verse.

Reader 2: (Saint Francis) *“Voce mea ad Dominum clamavi ...”*

With all my voice I cry out to the Lord...

Then the psalm said with alternate verses beginning with the right side of the church then the left for each verse.

Side 1. **With all my voice I entreat the Lord.
I pour out my troubles before him;
I tell him all my distress
While my spirit faints within me.
But you, O Lord, know my path.**

Side 2. **On the way where I shall walk
They have hidden a snare to entrap me.
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.**

Side 1. **I cry to you, O Lord.
I have said: ‘You are my refuge,
all I have left in the land of the living.’
Listen, then, to my cry
For I am in the depths of distress.**

Side 2. **Rescue me from those who pursue me
For they are stronger than I.
Bring my soul out of this prison
And then I shall praise your name.
Around me the just will assemble
Because of your goodness to me.**

**Side 1. Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit.**

**Side 2. As it was in the beginning
is now and ever shall be
world without end. Amen.**

Narrator: When the brothers finished the psalm,
there was a great silence,
broken only by those
who could not contain their grief.

Evening had already stolen into the hut.
Francis lay motionless.
The final stage of his *Transitus* into heaven had begun.

One of his biographer's wrote:

*He died singing, in the forty-sixth year of his age,
and the twenty-fifth of his conversion.*

A multitude of crested larks began to wheel about the roof of the hut their sad chirping, chorusing the loss of their friend. At the same hour, a brother, one of no small fame, saw a shining star, borne on a white cloud, mounting towards heaven.

All stand

**All Sing Let all things their creator bless,
And worship him in humbleness,
O praise him, Alleluia!
Praise God the Father, praise the Son,
And praise the Spirit, three in one;
O praise him, O praise him,
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!**

Leader: It has become a custom in Assisi for a Flame of Fraternity to be lit (by the Mayor of Assisi) on behalf of all the citizens of the town on the feast of St Francis.

Lighting The Flame of Fraternity

The Flame is lit by the Lord Mayor or the person appointed to do so. The prayer may be said by the Lord Mayor or the Leader:

**Lord, look with loving care
on our land of Australia.
Send your Holy Spirit among us
to give us the grace
to work for justice, fraternity and peace.
Above all else, may the Holy Spirit
assist us to struggle for spiritual growth,
by granting us a passion for honesty,
the grace of humility,
an understanding of the dynamics of dialogue,
a desire for unity,
that our nation may be an instrument of peace
for the whole world,
and our multicultural society,
a witness to the harmony
that can exist among all peoples. Amen.**

Friar C4

Renewal of Vows

Leader: I would now invite the Religious and Secular Franciscans to renew their Vows/Promises.

A General Renewal of Vows/Promises

I, (Name),
by the grace of God,
on this feast of our holy father Saint Francis,
renew my Promises/Vows
and consecrate myself to the service of God's kingdom.

Therefore, I wish to live
the holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ.
May the grace of the Holy Spirit,
the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary
and the prayers of our holy father Saint Francis,
and all the saints,
as well as the fraternal bonds of community
always be my help,
so that I may reach the goal of perfect love
for the service of God and of the Church.

FINAL BLESSING

Leader: The Lord be with you.

All: **And with your spirit.**

Leader: May the Lord Bless you and keep you. **R. Amen.**

May his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you.

R. Amen.

May he look upon you with kindness,

And give you his peace. **R. Amen.**

May almighty God bless you,

The Father, and the Son, + and the Holy Spirit

R. Amen.



**PAX ET BONUM
PEACE & GOOD**