

# THE YOUNG FRANCISCAN

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## The Canticle of the Creatures



**We** all like to receive gifts from the people we love. It is even more special when we know that the person giving the gift went out of their way and created it with their own hands. Why did they do this? Usually for no other reason than they love us too. Sometimes we keep these gifts in a special place where we can look upon it and be reminded of that special person in our lives. When guests come to visit us we proudly show it off and speak highly of the person who gave it to us.

St Francis felt just like this. He had received a gift from the greatest love in his life. It was a gift made with the hands of the one giving it, and every time Francis gazed upon this gift he was reminded of his great love.

Who was this love of his? It was the Holy Trinity – God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. What was the gift God gave? All of creation!

St Francis was overjoyed by the gift of creation. He rejoiced in everything he saw, from the smallest of worms to the sun, moon and stars. He rejoiced because he knew that all of these things had been created by the hands of God and given to humanity as a gift. Everything that had been created by God was also loved by God. In the book of Genesis when God had created the world he looked upon all he had created and said it was “very good.” St Francis saw this same goodness throughout all of creation.

Why did God give us such a planet with extraordinary beauty? For no other reason than he loves us! God always desired to make us humans in the image of himself. It is only fitting then that we, the image of God, live in a beautiful home – mother earth. The world and everything in it was created by holiness (God) for holiness (us). St Francis understood the sacred nature of God’s creation and felt an enormous love and deep respect for all of God’s gifts to us.

Francis saw the fingerprint of God in everything he saw, and marvelled in his creativity. With every glance upon God’s ‘art work’ Francis’ mind was constantly raised to the heights of heaven. It is probably correct in assuming that not a moment of his day would pass when he wasn’t thinking about God.

St Francis constantly sang praises to God for his goodness and love, and called all others to also sing praises to our God at all times. Out of all the writings of St Francis that exist today there is no other song of praise as well known and loved as the *Canticle of the Creatures*, sometimes also known as the *Canticle of Brother Sun*. In this song Francis gives praise to God for all of creation, and asks creation itself to also give praise to God. To begin to understand the spirit of St Francis there is perhaps no better place to start than in this Canticle. It is a fitting summary of Franciscan spirituality.



## Canticle of the Creatures

*Most High, all powerful, good Lord,  
Yours are the praises, the glory, the honour,  
and all blessing.*

*To You alone, Most High, do they belong,  
and no man is worthy to mention Your name.*

*Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures,  
especially through my lord Brother Sun,  
who brings the day; and you give light through him.  
And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendour!  
Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.*

*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 which  
You give sustenance to Your creatures.*

*Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,  
which 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, through Sister Mother Earth,  
who sustains us and governs us and who produces  
varied fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.*

*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.*

*Praised be 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 shall do them no harm.*

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

*St Francis of Assisi*

**The** Canticle of the Creatures was written almost 800 years ago. Just like in Francis' days we too, in our busy world and concrete cities, can continue to give praise to God through all of his creation.

## Brother Sun, Sister Moon

How can we give praise to God through Brother Sun? Certainly, it is one of the greatest gifts for sustaining life. Nothing is more important to the earth's survival than the sun. Without its heat and light our planet would be a lifeless ball of ice and rock. The sun keeps our seas warm, creates our weather patterns and gives energy to the plants which provide our food and create oxygen for life on earth. Here in Australia we have lots of sun! How often do we give praise and thanks to God for this great gift?

In the book of Revelations, we read how the sun, moon and stars gave praise to God through our Mother Mary: "A woman clothed in the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars." Wow – what a great way to honour Our Lady, Queen of heaven, earth and the universe!

## Brother Wind

In the old Hebrew language (the original language of the Old Testament) the word for 'wind' is 'ruach.' It is interesting that this word can also be translated as 'spirit.'

There are several key moments in the Old Testament where God sent the wind-Spirit ('ruach') as an act of new creation: When God created the first man, Adam, he breathed his wind-Spirit into man, and he began to live. When Moses crossed the Red Sea, God sent the wind-Spirit to separate the waters which saved the Israelites. After Adam and Eve had sinned we read that the 'ruah' was in the garden. After this we read that God himself was walking through the garden. How wonderful – even God likes walking through gardens! Whenever we are out in nature and feel a wind does it help us remember the Holy Spirit? Are we aware that

God is there walking by our side? Does the wind help us give praise to God?

In the New Testament, after the Resurrection, Jesus “*breathed on them*” and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” With the wind from his breath he breathed the Holy Spirit on to the disciples (John 20:22). At Pentecost “suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind (Acts 2:2). Praise God for Brother Wind!

## Sister Water

The combination of Spirit and water is a strong theme in our Christian faith. Jesus said “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit” (Jn 3:5).

Perhaps there is nowhere else in our Christian faith where water is more important than in the Sacrament of Baptism. What a gift this holy water is. It has the power to remove original sin, it purifies us. Water makes us a child of God! Let us praise God for Sister Water!

