

## The Transitus of St. Francis



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

**St Francis of Assisi died on the evening of the 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1226**

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

## The Transitus Ceremony

*Please stand.*

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.

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!**

*Please sit down.*

### **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: "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:

St. 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:

**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 2: "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:
- St. 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, Brother 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:
- St. 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:

St. 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:

St. 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.

St. 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.

St. Francis: “I, the 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:

St. 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.”

Narrator: Francis also sent 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:

St. 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.

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

*Please stand.*

Lector: The Lord be with you.

**All: And with your spirit.**

Lector: 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.

Lector: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

**All: Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.**

**Quiet reflection on the Word of God.**

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:

St. 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:

St. 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:

St. Francis: With all my voice I cry out to the Lord...

*Then the psalm is said with sides alternating verses. The refrain is sung at the beginning and between verses.*

**All sing: Set me free from my prison, O Lord, that I may praise Your Name.**

**Side 1:** ...With all my voice I entreat the Lord.  
**(spoken)** 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.

**All sing: Set me free from my prison, O Lord, that I may praise Your Name.**

**Side 2:** On the way where I shall walk  
**(spoken)** 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.

**All sing: Set me free from my prison, O Lord, that I may praise Your Name.**

**Side 1:**  
**(spoken)** 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.

**All sing:** Set me free from my prison, O Lord, that I may praise Your Name.

**Side 2:**  
**(spoken)** 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.

**All sing:** Set me free from my prison, O Lord, that I may praise Your Name.

**Side 1:**  
**(spoken)** Glory to the Father, to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit.

**Side 2:**  
**(spoken)** As it was in the beginning,  
is now, and will be forever. 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.

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.

*Please 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!

## **Renewal Of Profession Or Commitment To The Gospel Life In The Secular Franciscan Order**

Leader:

Assembled as a fraternity,  
let us now renew our promise  
to live the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in the manner of St. Francis.

You have been called  
to observe the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ  
by following the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi.

Do you embrace the Gospel way of life  
by following the words and example of St. Francis of Assisi,  
which is at the heart of the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order?

**Those renewing their profession, reply all together:**

**Yes, I do.**

Leader:

You have been called  
to give witness to the Kingdom of God  
and to build a more fraternal world based on the Gospel  
together with all people of goodwill.

Do you wish to be faithful to this vocation  
and to practice the spirit of service proper to Secular Franciscans?

**Those renewing their profession, reply all together:**

**Yes, I do.**

Leader:

You have been made members of the People of God by your baptism,  
and strengthened in confirmation by the new gift of the Spirit,  
in order to proclaim Christ by your life and your words.

Do you wish to bind yourself more closely to the Church  
and to work intently to rebuild the ecclesial community  
and fulfil its mission among all people?

**Those renewing their profession, reply all together:**

**Yes, I do.**

## **Renewal of Profession or Commitment to the Gospel Life:**

**I,  
N.N. (each person identifies him/herself),  
by the grace of God, renew my promise  
to live all the days of my life  
the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ  
in the Secular Franciscan Order  
by observing its rule of life.**

Leader:

Having renewed your commitment to the Gospel life,  
may the grace of the Holy Spirit,  
the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary  
and our holy father Saint Francis,  
and the fraternal bonds of community  
always be your help,  
so that we may reach the goal of perfect Christian love.

**All: Amen.**



**Pax et bonum!  
Peace and all good!**

