

OPENING OF THE CENTENARY OF THE CANTICLE OF THE CREATURES JANUARY 11, 2025

SAN DAMIANO (I MOMENT)

Opening Song

The presider, addressing the people, says: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The people respond: **Amen.**

Then the president greets the people, spreading his arms and saying: The God of hope, that fills us with every joy and peace in faith by the power of the Holy Spirit, be with all of you.

The people respond: And with your spirit.

Leader:

"You have created the world in the variety of its elements. To man, made in your image, you gave the wonders of the universe, so that in your works they may glorify you" (MRI20 p.363). From these words we grasp the essence of the relationship between creation, man and God. Pope Francis in the encyclical letter Laudato Si', reflecting the language of Saint Francis, underscores: "The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face." (n. 233). Created things are recognized as gifts of God and as a reflection of the Paschal Mystery, which radiates throughout creation. This is why Saint Francis calls everyone and everything "brothers", including the natural elements, because all are touched by the Easter of the Risen One. Again, the Holy Father in Laudato Si' states: "The Lord, in the culmination of the mystery of the Incarnation, chose to reach our intimate depths through a fragment of matter. He comes not from above, but from within, he comes that we might find him in this world of ours." (n.236). Let us live, then, this moment not only in remembrance of the prodigious event celebrated herein, the Canticle of the Creatures, but let us allow ourselves, now as well, to be touched by the grace of the Paschal Mystery, so loved, sung and lived by the Seraphic Father.

From the Assisi Compilation:

[FF 1614-5]

Blessed Francis stayed at San Damiano for just more than fifty days. Unable to bear natural light during the day, nor the brightness of the fire during the night, he was always in darkness in the house, inside that little cell. Not only that, but he suffered such excruciating pain in his eyes night and day that he could hardly rest or sleep, and this increased and worsened his eyes and his other infirmities. [...] One night, as Blessed Francis reflected on the many tribulations he endured, he was moved to pity for himself and said in his heart: "Lord, come to the aid of my infirmities, so that I may be able to bear them with patience!" And suddenly he was told in spirit: "Brother, tell me: what if, in exchange for your illnesses and sufferings, someone were to give you a great and precious treasure? And it would be so great and precious that, even if all the earth were changed to pure gold and all the stones to precious stones and all water to balsam, you would still judge and hold these things as nothing, as



(Wis 13,1-6)

if they were earth, stones and water, in comparison to the great and precious treasure which was given you. Would you not greatly rejoice?" "Lord," blessed Francis answered, "this treasure would indeed be great, worth seeking, very precious, greatly lovable and desirable." "Then, brother," he was told, "be glad and rejoice in your illnesses and troubles, because as of now, you are as secure as if you were already in my kingdom."

The next morning upon rising, he said to his companions: "if the emperor were to give a whole kingdom to one of his servants, should he not greatly rejoice? But, what if it were the whole empire, would he not rejoice even more?" [...] "I want therefore, for his praise and for my own consolation and for the edification of others, to compose a new *Praise of the Lord* for his creatures, which we use every day, and without which we cannot live. Through them the human race greatly offends the Creator, and every day we show ourselves ungrateful for such great graces, because we do not praise, as we should, our Creator and giver of all good". Sitting down, he began to meditate and then said:

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord, Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honor, and all blessing. To You alone, Most High, do they belong, and no man is worthy to mention your name.

Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun,
Who is the day and through whom You give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor; and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars, in heaven you formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, through brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather, through whom You give sustenance to your creatures.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water, who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom You light the night, and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You, my Lord, though our Sister Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruits with colored flowers and herbs.

The reading from the book of Wisdom is proclaimed:

From the Book of Wisdom:
Foolish by nature were all who were in ignorance of God,
and who from the good things seen did not succeed in knowing the one who is,
and from studying the works did not discern the artisan.
Instead either fire, or wind, or the swift air,
or the circuit of the stars, or the mighty water,
or the luminaries of heaven,



they considered gods, the governors of the world.

