

**St. Francis of Assisi**

October 4



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1181–1226 • Italy

Francis of Assisi was a fun-loving young man who wished to become a knight and win glory. On his way to battle, Francis had a dream in which Jesus told him to return to Assisi. So the next morning, Francis turned his horse about and returned to Assisi, where he waited to see what Jesus wanted of him.

As Francis was praying before a crucifix in an old little church called San Damiano, Jesus spoke to Francis from His Cross. He told Francis to rebuild His home, which was falling into ruin. Looking at the church's crumbling walls, Francis thought that Jesus was telling him to rebuild the chapel stone by stone. But Jesus wanted Francis to fix more than just the physical walls of the church. He had plans for Francis to build up His Church throughout the world.

Francis lived the way that Jesus had lived. He gave all of his money to the poor and called "Lady Poverty" his wife. He befriended all of God's creatures, including the animals. Because he loved Christmas, Francis started the tradition of creating a nativity scene, with Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus. If you have a nativity scene in your home during Advent and Christmas, you have St. Francis to thank for it!

Many people began to follow Francis so that they, too, could live like Jesus. They gave all that they had to the poor, begged for food and whatever they needed, and preached about Jesus' love. With so many people joining him, Francis went to the pope to ask permission to start a new order.

At first, the pope did not listen to Francis; but then he had a dream: the great pillars of the church were falling. But then there was Francis, holding up the collapsing Church! The pope gave Francis his permission, and Francis founded the Franciscans to live as Jesus had and to spread His love to all the world. Francis even set out as far as Egypt to try to convert the sultan, who was fighting Christians during the Crusades. Impressed by Francis, the sultan promised to treat his Christian prisoners kindly, though he did not become a Christian, and let Francis return home unharmed.

Two years before Francis's death, a seraph angel with six wings appeared to Francis as he prayed. Blinding rays of light shot forth from the angel and pierced Francis's side, feet, and hands. From then on, Francis bore the stigmata, the Holy Wounds of Jesus' Crucifixion, until he died a holy death.

St. Francis of Assisi, help me to live like Christ!