A Novena In Honour of

St Francis of Assisi

Fr Christopher Sharah FSF

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A NOVENA IN HONOUR OF SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI

Introduction:

St Francis of Assisi is one of the great saints of the Church, yet his true depth and spirituality is often hidden behind popular images of a carefree man surrounded by birds and other creatures of the Lord. The truth of this holy man goes much deeper than this and his passionate love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, especially in the Incarnation, the Cross, the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist and the Catholic Church, must be understood. To ignore these loves of St Francis is to ignore the true man he was.

This novena is an invitiation to prayer. An invitation to enter into the heart of St Francis, praying with his own words, lifting our hearts to the Lord through the eyes and feelings of this great lover and imitator of Christ.

Take your time as you follow through each day, ponder on the richness of these prayers, and let this little poor man of Christ teach you to love, to give all and to open your hearts to the wonderful mystery of the Most High God.

INTRODUCTORY PRAYER

Heavenly Father, You have given us the saints to be our models, patrons and friends. Today we turn to Saint Francis of Assisi and as You helped him reflect the image of Christ through his life of poverty and humility, grant us through his intercession the graces we so much need for soul and body. Especially during this novena we ask for: *[mention intention here]*. We also ask Your blessings on all those whom we love.

May the example of Saint Francis inspire us to grow in holiness as we imitate his joyful love.

Grant what we ask in Your Merciful love, through the merits of Jesus Christ Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, God, forever and ever. *Amen.*

[This Introductory prayer is said only once at the beginning of the nine days.]

The First Day

Mary, the Mother of Jesus

St Francis had an inexpressible love for our Lady, because she was the one who made the Lord of Majesty our brother. He would often sing to her, pouring out his affections, prayers and praises.

We ask St Francis to entrust us to Mary, that she might cherish, help and protect us to the end. She is our model, our Queen and our Mother. Let us join him in the salutations he composed for her;

> Hail, holy Lady, Most holy Queen,
> Mary, Mother of God, Ever Virgin.
> You were chosen by the Most High Father in heaven, consecrated by Him, with His Most Holy Beloved Son and the Holy Spirit, the Comforter.
> On you descended and still remains all the fullness of grace and every good.
> Hail, His Palace.
> Hail, His Tabernacle.
> Hail, His Robe.
> Hail, His Handmaid.
> Hail, His Mother.
> And Hail, all holy Virtues, who, by grace and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, are poured into the hearts of the faithful so that from their faithless state, they may be made faithful servants of God through you.

[Here mention your special intention]
Let us pray:

> Most High, Glorious God,
> enlighten the darkness of our hearts.
> Give us a right faith, a firm hope, perfect charity and profound humility,
> with wisdom and perception, O Lord,
> so that we may do what is truly Your Holy Will. *Amen.*

The Second Day

The Most Blessed Eucharist

St Francis had such an immeasurable love for the Blessed Sacrament. He understood this sublime Mystery as few others. He exhorted his friars to have the greatest possible reverence for the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, together with His Holy Name, and the writings which contain His words, those words which consecrate His Body, as well as chalices, corporals and all that is related to the Holy Sacrifice. Let us praise and worship our God and Saviour, present in this Most Holy Sacrament, in the words of St Francis;

> Let the whole of humanity tremble,
> the whole world shake and the heavens exult
> when our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the living
> God, is present on the altar in the hands of a priest!
> O admirable heights and sublime lowliness!
> O sublime humility! O humble sublimity!
> That the Lord of the universe, God and the Son of God,
> so humbles Himself that for our salvation
> He hides Himself under the little form of bread!
> Look at the humility of God and pour out your hearts
> before Him!
> Humble yourselves as well, that you may be exalted
> by Him.
> Therefore, hold back nothing of yourselves for
> yourselves so that He who gives Himself totally to you
> may receive you totally.