Now if out of the joy in their beauty they thought them gods,
let them know how far more excellent is the Lord than these,
for the original source of beauty fashioned them.

Or if they were struck by their might and energy,
let them realize from these things how much more powerful is the one who made them.

For from the greatness and the beauty of created things,
their original author, by analogy, is contemplated.

But yet, for these the blame is less;
for they have gone astray perhaps,
though they seek God and wish to find him.

Responsorial Psalm from the canticle of *Dn 3*, 57-88.56

R. Laudate omnes gentes, laudate Dominum, Laudate omnes gentes, laudate Dominum.

Bless the Lord, all you works of the Lord, praise and exalt him above all forever.

Angels of the Lord, bless the Lord,
You heavens, bless the Lord.

All you waters above the heavens, bless the Lord, All you hosts of the Lord, bless the Lord. Sun and moon, bless the Lord, Stars of heaven bless the Lord. *R*.

Every shower and dew, bless the Lord, All you winds, bless the Lord. Fire and heat, bless the Lord, Cold and warmth, bless the Lord.

Dew and rain, bless the Lord, frost and chill, bless the Lord. Ice and snow, bless the Lord, Nights and days, bless the Lord. *R*.

Light and darkness, bless the Lord, Lightnings and clouds, bless the Lord. Let the earth bless the Lord, praise and exalt him above all forever.

Mountains and hills, bless the Lord, Everything growing from the earth, bless the Lord. You springs, bless the Lord, Seas and rivers, bless the Lord. *R*.



You sea monsters and all water creatures, bless the Lord, All you birds of the air, bless the Lord. All you beasts, wild and tame, bless the Lord, You sons of men, bless the Lord.

O, Israel, bless the Lord, praise and exalt him above all forever. Priests of the Lord, bless the Lord, Servants of the Lord, bless the Lord. *R*.

Spirits and souls of the just, bless the Lord, Holy men of humble heart, bless the Lord. Hananiah, Azariah, Mishael, bless the Lord praise and exalt him above all forever.

Let us bless the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, praise and exalt him above all forever.

Blessed are you, Lord, in the firmament of heaven,

Praiseworthy and glorious and exalted above all forever. *R*.

Commentary

The Canticle of Brother Sun opens with the 'adjective' "most high", attributed to the Lord. It is noteworthy that this is the only one chosen to designate God himself. There is no doubt that it expresses a profound goal of the soul, its most elevated aspiration, the impulse towards the divine. But here the movement towards the Most High comes up against a self-consciousness: "and nullu homo ène dignu Te mentovare" (No one is worthy to mention your Name!). No praise, however high, can ever express the mystery of God. Francis is aware of this; he recognizes and accepts it. He thus turns to creatures: "Laudato sie, mi' Signore, cum tutte le Tue creature". (Praise be to you, my Lord, with all your creatures!) He renounces naming the Transcendent and speaks of things, and sings the praises of the world down here. The visible universe will be the path of his praise, his way toward the sacred. The initial movement of the canticle, which was purely vertical and entirely oriented towards transcendence, is in a certain sense associated with a horizontal movement, of openness and fraternal communion with all creatures. The man who recognized himself as unworthy of naming the Most High, now recognizes himself as a "brother" of every creature. Francis does not cease to be sensitive and available to the call of the Most High. But for him, the path that leads to the Most High is paradoxically a path that goes from heaven to earth. From the highest of the heavens, where "Sir Brother Sun" beams, Francis' praise gradually descends in the direction of the closest, most accessible and also increasingly humble realities. The itinerary of praise places us back among things, in the very heart of things. It brings us back to our humble origins. But the cosmic path is, moreover, also a path of intimacy. All the cosmic elements with which Francis fraternizes reveal a depth. Duly imagined, full of unconscious values, they open, in a certain sense, before the soul, like a path toward one's own interiority. Under the guise of sensible, beautiful and desirable realities, with which it finds itself in close and mysterious kinship, does not the soul perhaps unconsciously encounter its very self?

