

St. Francis was born in Assisi, Italy in 1182, the son of a wealthy merchant. His early years were frivolous, but an experience of sickness and later, military service were instrumental in leading him to reflect on his purpose in life. One day, in the church of San Damiano, he seemed to hear Christ saying to him, "*Francis, repair my falling house.*" He took the words literally, and sold a bale of silk from his father's warehouse to pay for repairs to the church of San Damiano. His outraged father disinherited and disowned him. Francis responded by renouncing his father's wealth. One account says that he not only handed his father his purse, but also took off his expensive clothes, laid them at his father's feet, and walked away naked. From that time, he renounced all material possessions, and became what we might call a hippie animal-lover who dropped out of the real world to live in the woods to embrace Poverty and to live his life among outcasts; to serve the poor and the sick and live among Lepers. He made a deliberate choice to live in extreme poverty.

Francis hears Jesus' instructions to the apostles as speaking directly and literally to him: '*Take no gold or silver or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics or sandals, or a staff, for laborers deserve their food.*' (Mt 10:9) He worked as a day laborer, insisting on being paid in bread, milk, eggs, or vegetables rather than in money. Soon a few companions joined him. They would have no money, and no property, individually or collectively.

Francis loved animals, preached to the birds, and legend says he tamed a fierce wolf. He founded the Franciscan order, although he was not happy about its incorporation into the institution of the Church. He preached reverence and obedience to the Church but maintained a serenity and detached distance from it. He lived out the ideals Jesus preached— simplicity, humility and poverty — at a time when the institutional church was rich, worldly and militaristic.

Francis gave up his wealth freely — and, in the end, joyfully — and for him it led to liberation. And the further he pursued this life, the more joy and freedom he found. For Francis, material poverty led to a simplicity of life that was the greatest wealth, the pearl of great price. That was his way to the truth of himself — when we strip ourselves of all that is unnecessary, that is distraction, that is addiction.

Letting go of our *attachments* to things — it does not necessarily mean that like Francis we strip ourselves naked and go into the woods. Maybe it means that we free ourselves of our *dependence* on material things. Maybe it means that we will learn to live as the peaceable kingdom that God ordained in Genesis 1. That we will learn to live without anxiety as prescribed in Philippians 4.

What draws me to St. Francis is his immense humility and utter refusal to judge others. He had no agenda for political or social reform, although no doubt he could see the wrongs of his society and church. He simply sought to follow Christ and to love others — and, indeed, all creation — as brothers and sisters. St. Francis inspires us by his love of peace and his kinship with all creatures.

He was known for preaching to the birds, brokering a peace accord between a wolf and a village, and founding a monastic order devoted to poverty and preaching, living within a community.

He also was an ambassador. He travelled to the heart of the Muslim empire in Egypt to persuade a great warrior, Saladin, to make peace with the Crusaders who had attempted to take land that he protected. He also persuaded a pope to accept practices that had earned excommunication in earlier spiritual leaders. But, he remains for us the patron saint of animals and nature.

St. Francis embraced this prayer before a crucifix in a little church called San Damiano: "*Most high, glorious God, enlighten the darkness of my heart. Instill in me a correct faith, a certain hope and a perfect love; a sense and a knowledge, Lord, so that I may do your holy and true command.*"

We are to have dominion - stewardship. We are to live peaceably with animals and with one another.

Isaiah speaks of the animals laying down with one another as they once had in Eden. The lion will lay down with the lamb. The cat will curl up with the dog.

Story about my adorable dog Denali on when she's on a leash leash. My otherwise friendly dog walks perfectly by my side on a leash...until she sees another dog. Depending on the dog, my sweet Denali turns into a snarling, barking beast - yanking on the leash, ignoring verbal commands.

- Having a leash around her neck means she can no longer move freely. It leads to frustration.
- dogs can feel restrained or confined by a leash. Fear/anxiety.
- a bad experience on-leash can cause a bad association to seeing dogs on leash.

Fear/Nervous aggression Territorial Predatory
Dominance protective Learned aggression
Any one or a combination of the above types of aggression can contribute to dog to dog aggression.
if you are fighting to get to something and someone holds you back you fight harder. This happens to humans too.
Have you ever felt like you've been on a short leash?

Lazy F - Trading Post cabin - we were all about ready to go to bed when someone opened a door and a woodpecker flew in. Uninvited— not particularly welcome.
It filled the space. It was drawn to the light and would not fly toward the darkness of the night.
We were able to limit its options (path), but we could not control it.

We were fascinated, but also afraid of it, especially if it came too close and we could not imagine how to catch it and set it free.

One of us was frustrated, one of us was afraid. One of us fell asleep.
Our room was too small to contain it—for it to be true to its nature.

Eventually someone came in and the first thing that happened - he noticed the bird's beauty, and called it by its name. He took off his coat and gently coaxed the woodpecker into his coat and placed his hands around the bird, took him outside and set him free. The person who released the Spirit approached it with gentleness and respect, And he followed it out into the night.

The rest of us were grateful to be rid of it and went to bed. Not everyone is able to recognize the Spirit of God when it arrives. Nor did we recognize how scared that creature must have been of us.

May we follow in the footsteps of St. Francis to love all of God's creation, and to love all creatures - great and small.

Blessing of the Animals

"Blessed are you, Lord God, maker of all living creatures. You called forth fish in the sea, birds in the air and animals on the land. You inspired St. Francis to call all of them his brothers and sisters.

Creator of all things and giver of all life, let your blessing be upon all these animals. May our relationships with them mirror your love, and our care for them be an example of your bountiful mercy. May we think of you and thank you when we play with and care for our pets. Be praised for making us so happy to have our pets and to have them to play with. We ask you, Lord, that we may be good to our pets always, so that they may be happy also. Help us always to take care of them so that they will be healthy. *By the power of your love, enable it to live according to your plan.* Grant the animals health and peace. Strengthen us to love and care for them as we strive to imitate the love of Jesus Christ our Lord and God's servant Francis. Amen.

We ask you to bless this pet _____ . By the power of your love, enable it to live according to your plan. May _____ and _____ enjoy life together and find joy with the God who created you."

May we always praise you for all your beauty in creation. Blessed are you, Lord our God, in all your creatures! Amen."