



Francis of Assisi:

A SEED FOR ETERNAL LIFE

The Spiritual Legacy of a Christian Man

1226 — 2026

Franciscus

Eight Hundredth Anniversary of the Death of St. Francis



On the cover: San Francesco, tempera su tavola, Cimabue
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Eight Hundredth Anniversary of the Death of St. Francis

Eight hundred years ago, Francis of Assisi left this world. But the seed he planted continues to germinate.

In his letter to the Galatians, Saint Paul writes words that seem mysterious: *“one who sows for the spirit will reap eternal life from the spirit.”*¹

These words were fulfilled in Francis. After welcoming the Spirit of Jesus into himself, to the point of bearing the marks of the Crucified One on his body, he himself became a seed of the Gospel filled with the fruits of eternal life.

This is the precious legacy he left us. A legacy that still speaks to the hearts and minds of our generation today, helping us to believe in the Gospel, *“to have the Spirit of the Lord and Its holy activity.”*² and to become signs of peace.

With this letter, we wish to thank the Lord for the seed of the Gospel that he planted in the Church 800 years ago and which is still alive and fruitful today. Together, we wish to recall some fundamental aspects of this Christian history. These aspects remain a legacy for all those who, following Francis, wish to follow in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus.

¹ Gal 6:8.

² *Later Rule* 10:8.

We will be guided by the *Testament*, written by the Saint shortly before his death. In it, Francis recalled the fundamental occasions of his experience: the initial events, his encounter with the Church, and the fruit that was born together with his brothers. Only by starting from that past, he said, is it possible to understand the present and build the future.

So, it is for us. That narrative is a precious legacy for understanding “Francis’ intentions.” We can thus choose anew our evangelical calling today, according to the Christian life lived by the Saint.



1. The Encounters That Changed Everything

A seed filled with mercy and faith

“The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, the grace to begin doing penance.”³

Thus begins the Testament. Francis recounts a profound conversion: the Lord granted him a radical change in his way of seeing and experiencing life. No longer the logic of a knight who must excel above all others, rising to power. But that of a brother who shares in the fate of the least, descending among the lowest of whom he is a part, because he too is a leper. It was an experience that transformed the desires of his heart and the logic of his mind. It freed him from the bitterness of an existence dominated by rivalry. It led him to the sweetness of a life given to the joy of sharing.

The eyes of lepers

This reversal came about thanks to two encounters: First, with the sight of the lepers.⁴ Francis left the comforts of Assisi and went among them. The Testament recalls this in simple yet profound words:

³ *Testament* 1.

⁴ *Testament* 1-3.

“And the Lord Himself led me among them and I showed mercy to them.”⁵

The key word is mercy. Francis' life did not change because he chose poverty, but because he showed mercy. Of course, poverty was the way to get there. If he had not become a neighbor, sharing the fate of the poor, he would not have been able to give his heart to them in their misery.

The choice of poverty encompasses all the other virtues dear to Francis: humility, patience, simplicity, and minority. Without them, there would be no mercy.

That is why we must never separate these two words. Poverty without mercy becomes an idol. Mercy without poverty is reduced to ideology.

REMEMBER

- Poverty without mercy becomes an idol.
- Mercy without poverty is reduced to ideology.

The eyes of the Crucified

His conversion was complete when Francis encountered the crucified Christ of San Damiano. Before him, a prayer flowed from his heart which, together with the *Pater Noster*, he would use constantly with his brothers and which he later wanted to include in his Testament: *“We adore You, Lord Jesus Christ, in all Your churches throughout the whole world and we bless You, because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.”⁶*

⁵ *Testament 2.*

⁶ *Testament 4-5.*

In the glorious face of Christ crucified, Francis saw the open eyes of the Son turned toward the Father. Those eyes were the sure sign of God's love for every wounded person in need of salvation.