(excerpt from E., Leclerc, The symbols of union. A reading of the Canticle of the Creatures by Saint Francis of Assisi, Padua: EMP, 2012, pp. 46-8)

Silence



Message from the representatives of the Franciscan Family Conference:

[Fr. Massimo Fusarelli, OFM]

We celebrate the centenary of a text that is certainly a poem, but first and foremost a prayer. The opening words leave no doubt: Francis addresses the "Most High, omnipotent, good Lord". We must read this text, then, with a prayerful spirit in order to truly understand it. We want to associate ourselves with Francis' prayer, in accordance with our faith, as we express it in prayer and in thanksgiving. The first creature upon which Francis fixes his gaze is the sun; of it he writes: "it is beautiful and radiant with great splendor: of You, Most High, it carries a likeness". In these words, we find a key to understanding the entire Canticle: the sun and all creatures are a sign of God, they "carry significance" of him, they speak to us of him, if we know how to look at them with appropriate eyes, i.e. eyes illuminated by faith and fixed on Jesus Christ, who is the sun of justice that rises from on high.

"Most High, Almighty, Good Lord" we pray to you: open our eyes to a gaze of faith that knows in Christ how to recognize the significance of your presence in the cosmos and in history. Amen.

[Fr. Carlos Alberto Trovarelli, OFM Conv]

"Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather."

After the sun, the moon and the stars, which are celestial creatures, Francis turns his gaze to what is under the sky: the air, water, earth and fire. First of all, he praises the Lord "for brother wind and for the air, cloudy and serene and for every kind of weather." It is interesting to note the connection that he recognizes between the air and climate. We are particularly sensitive to this connection, in a time of climate change and global warming that is causing everyone concern. As Pope Francis writes in Laudato Si': "Climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods. It represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day" (LS 25).

"Most High, almighty, good Lord", help us to collaborate with those who are committed to improving climatic conditions; give us the courage to choose frugality and a commitment to limit our consumption and to restore balance in creation. Amen.

[Tibor Kauser, OFS]

"Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water, who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste". Sister water is the first thing that is mentioned in the Book of Genesis. She was created before light, before the sky, and "the spirit of God was hovering over the waters" (Gen. 1.1). How precious is she, being chosen to give space above for the Spirit of God! This same Spirit of God has chosen us not only to hover above but to dwell in us! Praised be you, Lord, for sister water, the precious one! Sister water is essential for life. "I saw water flowing out from beneath the threshold of the temple toward the east. ... Wherever the river flows, every sort of living creature ... shall live" can we read at prophet Ezekiel (Ez. 47.1, 47.9). She is not only useful, but we cannot live without her. How great would it be if we could be running together with her and giving life! Praised be you, Lord, for sister water, the useful one! Sister water is humbly serving either at washing the feet (cf. Jn. 13.5) or changing into wine to give joy (cf. Jn. 2.8), or to be the road under the feet of Jesus (cf. Mt. 14.25), all being this at the disposal of the Lord. Let us start washing the feet, giving joy, and giving way to the Lord, humbly! Praised be you, Lord, for sister water, the humble one! Sister water as created by God is clear, pure, chaste, and is to cleanse, to purify. "I will sprinkle clean water upon you ... and I will cleanse you" (Ez. 36.25). If we seek sister water, the chaste one of God, we will be cleansed. Praised be you, Lord, for sister water, the *chaste* one!

Hymn



CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA MAGGIORE Sanctuary of the Stripping - Bishopric (II MOMENT)

The presider, addressing the people, says:

Brothers and sisters, we are gathered here to continue to praise and bless the Most High good Lord with the words of the Canticle of Brother Sun. Saint Francis, in his dance of praise, invites the contemplative man to enter into two moments of his existence: when he forgives and when he dies.