[Here mention your special intention]

Let us pray:

Most High, Glorious God, enlighten the darkness of our hearts.
Give us a right faith, a firm hope,
perfect charity and profound humility,
with wisdom and perception, O Lord,
so that we may do what is truly Your Holy Will. *Amen.*

The Third Day

In Praise Of God

There is nothing St Francis loved more than praising God. He would spend his days in prayer meditating upon and pondering the wonder of God the Almighty. These praises were written by St Francis to help his close companion, Br Leo, who was struggling with temptation. Immediately the brother prayed these words, all temptation was lifted from him. Let us join St Francis in lifting our hearts, our minds and our spirits in singing these praises;

You are holy, Lord, the only God,
and Your deeds are wonderful.
You are strong.
You are great.
You are the Most High.
You are Almighty.
You, Holy Father are King of Heaven and earth.
You are Three and One, Lord God, all good,
You are Good, all Good, supreme Good,
Lord God, living and true,
You are love, You are wisdom.
You are humility, You are endurance.
You are rest, You are peace.

You are joy and gladness.
You are justice and moderation.
You are all our riches, and You suffice for us.
You are beauty.
You are gentleness.
You are our protector,
You are our guardian and defender.
You are our courage. You are our haven and our hope.
You are our faith, our great consolation.
You are our eternal life, Great and Wonderful Lord,
God Almighty, Merciful Saviour.

[Here mention your special intention]
Let us pray:

Almighty, eternal, just and merciful God,
grant us in our misery the grace to do for You alone
what we know You want us to do,
and always to desire what pleases You.
Thus inwardly cleansed, interiorly enlightened
and inflamed by the fire of the Holy Spirit,
may we be able to follow in the footsteps of Your
Beloved Son,
our Lord Jesus Christ.

And by Your grace alone,
may we make our way to You,
Most High,
Who live and rule in perfect Trinity and simple Unity,
and are glorified God all-powerful
forever and ever.
Amen.

The Fourth Day

In Praise of Virtue

St Francis spent his life desiring to imitate Christ His Lord. He always urged his brothers and all people to do so. He knew that the essential way to imitate the Lord was to grow in the practice of virtue, the good habits necessary to vanquish vice.

As a man who gave himself so totally to Jesus, St Francis was infused with the Wisdom that can only come from God. These praises which poured out of his soul not only salute the virtues, but they also give us the dispositions necessary to receive them. For Francis, self-denial, dying to self is the basis of virtue. As we sing these praises with St Francis, let us strive to put them into practice in our lives:

Hail Queen Wisdom! The Lord save you,
with your sister, pure, holy Simplicity.
Lady Holy Poverty, God keep you,
with your Sister, holy Humility.

Lady holy Charity, may the Lord protect you,
with your sister, holy Obedience.
All holy virtues, God keep you,
God, from whom you proceed and come.

There is surely no one in the whole world who can possess any one of you unless he first dies to himself.

Whoever practices one and does not offend the others, possesses all.
And whoever offends against one, possesses none and violates all.

Each and every one of you puts vice and sin to shame.

Holy Wisdom puts Satan and all his wiles to shame.
Pure and holy Simplicity puts all the learning of this world, all the wisdom of the body, to shame.

Holy Poverty destroys the desire of riches and avarice and the cares of this world.
Holy Humility destroys pride, putting to shame the inhabitants of this world and all things that belong to the world.
Holy Love destroys every temptation of the devil and of the flesh and every carnal fear.

Holy Obedience destroys every natural and selfish desire, binding the mortified body to obedience of the Spirit and to obedience of one's brother.
Obedience subjects us to everyone on earth,
And not only to man, but all beasts and wild animals, so that they may do whatever they want with us, as far as God allows them.

[Here mention your special intention] Let us pray:

Almighty, eternal, just and merciful God,
grant us in our misery the grace to do for You alone what we know You want us to do,
and always to desire what pleases You.
Thus inwardly cleansed, interiorly enlightened and inflamed by the fire of the Holy Spirit, may we be able to follow in the footsteps of Your Beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

And by Your grace alone,
may we make our way to You,
Most High,
Who live and rule in perfect Trinity and simple Unity, and are glorified God all-powerful
forever and ever. *Amen.*

The Fifth Day

The Canticle of Creation

Perhaps the most famous of all St Francis's writings would be this Canticle. In it, St Francis gives praise to God for every aspect of life, from the joys of creation to the sufferings of death. He understands something of the deep mystery of life, seeing God at work through the world in which we live. More than anything else, St Francis saw that all things were intended to touch the hearts of men and lift them to God.