This was the "*message of the cross.*"⁷ which he heard at San Damiano: God became poor, coming among us, to show us mercy. In that church and in all the other churches where he contemplated the glorious Christ, he repeated that prayer as a summary of his experience of faith in that visage, in which he recognized and therefore adored and blessed, praised and thanked the love that is God.

A new man was born

The eyes of the lepers and the eyes of the Crucified gave Francis a seed for eternal life. From that moment on, he began to live in praise of God the Father revealed in Christ, in humility towards himself, feeling himself to be a beloved son, and in mercy towards all men, whom he welcomed as blessed brothers. A new man was born, in whom the Gospel had taken root, thus obtaining a true and new wisdom towards himself, towards man, and towards God.

This is the first legacy that Francis leaves us: the poor and Christ crucified as the fundamental and integral reference points of our Christian vision of life. To forget this and live differently means to allow our vocation as Franciscans, our true penance (i.e., our evangelical conversion) to evaporate.

⁷ *ICor 1:18.*



2. The Church: Poor yet Fertile Soil

Where to plant the seed

After his conversion, Francis found himself faced with a crucial question: where should he plant the seed that God had sown in him? What soil was most suitable for it to grow and bear fruit?

The ecclesial situation at that time was not easy. The clergy was often impoverished morally and spiritually. Many lay movements, reinforced by their evangelical choices, judged, condemned, and abandoned the Church.

For Francis, however, the Church remained that field in the parable in which the sower⁸ never stopped sowing the seed. Even through the rocks, thorns, and hardness of the soil, that field remained the place where the seed of the Gospel could germinate.

San Damiano: learning to love the Church

Francis spent about a year in San Damiano after leaving his father's house and breaking with his commercial and competitive mind-set.⁹ That was the time when Francis was educated in ecclesial life, learning to love it with humility and fidelity without falling into the

⁸ Cf. *Mt* 13:1-23, *Mk* 4:1-20 and *Lk* 8:4-15.

⁹ *ICel* 15; *Legend of the Three Companions* 19.

spiritual pride of the perfect. He stayed with the poor priest Peter¹⁰ who resided there. A friendship developed between them.¹¹

It was during this period that: “*the Lord gave me great faith in priests*,”¹² that is, in the Church. An experience so profound that it will last forever: “*If I find poor priests, I want to fear, love, and honor them as my lords*.”¹³

He had spent a crucial period of his evangelical development with that poor priest. He had been educated in the faith of the Church, recognized as the sacramental center of the revelation of God’s love.

REMEMBER

- The Church, for all its thorns, remains the place where the seed of the Gospel can germinate.

The Eucharist: the heart of the mystery

The Eucharist was sure proof of this mystery. In it, “*every day*”¹⁴ the Most High and Almighty allowed himself to be manipulated by the poor and perhaps impure hands of the priests.”

Francis remembers it with amazement: “*I see nothing materially of the most high Son of God except His most holy Body and Blood*.”¹⁵

Two fundamental aspects were intertwined in his great devotion to the Eucharist. The first is love for that poor soil that is the Church,

¹⁰ Cf. *The Anonymous of Perugia* I:7.

¹¹ *Legend of the Three Companions* 21-22.

¹² *Testament* 6.

¹³ *Testament* 7-8.

¹⁴ *Admonitions* I:16-18.

¹⁵ *Testament* 10.

in which God humbly submits himself and “*each day comes down upon the altar in the hands of a priest.*”¹⁶ The second is contemplating the mystery of a God who is “humility,”¹⁷ who gives himself to us “*in the humble appearance of bread.*”

In the poor and humble bread that is the Eucharist, Francis held in his hands not only a memorial of the Church’s worth, but also the sacrament in which to contemplate every day Jesus’ mindset: humility and poverty as the only ways to become a gift of mercy.

The Church and the Eucharist are the second legacy Francis leaves us: the soil in which to plant our seed of evangelism to make it truly Christian, and the rationale that nourishes us every day to bear the fruit of eternal life.

¹⁶ Cf. *Admonitions* I:18.