Let us pray. All-powerful, most holy, most high and supreme God, all good, supreme good, totally good, You who alone are good, may we give You all praise, all glory, all thanks, all honor and blessing and all good things. Fiat! Fiat! Amen. [Praise at all the Hours: FF 265]

Guide:

"Praise be to you, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love and bear infirmity and tribulation". The stanza of forgiveness was composed by Brother Francis following a regrettable episode that occurred in the city of Assisi.

From the Assisi Compilation:

[FF 1616]

At that same time, while he was lying ill, having already composed and asked to have sung the *Praises*, it happened that the bishop of Assisi then in office, excommunicated the Mayor of the city. The latter, enraged, by way of retaliation, had this harsh proclamation announced: that no one should sell to the bishop or buy from him or make contracts with him; they had come to hate each other to just such an extent. Francis, sick as he was, was seized with pity for them, especially since no ecclesiastic or secular was interested in restoring peace and harmony between the two of them. And he said to his companions: "It is a great shame for us, servants of God, that the bishop and the mayor hate each other so much, and no one takes the trouble to restore peace and harmony between them." He then composed this stanza, to be added to the *Praises*:

Praised be You, my Lord, for those who forgive for Your love, and bear infirmity and tribulation. Blessed are those who endure in peace, because by You, Most High, they will be crowned.

[...] The Saint said to two of his companions: «Go and sing the Canticle of Brother Sun in the presence of the bishop and the mayor and the others who are present there. I trust in the Lord that He will humble their hearts, and they will make peace and return to their former friendship and affection». [...] After the Canticle was finished, the mayor said before all those present: «I tell you in truth, that not only do I forgive the lord bishop, whom I must consider my lord, but I would even forgive anyone who had murdered my brother or son». And so he cast himself at the bishop's feet, saying: "For the love of our Lord Jesus Christ and his servant Francis, I am ready to make amends to you for everything, as you please." The bishop took him by his hands, stood up and replied: "Because of the office I hold, I should be humble; but unfortunately, I have a temperament prone to anger. I beg you to forgive me." And so the two embraced and kissed each other with great cordiality and affection. The brothers were very impressed, taking note of the sanctity of Francis, since what he had predicted about their peace and harmony had been fulfilled to the letter.

Song of interlude



Guide:

"Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Bodily Death." For Francis, death does not represent the end of life, inevitable for every man, but the door that leads to life, the moment of full conformation with Jesus who died and rose again.

From the Assisi Compilation

[FF 1547]

Then Blessed Francis, although worn out by illness, praised the Lord with great fervor of spirit and interior and exterior joy. Then he replied to his companion: "Well then, if death is imminent, call to me Brother Angelo and Brother Leo, so that they may sing to me of Sister Death." The two presented themselves before him and sang, in tears, the Canticle of Brother Sun and of the other creatures of the Lord, composed by the saint himself during his illness, in praise of the Lord and for the consolation of his soul and the soul of the others. In this Canticle, before the last stanza, he inserted the 'alas' of Sister Death, this one:

Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death, from whom no living man can escape. Woe to those who die in mortal sin; blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will, for the second death will do them no harm.

Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks and serve them with great humility.

Commentary

Francis wanted to add two more stanzas to his song. They came to him later, under particular circumstances. At first glance, there seems to be no connection to that which precedes them. The entire Canticle had applied to the realities of nature, forming a cosmic praise; and now, instead, brutally, in the penultimate stanza it focuses on human realities, on the destiny of man dealing with his fellow men. For Francis, these verses are in fact in harmony with the entire work. From this point of view, there are two characteristic traits of human relationships for Francis. First of all, he places strong emphasis on personal encounters. A second characteristic trait of Francis' relationships with his fellow men is that he places them under the sign of peace. The peace that he wishes for each and every one is divine favor, forgiveness, a return to grace, divine friendship rediscovered, in short, total reconciliation with God.

