

For the Feast of Saint Francis

Introduction & Opening Prayer

Leader: As we celebrate the Feast of St. Francis, we remember that above all we are called to love: God, one another and all of God's blessed creation. Clean water gives nutrients to the trees that clean the air that fills our lungs. We use our lungs to advocate with and for the poor and vulnerable such that all may flourish. Our ecosystem functions or fails as one, and so too do we thrive or wither as one.

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis' letter on the environment, the teachings of St. Francis are foundational: "Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically."¹ Indeed, through the legacy of St. Francis, we are each invited to use our gifts and talents to build up a living ecosystem wherein each part is integrated to the good of the whole such that nothing falls through the cracks.

As we call to mind all the ways in which we may or may not contribute to the good of the whole living ecosystem, let us begin with the words of St. Francis:

***All:* Enlighten the darkness of my heart.
Give me right faith, sure hope and perfect charity.
Fill me with understanding and knowledge that I may fulfill your command.**

Reading 1: *Laudato Si'*

"[Saint Francis'] response to the world around him was so much more than intellectual appreciation or economic calculus, for to him each and every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection. [...] Such a conviction cannot be written off as naive romanticism, for it affects the choices which determine our behaviour. If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously."²

Reading 2: Luke 10:25-37

¹ https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html, #10.

² Ibid, #11.

"There was a scholar of the law who stood up to test Jesus and said,
'Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?'
Jesus said to him, 'What is written in the law?
How do you read it?'
He said in reply,
'You shall love the Lord, your God,
with all your heart,
with all your being,
with all your strength,
and with all your mind,
and your neighbor as yourself.'
He replied to him, 'You have answered correctly;
do this and you will live.'"

The gospel of the Lord.

Reflection

In the gospel reading, whether he realizes or not, the scholar of the law already has the deceptively simple answer all along: love. Love God and love others wholeheartedly and unreservedly. We know that loving is deeply important, but we do not always excel at understanding what that looks like in our daily lives. Indeed, when we are presented with challenges or misunderstandings, loving becomes even more difficult.

One such challenge, which we are reminded of in the excerpt from *Laudato Si'*, is not only the call to love nature and the environment but how that demonstrated care is intimately connected to creating the social conditions necessary to realize human fulfillment and thriving.

In our opening prayer, St. Francis asks God to fill him with that which will allow him to fulfill the command to love above all and with all of who we are. What has God already given you that has helped you to love? Where might you seek more understanding? What dark corners of your heart could use some light? How can such light and understanding help us expand our love of neighbor to include all of God's blessed creation?

Intercessions

Leader: When we are tired or run down, as so many of us who work in health care are, it can be difficult to love freely and deeply. Inspired by the life of St. Francis, we ask God to strengthen us as we strive to love more deeply all of God's blessed creation. Please respond: Enlighten the darkness of our hearts.

All: Enlighten the darkness of our hearts.

Reader 1: When we encounter those who are difficult for us to love, who have done harm to us in body, mind or spirit ...

All: Enlighten the darkness of our hearts.

Reader 2: We remember those whom we have hurt or have failed to love, whose love and pardon we humbly pray for ...

All: Enlighten the darkness of our hearts.

Reader 1: In our moments of doubt and struggle, when love seems powerless in the face of difficulty ...

All: Enlighten the darkness of our hearts.

Reader 2: When times of grief overwhelm, when loneliness and despair seem to be endless in our lives ...

All: Enlighten the darkness of our hearts.

Reader 1: In times of conflict, when anger is more satisfying than mercy and patience ...

All: Enlighten the darkness of our hearts.

Reader 2: When we struggle to love ourselves, to see ourselves as God sees us always ...

All: Enlighten the darkness of our hearts.

Closing Prayer

Leader: Let us close in prayer together:

Side 1: Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;



Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.

Side 2: O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

All: Amen.