¹⁷ Cf. *Letter to the Entire Order* 28.



3. Brothers for Bringing Peace to the World

The gift of brothers

In San Damiano, Francis had found his place in life. He sought nothing else. But God surprised him again, giving him the unexpected gift of brothers.

With them, he would live “according to the Holy Gospel.”¹⁸ and would go throughout the world proclaiming peace.¹⁹ The seed of the Gospel would bear its most abundant fruit.

A brotherhood without power

Francis recalls: “*And after the Lord gave me some brothers, no one showed me what I had to do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel.*”²⁰

With his first companions, he did not want to create a pyramidal order, but rather a circular brotherhood. He wanted to eliminate the vertical principle of power, typical of the feudal order, and establish a reciprocity of service that he saw shining in the Gospel.

¹⁸ *Testament* 14-15.

¹⁹ Cf. *Testament* 23.

²⁰ *Testament* 14.

The various positions also had to match that dream: “*Let no one be called “prior,” but let everyone in general be called a lesser brother. Let one wash the feet of the other.*”²¹

Two roles would have guaranteed this: the superior as “*minister and servant*” in the service of the brothers,²² while acting in the manner of a “*mother*” capable of closeness and care in times of difficulty²³ Only in this way would the brothers have created among themselves true “*domesticity*”²⁴ and “*familiarity*,”²⁵ authentic fruits and a sure guarantee of living together “according to the Gospel.”

This is the logic that Francis confirms in his beautiful letter to an anonymous minister: those difficulties he was experiencing in guiding his brothers should be “*considered as grace.*”²⁶ Though sometimes painful, the wonder of human relationships, when experienced in the name of the Gospel, is what leads to a more fraternal world.

REMEMBER

- Not a pyramidal order, but a circular brotherhood.
- All brothers and minors: wash each other’s feet.

Witnesses who proclaim peace

From the fraternal lifestyle comes the second important fruit: being witnesses and proclaimers of peace.

²¹ Cf. *Earlier Rule* 6:3.

²² Cf. *Later Rule* 10.

²³ Cf. *Later Rule* 6.

²⁴ Cf. *Later Rule* 6:7.

²⁵ Cf. *Later Rule* 10:5.

²⁶ Cf. *Letter to a Minister* 2.

Francis recalls the task entrusted to him by the Lord: “*The Lord revealed a greeting to me that we would say: “May the Lord give you peace.”*²⁷

It was much more than a simple greeting; it was a program for evangelization. And it would only be realized if they remained true lesser brothers among the people. Men who were “*simple and subject to all,*”²⁸ their simplicity and minority had to be the content of that greeting of peace and the tactic which made it credible.

In the Rule, he specified: “*I counsel, admonish and exhort my brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ not to quarrel or argue or judge others when they go about in the world; but let them be meek, peaceful, modest, gentle, and humble, speaking courteously to everyone, as is becoming.*”²⁹

Only in this way, free from violence and strengthened by their humble subordination, could they fulfill their task: “*Into whatever house they enter, let them first say ‘Peace be to this house!’*”³⁰

And so, they were to be “lesser brothers,” that is, “*minstrels of the Lord who must move people’s hearts*” to peace.³¹ Earlier in the same text of the *Rule*, Francis had forbidden the brothers from riding horses.³² They were not to go out into the world as knights of Christ, imposing the power of their truth from above. They were called to remain lowly, to live “*among the poor and the powerless, the sick and the lepers, and the beggars by the wayside.*”³³

²⁷ *Testament* 23.

²⁸ *Testament* 19.

²⁹ *Later Rule* 3:10-11.

³⁰ *Later Rule* 3:13.

³¹ *Assisi Compilation* 83.

³² Cf. *Later Rule* 3:12.

³³ *Earlier Rule* 9:2.

Only in this way could they be the humble and peaceful presence necessary to inspire respect and dialogue. Only in this way could they promote peace in the Church, in society, and in the world.

