

THE SEASON OF CREATION ENDS THIS FRIDAY 4 OCTOBER - THE FEAST OF ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI

*Ian Campbell, who lives in Portobello, wrote the reflection below in 2023
for a Duddingston Kirk Wednesday morning Stillness Service
on the Feast of St Francis*

Today is the feast of Francis of Assisi, one of the most popular saints in the Catholic Church. I've always felt a bit mixed about him. He had a conversion experience in his early 20s, after a dissolute youth, and tried to live the Gospel as literally as possible, giving away everything he had, even, it is said, stripping naked in the middle of Assisi to the horror of his family from whom he ran away and hid in a ruined church. There he heard the Christ painted on a cross speaking to him, telling him to repair his church. He thought at first that meant the building he was in but later realised Christ meant the whole Catholic Church. He quickly attracted disciples, which ended up with the founding of the Franciscan order, the Greyfriars, committed at first to radical poverty, but it was difficult for others to follow him in his extremeness and, even while he was still alive, they had to relax the rules just for the friars to survive. He meditated so much on the Passion of Christ, while living in a cave, that he became the first person to receive the stigmata, the wounds of Christ, on his body, causing him intense pain for the last two year of his life. He died in 1226 aged only 44. It's that extremeness that puts me off if I'm honest. I'm happier with St Martin who was converted, when he was a Roman soldier, met a beggar freezing in the cold and tore his cloak in two, giving half to the beggar and keeping half for himself.

The aspects of Francis I can cope with are the stories about his love of nature, preaching to the birds or taming the Wolf which had been terrorising the town of Gubbio not far from Assisi, by promising it that if it was good that the citizens would feed him. The wolf gave him his paw and agreed and lived two years more going from door to door to be fed, dying probably of obesity one suspects. I was once enjoying a large pork chop outside a restaurant in Gubbio when a huge wasp or hornet landed on it. I was about to bat it away when I remembered St Francis and instead let the wasp chew off a sizable corner of the chop and then watched it having trouble flying away with its heavy load. That's about as near I've come to imitating St Francis, I'm ashamed to say, although I've always shared his love of nature, which made him the obvious choice to be the patron saint of environmentalism and why Pope Francis's first encyclical was entitled '*Laudato Sii*', which means 'Praised be' and is the recurrent phrase in St Francis's *Praises of the Creatures* or *Canticle of the Sun* as it's better known, which I will finish with:

*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 pronounce Your name.*

*Be praised, my Lord, by all your creatures,
especially by my Lord, Brother Sun,*

*who brings the day; and through him you give light.
And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendour!
Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.*

*Praised be You, my Lord, by Sister Moon and the stars,
in heaven you formed them bright and precious and beautiful.*

*Praised be You, my Lord, by Brother Wind and Air,
and by the weather, both cloudy and clear,
and all kinds of weather by which you give sustenance to Your creatures.*

*Praised be You, my Lord, by Sister Water,
who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.*

*Praised be You, my Lord, by Brother Fire,
through whom you light the night and he is beautiful
and playful and robust and strong.*

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

*Praised be You, my Lord, by those who forgive for Your love,
and suffer infirmity and tribulation.*

*Blessed be 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 person can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin.
Blessed be those who the second death finds doing your most holy will,
for she shall do them no harm.*

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

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord God, you made Saint Francis of Assisi
Christ-like in his poverty and humility.
Help us so to walk in his ways that,
with joy and love,
we may follow Christ your Son,
and be united to you.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.