The gospels are full of water stories: Jesus turned water into wine; Blood and water came pouring out from his pierced side; Jesus walked on water; Jesus calmed the seas. Even the water obeyed Jesus. Or in other words, even the waters gave praise to God.

We are told that 60% of our body is made up of water. So, we were created from the breath of God (wind), and also from water – the two fundamental elements for life.

## Sister Mother Earth

God created us from wind and water. But are we also created from the earth? Adam certainly was. God took some soil and fashioned man, then blew the wind of God into his nostrils. From dust we were made, to dust we will return.

Our bodies give praise to God through Sister Mother Earth from which we were formed. The soil also gives praise to God because that soil became an ‘image of God.’ We are the soil, the wind, the water – and we, those elements, praise God.

Francis adds praise, not only to the earth, but to the “varied fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.” or in other words, everything that grows in the earth – the plants, flowers, trees.

Is it possible for a tree to give praise to God? The tree that was chopped down and given to Jesus to carry, and then had him nailed to it – O holy tree! What praise it gave to God. If only that tree could have spoken, just imagine what praises it would have shouted!

Sister Mother Earth sustains us, it feeds and nourishes us. Our medicines come from the earth, from plants.

The wheat in the field and the fruit of the vines, surely they give glory and praise to God each time they become the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. No wonder St Francis gives praise to God through Sister Mother Earth.

Flowers can also help us give praise to God. The rose especially gives praise to God through our Mother Mary. Every time we see or smell a rose does it remind us of our heavenly Mother?

## Brother Fire

Is it possible that God made us from fire as well? We know from the Transfiguration that Jesus shone a most radiant light. The children of Fatima described Our Lady as “dressed in white [and] more brilliant than the sun.” In fact, as we read earlier in Revelations she is clothed in the sun. When Moses went up on Mount Horeb, he saw God as a burning bush. When he came down from the mountain his face was radiant. The Holy Spirit appeared like tongues of fire. The Sacred Heart of Jesus and Immaculate Heart of Mary are always burning.

Before Adam and Eve sinned, they were full of the graces of God and radiated God’s light. Perhaps they did have the fire of God shining through them? Perhaps this is the element that they lost after they disobeyed God – their bodies went dull, they were no longer clothed in God’s light. They were naked. Perhaps this is an element that we will only be filled with again in the heavenly reality?

St Francis’ Canticle helps us to understand how even today we can continue to give praise to God through all his creation. It is certainly not a definitive list of praises to God, and it is a subject we can revisit in future editions.

# Secular Franciscan Saints



## St Catherine of Genoa

1447-1510

Catherine's parents were members of the nobility in Genoa. At 13 she attempted to become a nun but failed because of her age. At 16 she married Julian, a nobleman who turned out to be selfish and unfaithful. For a while she tried to numb her disappointment by a life of selfish pleasure. One day in confession she had a new sense of her own sins and how much God loved her. She reformed her life and gave good example to Julian, who soon turned from his self-centred life of distraction. It was during this time that she joined the Third Order of St Francis. Julian's spending, however, had ruined them financially. He and Catherine decided to live in the Pammatone, a large hospital in Genoa, and to dedicate themselves to works of charity there. After Julian's death in 1497, Catherine took over management of the hospital.

Catherine composed many writings which after being examined by the Holy Office were found to contain doctrine that would be enough, in itself, to prove her sanctity.

## Archangela Tardera

1548-1608

As a child Archangela lived a devoutly religious life, practicing self-denial and modesty. Her conduct at church uplifted all who observed her. After her father died, Archangela, together with her mother and sister entered the Franciscan Third Order. They lived such holy lives and were an inspiration to the entire town.

Archangela showed such care for orphans that she was known as the mother of orphans. She also had a particular talent for reconciling troubled married couples. Her intimate relationship with God sometimes left her in ecstasy while in prayer. She was also granted the privilege of seeing the baby Jesus whom she held in her arms. However, Archangela suffered much illness and felt constant torture throughout her body. This pain lasted thirty-six years, however she bore them with great passion out of devout remembrance of the passion of Jesus. Towards the end of her life God impressed on her body the five wounds of Jesus. Amid her suffering she would only ever speak of the sweet love of God.

## Bl Torello of Poppi

1202-1286

At the age of eighteen, Torello desired to devote himself to the service of God, however he became caught up with two bad friends and was corrupted by them. They became the scandal of the town. One day a cock jumped into his arms and crowed three times. Torello took this as a message from heaven. He immediately deserted his friends and went to confession.

He withdrew to the mountains where he found a cave. He purchased the land around the cave and built a hermitage there. He ate very little and fasted for days at a time. He limited his sleep to three hours a day and slept on a bed of brushwood and thorny twigs. To overcome temptations of the flesh he scourged himself unmercifully and immersed himself into freezing water. Under his woollen habit he wore a pigskin shirt still covered with bristles. In the fourth year of his conversion he joined the Third Order Franciscans. Like St Francis, he possessed a supernatural power over wolves and worked several miracles.



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