

Death and New Life



While St. Francis died in 1226, his preparation for this final journey to heaven began well over two years prior. For Francis' followers and for Christians today, October 3rd, the day of St. Francis' transitus (transition from this life into God), is a day marked with prayerful solemnity, especially at the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi—the site of his tomb—and in Franciscan convents, friaries, and monasteries around the world. The Feast of St. Francis (October 4th), is a day of celebration and joy—a day in which Francis' life, works, and profound love of God are remembered and honored. But how is



it that one man's life made such a difference on the world around him and continues to impact it today, hundreds of years after his passing? The answer is simple, yet profound. St. Francis of Assisi spent his entire life dying—dying to self. Instead of pursuing his own desires and ambitions, Francis chose to be a servant and to follow in the footsteps of Christ. In many ways, the Feast of St. Francis is more than just a festive commemoration of their "Lesser Brother," it is a celebratory recognition of his transformative death-to-self. Francis abandoned a life of comfort to pursue a life of holiness. Conforming himself to the will of Christ required sacrifice and radical humility. Above all, it required an acknowledgement that his needs and desires were secondary to the needs and desires of others, and most importantly, of Christ. †



Scripture

Matthew 8:34-36

"He summoned the crowd with his disciples and said to them, 'Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it. What profit is there for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?'"



Reflection Questions

- If we learned that we were dying, how would that change the way we live our lives?
- In what ways are we being called to die to our selfish desires and instead clothe ourselves in Christ?

Early Writings

From the Twelve Book of Henri d'Avranches'
The Verified Life of Saint Francis

"[Francis], giving thought to the fact that the last days of his life had arrived, betakes himself to a secluded place to reside in quiet. There he might shake from his feet earth's clinging dust, where Martha's ministrations would not distract his unsullied soul, but contemplation would wholly engage it, and where he could spend the remaining years on things above. Sojourning there he contemplates and prays, nothing save Christ being in his heart or on his lips."

Regis Armstrong, Wayne Hellmann
& William Short, eds.

Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, The Saint, Vol. I
(New York: New City Press, 2000), 508-509.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, through Your Son Jesus Christ and His faithful disciple St. Francis of Assisi, You have shown us that the path to salvation requires a total gift of self, and an abandonment of our own selfish desires. Help us to imitate the perfect life of Your Son by following the example of St. Francis. Fill our hearts with a desire to take up our crosses and follow where You may lead. Strip us of our pride and bring us ever more close to Your Most Sacred Heart.