

## St. Francis of Assisi



St. Francis of Assisi was a Catholic friar. His real name was Giovanni Francesco di Bernadone. He was born around 1181 and died in 1226. He began the order of Friars called the Franciscans.

St Francis is the patron saint of animals and the environment. His feast day is 4<sup>th</sup> October.

There are many stories about the life of St. Francis. Most of them tell us of his love for animals. One collection of the legends is called the 'Fioretti' or 'Little Flowers'.

One day, Francis was travelling with friends when they came to a place where lots of birds were roosting in the trees. Francis asked his friends to wait for him, while he went over to preach to the birds. The birds surrounded him on all sides. They seemed to be attracted by the power of his voice. Not one bird flew away. They all stayed and listened to the friar.

Read what St. Francis said below.

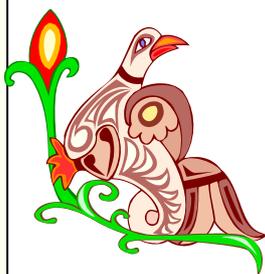




"My sister birds, you owe much to God, and you must always and in everyplace give praise to Him; for He has given you freedom to wing through the sky and He has clothed you... you neither sow nor reap, and God feeds you and gives you rivers and fountains for your thirst, and mountains and valleys for shelter, and tall trees for your nests. And although you neither know how to spin or weave, God dresses you and your children, for the Creator loves you greatly and He blesses you abundantly. Therefore... always seek to praise God."

Talk to your class:

What do you think St. Francis was trying to tell the birds?



Another legend from the tales says that in the city of Gubbio, where Francis lived for a while, there was a wolf that was terrorizing the area. It was said to eat both men and animals. Francis was sorry for the people of the town, and went up into the hills to find the animal.

The friar's friends soon left him, as they were afraid of the wolf, but Francis went on.



When he came upon the wolf, he made the sign of the cross and called the animal to come to him. The wolf closed its huge jaws and lay down at the feet of the saint.

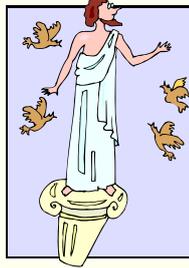


"Brother Wolf, you do much harm in these parts and you have done great evil...", said Francis. "All these people accuse you and curse you..."

But brother wolf, I would like to make peace between you and the people".

Then St. Francis led the wolf into the town and made it make peace with the people. As the wolf had only killed from hunger, he made the people agree to feed the wolf. In return, the wolf promised never again to kill them or their flocks. He even made peace with the town dogs!

St. Francis then blessed the wolf. **It is worth remembering that not one killing of a human has *ever* been proved to be by a wolf.**



The legends we are told about St. Francis shows his love of the natural world. He wrote a poem called 'The Canticle of the Sun'

It tells of a love and appreciation of Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Mother Earth, Brother Fire, etc. and all of God's creations.

"All praise to you, Oh Lord, for all these brother and sister creatures."

St Francis believed that the world was good and beautiful, but suffers because of the some of the things men do. He preached that man and all creatures should praise God, and the duty of men to protect and enjoy nature as both the protectors of God's creation, and as creatures ourselves.

Legend says that St. Francis, on his deathbed, thanked his donkey for carrying and helping him throughout his life, and that his donkey wept.