The last stanza, however, is the welcome that the author of the Canticle addresses to his own death. Greeting in death a "sister", means recognizing a close bond of kinship between her and us; it means discovering, in the complete otherness of death, not an extraneous reality, but another dimension of ourselves. The Canticle, therefore, is the expression of a profound deprivation of self; Francis, in fact, has freed himself from any self-possessive attitude. He now exists more in God than in himself. Whoever has agreed to disappropriate himself and abandon himself to God and his creative plan is already immersed in the Eternal and is open to great hope. It is from the depths of death, welcomed as a 'sister', that Francis celebrates the splendor of creation.

(extract from E., Leclerc, The symbols of union. A reading of the Canticle of the Creatures by St. Francis of Assisi, Padua: EMP, 2012, pp. 177-98)



The presider, addressing the people, says:

Brothers and sisters, let us now exchange a sign of peace, with the certainty that reconciliation springs from mutual forgiveness.

Taizé Canon: **Da nobis pacem**

Message from the representatives of the Franciscan Family Conference:

[Sr Frances Marie Duncan, CFI-TOR]

Francis' praise continues by looking to fire and to the earth, of which he says she is, at once, sister and mother: sister like any other creature, but also mother because she nourishes us, producing "diverse fruits with colorful flowers and herbs". Looking at the earth reminds us of the problems of equitable distribution of that food that the earth produces. Today we still live in situations of inequality that, instead of decreasing, continue to grow, with the many poor becoming poorer and the few rich becoming richer. Even the right to own land cannot be absolute, but must be subject to the limits set by the existence of other human beings and the knowledge that, first and foremost, the earth is God's.

"Most high, most almighty, good Lord", we thank you for the fruits that the earth gives us. We recognize that all good comes from You and we want to joyfully return it to You and Your chosen representatives, who are the poor of this world. Amen.

[Fr. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR]

After praising inanimate creatures, Francis praises the Lord "for those who give pardon for Your love, and bear infirmity and tribulation." The Canticle does not only speak of the beauty of Nature, but also of the difficulties of human history: if there is praise for forgiveness, it means that there are sins to forgive, as well as infirmity and tribulation. We find that association between the environment and man, that Pope Francis has taught us to call "integral ecology", because "a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach, ... to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (LS 49). Finally, Francis teaches that difficulties can be endured in peace: "blessed are those who endure in peace", because the peace that makes one blessed, flourishes amid obstacles and adversity. "Most High Almighty Good Lord" give peace to this world of ours, the peace that blossoms amidst

"Most High, Almighty, Good Lord", give peace to this world of ours, the peace that blossoms amidst infirmities and tribulations, and accompanies forgiveness for your love, the peace that comes from you and renders us blessed. Amen.

[Fr. Roberto Genuin, OFM Cap]

The Canticle, first of all, contemplates the beauty of the cosmos; it then expands to the difficult events of man, and finally casts its gaze on the ultimate and definitive reality for us all: death. And always, for every reality contemplated, praise rises! Even for death, Francis can say "Praised be to You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death." What could explain this attitude of Francis, who is always able to praise? His secret is faith in a God, who is "good, every good, the supreme good, who alone is good". Only such faith can explain this constant praise, which recognizes that everything comes from God and that all good is restored to Him in thanksgiving and in praise.

"Most High, omnipotent, good Lord", give us Francis' profound faith, that we may recognize You as the only good, and joyfully restore to you the gifts of the cosmos, the events of history, and all of our life, until that last and final restitution that will unite us to You forever. Amen.

[Message by H.E. Mons. Domenico Sorrentino, Bishop of Assisi - Nocera Umbra - Gualdo Tadino and Foligno]



The presider, addressing the people, says:

Dear brothers and sisters, accepting the final invitation of Saint Francis, we renew our praise and our song of thanksgiving to God on behalf of all people and we pray:

R. Kyrie, eleison.

Almighty Father, we praise You for all that You are and we thank You for all that You give to us, may we be inspired by Saint Francis to praise and thank You "for" and "with" all Your creatures. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, You are our Creator and You have redeemed us with the Blood of Your Son Jesus Christ. Grant that we may never forget that we have been saved by Him. Let us pray.

