

PEACE IN CHRIST

Have on hand: O.F.S. Rule and a copy of the Peace Prayer

Thomas of Celano tells us this about St. Francis: “In all of his preaching, before he presented the word of God to the assembly, he prayed for peace saying, ‘May the Lord give you peace.’ He always proclaimed this to men and women, to those he met and to those who met him. Accordingly, many who hated peace along with salvation, with the Lord’s help wholeheartedly embraced peace. They became themselves children of peace, now rivals for eternal salvation.”¹

Participants should now read from our *Rule*,
Articles #7; #15; #17 and #19.

St. Francis treasured the blessings of peace. He promoted peace; he became a guide to peace for peoples of many walks of life. We know well the *Peace Prayer of St. Francis*. [This prayer was most likely written in France in 1212, but it has been attributed to St. Francis.] This prayer must not only be a begging for peace, but a prayer of commitment to do on our part what is needed to find peace in our world – peace with God, peace with ourselves, and peace with one another. We can recount some other events in his life, such as his legendary encounter with the Wolf of Gubbio.



Stefano di Giovanni: The Wolf of Gubbio, ca. 1437-1444

In *The Legend of the Three Companions* we read: “He used to tell them: ‘As you announce peace with your mouth, make sure that greater peace is in your hearts. Let no one be provoked to anger or scandal through you, but may everyone be drawn to peace, kindness, and harmony through your gentleness. For we have been called to this: to heal the wounded, bind up the broken, and recall the erring. In fact, many who seem to us to be members of the devil will yet be disciples of Christ.’”²

Another example is cited in *The Assisi Compilation*: “Although very ill, blessed Francis was moved by piety [sic] for them, ... He said to his companions: ‘It is a great shame for you, servants of God, that the bishop and the podestà hate one another in this way, and that there is no one intervening for peace and harmony between them.’

“And so, for that reason, he composed one verse for the *Praises*: Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love, and bear infirmity and tribulation. Blessed are those who endure in peace for by You, Most High, they shall be crowned.

“Afterwards he called one of his companions and told him: ‘Go to the podestà and, on my behalf, tell him to go to the bishop’s residence together with the city’s magistrates and bring with him as many others as he can.’

“And when the brother had gone, he said to two of his other companions: ‘Go and sing the *Canticle of Brother Sun* before the bishop, the podestà, and the others who are with them. I trust in the Lord that He will humble their hearts and they will make peace with each other and return to their earlier friendship and love.’ [The bishop and the podestà forgave each other and were indeed reconciled.]

“And the brothers marveled greatly, considering the holiness of blessed Francis, that what he had foretold about peace and harmony between them had been fulfilled, to the letter.”³

Donald Spoto observes: “When Francis insisted on the need for peace, it was more than just a sentimental wish; it was a prayer for the human condition. It derived from his acquaintanceship with Scripture, from hearing the words spoken at worship, and from his direct inner experience of

the peace of God, which had changed and was continuing to change his life as his own conversion continued. ‘Live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you.’ (2 Cor 13:11) With those words, St. Paul concluded his second letter to the Corinthians; with those same words, Francis embarked each day on his mission to proclaim God’s peace to a violent world. Much more than the mere absence of conflict, peace was to be the result of better relationships with God and neighbor, and was therefore necessarily linked to justice and love.¹⁴

Q1. How do I explain what “peace” is? What are some different meanings for the word “peace” – among governments, neighbors, in families, relationships?

Q2. What did Francis of Assisi mean by “peace”?

Zechariah gives us a description of the Savior: “... because of the tender mercy of our God by which the daybreak from on high will visit us to shine on those who sit in darkness and death’s shadow, to guide our feet into the path of peace.” (*Luke 1:78-79*)

The angels on Christmas morn sang of “... peace on earth ...” Christ on the Cross, “Father, forgive them ...” and at each of our Masses during the *Sign of Peace*, “Lord Jesus Christ, who said to your Apostles: Peace I leave you, my peace I give you ...” Christ’s first words to his followers on that first Easter Sunday evening addressed them with “Peace be with you.” (*John 20:19*)

Q3. What does Sacred Scripture mean by “peace”?

Q4. Since we are called to be “peacemakers” by Christ, go line by line and explain how each phrase of the *Peace Prayer* attributed to St. Francis helps promote peace. An internet search will yield interesting background on the circuitous path of this prayer.

Q5. What does the Liturgy at Mass mean when it uses this word several times before Holy Communion?

Q6. Is the “Sign of Peace” at Mass – only a gesture? Or is it a prayer? What meanings do I give it at Mass?

Q7. Following Zechariah’s view, do I let Christ “guide our feet into the path of peace”?

One of the critical statements that help us on our way to finding peace in our society is that of Pope St. Paul VI (*For the Celebration of the Day of Peace*, January 1, 1972), who declared: “If you want peace, work for justice.”

Also examine the *Catechism*, §1784; §2302 to §2330 and the term “Peace” in the Glossary.



Albert Chevallier Tayler: St. Francis, 1898

¹ FA:ED, *The Life of Saint Francis, First Book*, 1228-1229, Vol. I, p. 203, Chapter X, v. 23

² FA:ED, *The Legend of the Three Companions*, 1241-1247, Vol. II, p. 102, Chapter XIV, v. 58

³ FA:ED, *The Assisi Compilation*, 1244-1260, Vol. II, pp. 187-188: 84: He makes peace between the bishop and mayor of Assisi, adding a verse to the Canticle

⁴ *Reluctant Saint: The Life of Francis of Assisi*, D. Spoto, 2002, p. 70