Today more than ever, we perceive that the path of the meek and humble of heart, as Jesus was³⁴ is the only thing that can lead people to sincerely seek paths to peace. An interconnected and multifaceted world like ours requires a spirit of dialogue and collaboration in order to manage tensions and rivalries without violence.

³⁴ Cf. *Mt* 11:29.



The Seed Continues to Germinate

The legacy that calls us forth

This is the seed of eternal life planted in Francis' heart. A seed filled with mercy towards men and faith in the crucified love of Christ.

To help it grow, he entrusted it to the poor but fertile soil of the Church. In it, he wanted to begin to realize, already at this point in history, the evangelical dream of a world of peace in which we are all brothers and sisters.

There are three key sentiments from the Gospel that describe this precious legacy:

- Mercy towards the poor and love for Christ crucified.
- Submission to the Church, in which alone the love of God is made present in the Eucharist.
- Fraternal life of service and hospitality, a prerequisite for credible proclamation of reconciliation and peace.

Our responsibility

It is a task that continues today. It requires us to take on the responsibility of making that seed of evangelical life visible and fruitful.

For 800 years, men and women of the Franciscan family have been responding to this call. In the spirit of family, each according to their personal vocation; they live “*according to the form of the Holy Gospel.*”

What is asked of all of us is fruitfulness from our own humility and poverty and to be persistent and generous seeds of Christian life, no matter what state we find ourselves in.

Being true Christians also means being good citizens. Addressing real problems and seeking innovative solutions for a more just and fraternal world. This is the only way to bring about hope for peace.

Pilgrims approaching the Definitive City

So that we do not become discouraged in this endeavor, Francis reminds us that we are “*pilgrims and strangers in this world,*”³⁵ men who live in anticipation of the Definitive City.

Our efforts are those of *pilgrims*, of people who do not have the definitive solution, but who know where they are going. They know that they are called for eternity to live in communion with the living God and in communion with one another.

And they know that this communion will only be complete and definitive when “*God will be all in all.*”³⁶

³⁵ *Later Rule* 6:2; *1Pt* 2:11.

³⁶ *ICor* 15:28.

Lord Jesus Christ,
thank you for the seed of eternal life
that you planted in Francis.

Thank you because that seed continues to germinate,
from generation to generation.

May it also bear fruit in each of us:
mercy towards the poor,
love for You crucified,
fidelity to the Church,
love for the Eucharist,
fraternity without power,
the witness of peace.

Help us to live “according to the form of the Holy Gospel”
wherever we are and whatever we do.

May the Spirit make us passionate Christians, citizens of these times,
capable of facing real problems
and seeking a more just and fraternal world.
And remind us that we are pilgrims of hope,
on our way to the Definitive City,

where God, your and our Father, will be all in all. *Amen.*



The seed of Francis continues to germinate.
It is up to us to make it bear fruit.

Prot. N. 01/26

Assisi, 10 January 2026

800th Anniversary of the Death of St. Francis 1226 – 2026

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APPENDIX

Suggestions for further reading on this letter:

For personal reflection: Read one section per day, focusing on the sentences in bold. Use the questions at the end of each section for your reflection.

In a group/community: Dedicate one meeting (60/90 minutes) to each of the three main parts. This activity must be carefully planned so that everyone can express themselves in an atmosphere of earnest dialogue.

With prayers: Use the theme-oriented prayers at the end of each section to open or close your reflection.

Prayer to begin the journey (at the beginning of each meeting)

Lord Jesus Christ,
who called Francis to follow in your
footsteps,
giving him a heart capable of mercy
and eyes to see your face in the poor
and in the Crucified One, open our
hearts to your Word.

Send your Holy Spirit so that we can
understand the precious legacy that
Francis left us

and we too can live according to the
form of the holy Gospel.

Amen.

1. The Encounters That Changed Everything

✓ TODAY IN REAL TIME

At present:

- Perform an act of mercy toward someone on the margins of society.
- Spend 10 minutes in silence in front of a crucifix.
- Write in your journal: Who are the “lepers” I encounter?