Good Father, you wish that the work of your Son be perpetuated in Holy Mother Church, protect Pope Francis, our bishops, ministers, and religious, and all your faithful people, so that united in love, they may give witness to the beauty of belonging to you. Let us pray.

Holy Father, you wanted the family of the Friars Minor and the Poor Sisters to spring from Saint Francis, grant us to be witnesses of fraternity, minority and poverty, so that those we meet along our path, traveled for your love, may be attracted to you. Let us pray.

Father of mercy, give your Spirit to us who are gathered here today, so that it may inspire our hearts to make courageous choices for poverty, generosity and respect for every creature. Let us pray.

The presider extends his hands and sings or says with the people:

Our Father

The presider, facing the people and with his hands extended, says the following prayer:

Holy Father, because all of us, wretched and sinners, are not worthy to pronounce your name, we humbly pray that our Lord Jesus Christ, Your beloved Son, in whom You are well pleased, together with the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, may give you thanks, as you and He please, for everything, He who is always sufficient for you in everything and through whom you have done such great things for us. Amen. Alleluia. (*Rnb* 23: FF 66)

It ends with the blessing:

The presider: The Lord be with you.

The people respond: And with your Spirit.

Laying hands on the faithful:

The presider: May Almighty God bless you, Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit.

The people respond: Amen.

The presider: Glorify the Lord with your life. Go in peace.

The people respond: We give thanks to God.

Hymn



CRYPT OF ST. FRANCIS

[MOMENT WITH THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE FRANCISCAN FAMILY]

The representatives of the conference of the Franciscan family descend into the Crypt with a floral tribute to St Francis, while there is musical accompaniment.

Arriving in the Crypt after placing the flowers on the altar, the representatives of the conference of the Franciscan family praise the Lord, together with creation, with the prayer written by Pope Francis in the encyclical *Laudato si'*:

We praise you, Father, with all your creatures, They came forth from your all-powerful hand; they are yours, filled with your presence and your tender love. Praise be to you!

Son of God, Jesus, through you all things were made. You were formed in the womb of Mary our Mother, you became part of this earth, and you gazed upon this world with human eyes. Today you are alive in every creature in your risen glory. Praise be to you!

Holy Spirit, by your light you guide this world towards the Father's love and accompany creation as it groans in travail. You also dwell in our hearts and you inspire us to do what is good. Praise be to you!

Triune Lord, wondrous community of infinite love, teach us to contemplate you in the beauty of the universe, for all things speak of you.

Awaken our praise and thankfulness for every being that you have made.

Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined to everything that is.

God of love, show us our place in this world as channels of your love for all the creatures of this earth, for not one of them is forgotten in your sight. Enlighten those who possess power and money that they may avoid the sin of indifference, that they may love the common good, advance the weak, and care for this world in which we live. The poor and the earth are crying out. O Lord, seize us with your power and light, help us to protect all life, to prepare for a better future,



for the coming of your Kingdom of justice, peace, love and beauty. Praise be to you!

Amen.

(Pope Francis)

The presider continues with the incensing of the saint's relic while the antiphon Salve Padre Santo is sung:

Hail, holy Father, splendor of the homeland, model of the Minors, mirror of virtue way of justice, norm of life: guide us from this exile to the kingdom of heaven.

It ends with a blessing:

The presider: The Lord be with you.

The people respond: And with your spirit.

Stretched out their hands, they say:

The presider: The Lord bless you and keep you.

The people respond: Amen.

The presider: May his face shine upon you and grant you his mercy.

The people respond: Amen.

The presider: May He look upon you and grant you his peace.

The people respond: Amen.

The presider: May the blessing of Almighty God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit descend upon you

and remain with you forever. The people respond: **Amen.**

The presider: Glorify the Lord with your lives. Go in peace.

The people respond: Thanks be to God.

Final Song