
LIKE JESUS, FRANCIS AND CLARE



In the first sessions of the third level of the family- and parish-based catechetical programme, *Remain in My Love*, we are led to amazement and thanksgiving. We are encouraged to love the earth, just as Jesus, Francis, and Clare of Assisi did. The earth is one of God's beautiful gifts to us.

BLESS THE LORD!

One of the hymns which the liturgy has is called the Hymn of the Universe; it is also called the Song of the Three Children, the prayer of Daniel and his companions when they were thrown into the fiery furnace and still kept on praising God for all creation: "Bless the Lord, all you works of the Lord, praise and exalt him above all forever. Angels of the Lord, bless the Lord! You heavens, bless the Lord! Let the earth bless the Lord. Mountains and hills, everything growing from the earth, you springs, seas and rivers, bless the Lord!" Everything living is called to praise the Lord. We, the living, are called to praise our Creator. Several psalms are hymns of thanksgiving, and it would do us good to make them our own and use them in prayer. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, from the depths of my being, bless his name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and never forget his kindness." Jesus prayed the psalms, he made them his own. He loved our earth, and his preaching is stamped with his love. The gospels of Matthew and Luke record this prayer of Jesus: "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for having hidden these things from the wise and revealed them to the lowly. Yes, Father, such was your good pleasure. Everything has been given to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one can know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." This is a very simple prayer, full of trust and gratitude. The one who is humble can recognise the grandeur of God.

YOU ARE GREAT, YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL!

In a book called *Appelés à la liberté* ("Called to Freedom"), Patrick Richard has a beautiful song to connect us to this wonderful prayer network. It is a song well worth praying: "Through the waters before you, splendour and majesty, through the infinitely great, the infinitely small, and through the firmament, your starry mantle, and through brother sun, I want to cry out: My God, how great You are, how beautiful You are, living God, mighty God, God present in all creation. Through all the oceans and all the seas, through all the continents and through the rushing rivers, through the fire which proclaims You, through the burning bush and the soft breeze, I want to cry out! Through all the mountains and all the valleys, through the shade of the forest and the flowered fields, through the budding tree, the prairie green, and the ripening wheat, I want to cry out! Through all the animals of land and sea, through the song of the birds, the song of life, through the man You created just less grand than yourself, and through all of man's children, I want to cry out! Through the hand stretched out in invitation to dance, through the kiss given in a gesture of hope, through the gaze of love which lifts up and warms the heart, through the bread and the wine, I want to cry out: My God, how great You are, how beautiful You are!"

BROTHER SUN

Saint Francis of Assisi (1182-1226), the "patron saint of ecologists," left us an extraordinary testimony of a life of poverty lived in freedom and joy. Despite the shortness of his life, he has left us such wonderful lessons! He could have succeeded his rich father as a merchant, hobnob with the great of the world, but instead he decided to embrace Lady Poverty. A battle wound forced Francis to undergo a long convalescence. During that period, he had much time to reflect. When he started to regain his strength he took long walks. That was how he discovered the wonders of nature, the birds, flowers, butterflies, and animals. He then realised that all these creatures were God's creation, a gift of God our Father. He started praying to express his admiration to God, and to thank Him for these wonderful gifts. He learned to love God so much that one day he left his

family and all his riches behind and went into the mountains to live in poverty, like Jesus. He was soon joined by companions, and together with them, Francis started teaching the Word of God, looking after the sick, visiting the poor, praying a lot, and singing about the joy of living with God. One day, a young girl of Assisi who had heard Francis and his companions preach, came to meet him: her name was Clare. She, too, decided to live as Jesus had. With companions who came to live with her she worked among the poor and gave her life to God and prayer. If one day you happen to visit Italy, don't miss visiting Assisi! Everything there will lead you to exclaim like Francis: "Praised be You, my Lord, with all your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun; he bears a likeness of You. 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. 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 our Sister Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces varied fruits with coloured flowers and herbs."

THE WONDER OF SUCH LOVE!

How the days are beautiful and short when they are spent in wonder and admiration! However, there are prophets warning us about the dangers stalking this blue planet of ours. Robert Lebel sings: "Fragile as pottery, how come your children forsake you, in the paradise of unconcern? What have we done with you, O blue planet, unique and beautiful in the sky? The clouds have taken the colour of the black soot of mills. The bitter rains kill the flowers, and the sap has the bitter taste of acid. Even the buds are sick at heart, and the tree dies at its very roots. You our sister, the living water of our beginnings, forgive us. Here and there are ugly and filthy dunes piled high with rubbish carrying nauseous smells, scraps and twisted leftovers of our culture of death. But not all is lost of the world's first day. From here and there voices are raised like a murmur of hope, a chance or a battle, a song of love in your defence. Amazed like Francis and dazzled by so much abundance, they pray, with uplifted arms, that you recover lost innocence." May that cry be with us, that we take good care of the gift of the earth which God gave us, and where He comes to dwell!

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