For personal and community reflection:

- I try to recognize the “lepers” of my time; who are the excluded people I encounter?
- When have I experienced that mercy changes more than perfection?
- Where do I see today the “opened eyes” of the Crucifix looking at me?

Prayer

Lord,

You led Francis among the lepers
and there you taught him mercy.

Open my eyes so that I may see the
“lepers” of my time:

the poor, the excluded, the
marginalized,

those whom everyone avoids and
despises.

Give me the courage to leave my
comfort zone,

to draw close to others and discover
who is close to me, to share their
fate.

Teach me that it is not enough to
choose poverty: I must show mercy,
I must give my heart, not just my
possessions.

Deliver me from the bitterness of
rivalry and lead me to the sweetness
that comes from sharing.

Amen.

2. The Church: Poor yet Fertile Soil

✓ TODAY IN REAL TIME

At present:

- Participate in the Eucharist with renewed attention.
- Arrive five minutes early to prepare yourself in silence.
- Give thanks for the Church, even with its shortcomings.

For personal and community reflection

- How do I experience my belonging to the Church with its poverty and riches?
- Where do I “sow my seed” of the Gospel? Where are my places of witness?
- Is the Eucharist truly the center of my week? How could it be more so?

Prayer

Lord,

You taught Francis to love the Church, his mother, with all her poverty.

I too want to choose to plant my seed in this poor yet fertile soil.

Deliver me from the temptation to judge, from the pride of the perfect, from the pride of those who believe themselves to be superior.

Teach me to see in the Church that field where You, patient Sower, continue to sow the seed of the Gospel.

Grant me great faith in priests, in whose poor hands

You continue to give yourself in the Eucharist.

Amen.

3. Brothers for Bringing Peace to the World

✓ TODAY IN REAL TIME

At present:

- Apologize to someone instead of justifying yourself.
- Bring peace to a conflict within family or at work.
- “Wash the feet” of someone; serve instead of dominating

For personal and community reflection

- Do my relationships seem “circular” or “pyramidal”? Where do I recognize that I am exercising power rather than service?
- How do I effectively bring peace to the places where I live?
- Am I more of a “knight” (who imposes) or a “brother and minor” (who dialogues with humility)?

Prayer

Lord,
who have given to Francis his brothers,
Teach me to live in brotherhood.

Free me from the desire to dominate,
from the temptation of power.

Help me understand that relationships
are not pyramidal, but circular – all
brothers, no masters.

Teach me to “wash the feet” of others,
to be a servant and not a master.

Let me know how to be like a mother:
to be welcoming to those who make
mistakes, to be patient with those who
are difficult.

Help me see the difficulties in
relationships not as failures but as
blessings, opportunities to grow in
love.

Amen.

Conclusion: The Seed Continues to Germinate

FINAL SUMMARY QUESTIONS

- Which of Francis' three legacies (mercy, Church/Eucharist, fraternity/peace) do I feel furthest from in my life and in our lives today?
- That is probably the area where the Lord is calling you to grow. What can you do about it in practical terms?
- What sentence or phrase in this letter struck me the most? Why?
- Write it down, memorize it, repeat it throughout the week as a prayer.
- What concrete commitment do I want to make after reading this?
- Be specific: not "I want to be kinder," but "this week I will call that person," "I will visit that sick person," "I will apologize to that person," etc.

Prayer

Lord, Prince of Peace,
make me an instrument of your peace.

Teach me to carry your greeting:
"May the Lord give you peace."

Not as an empty phrase, but as a way
of life.

Help me not to argue, not to judge,
but to be meek, peaceful, gentle.

Make me understand that I don't
have to go as a "knight" that imposes
truth from above,

but as a "brother/sister and minor"
who is below,

who is grounded in humility,
who listens before speaking.

Make me into a bridge builder,
a sower of reconciliation, a peaceful
presence

who encourages dialogue and
respect.

Amen.

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