With the joy and confident trust of St Francis in the loving and merciful Providence of God, let us sing from our hearts this Song of Brother Sun;

Most High, all-powerful, all-good Lord,
All praise is Yours, all glory, all honour and all blessings.
To You alone, Most High, do they belong,
and no mortal lips are worthy to pronounce Your Name.

Praised be You my Lord with all Your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,
Who is the day through whom You give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour;
Of You Most High, he bears the likeness.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,
In the heavens you have made them bright, precious and fair.

Praised be You, my Lord through Brothers Wind and Air,
And fair and stormy, all weather's moods,
by which You cherish all that You have made.

Praised be You my Lord through Sister Water,
So useful, humble, precious and pure.

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,
producing varied fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.

Praise be You my Lord through those who grant pardon
for love of You and bear sickness and trial.
Blessed are those who endure in peace,
By You Most High, they will be crowned.

Praised be You my Lord through Sister Death,
from whom no living man can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin!
Blessed are they She finds doing Your Will,
No second death can do them harm.
Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks,
And serve Him with great humility!

[Here mention your special intention] Let us pray:

Let every creature in heaven, on earth, in the sea
and in the depths, give praise, glory, honour and
blessing to Him
Who suffered so much for us,
Who has given so many good things to us,
and will continue to do so for the future.

For He is our power and strength,
He who alone is Good,
Most High, All Powerful, Admirable and Glorious;
He who alone is Holy, Praiseworthy,
And blessed throughout endless ages. *Amen.*

The Sixth Day

Admonitions of St Francis

St Francis would always turn to the Lord before he said or did anything. Thus seeking the counsel of his Master, his mind and heart were open to receive all manner of grace, blessings and Wisdom from God. His "Admonitions" or directives, a fruit of this relationship, are a wonderful guide in our spiritual life. Let us strive with our whole heart, mind, body and soul as St Francis did, to love our Lord and our neighbour, and all creation. To be thoroughly courteous and noble, sensitive to all that is good and beautiful, and so to be true disciples of Christ. As we listen to his guidance, through these selected Admonitions, let us open ourselves to our Lord that we may receive mercy, grace, peace and abundant blessings.

"Be conscious, O man, of the wondrous state in which our Lord God has placed you, for He created you and formed you to the image of His Beloved Son according to the body, and to His likeness according to the spirit. And yet every creature under heaven serves and acknowledges and obeys its Creator in its own way better than you do. Even the devils were not solely responsible for crucifying Him; it was you who crucified Him with them and you continue to crucify Him by taking pleasure in your vices and sins.

In what then can you glory? If you were so clever and learned that you knew everything and could speak every language, so that the things of heaven were an open book to you, still you could not boast of that. Any demon knew more about the things of heaven and knows more about the things of earth, than any human being, even one who might have received from God a special revelation of the highest wisdom.

If you were the most handsome and richest person in the world and could work wonders, like driving out demons, all that would be something outside of you; it would not belong to you and you could not boast of it.

But there is one thing in which we can glory; we can boast of our humiliations and in taking up daily the Holy Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us look to the Good Shepherd Who suffered the passion and agony of the cross to save His sheep. The Lord's sheep followed Him in tribulation and persecution, in insult and hunger, in infirmity and temptation, and in everything else, and they have received everlasting life from the Lord because of these things. Therefore it is a great shame for us, servants of God, that while the saints certainly did such things, we wish to receive glory and honour by mere recounting of their deeds.

St Paul tells us: "The letter kills, but the spirit gives life" *(2 Cor 3:6)*. Those are killed by the letter who do not wish to follow the spirit of Sacred Scripture, but merely wish to know the words alone and how to interpret them to others. On the other hand, those have received life from the spirit of Sacred Scripture, who by their words and example, refer to the Most High God, to whom belongs all good, all that they know or wish to know, and do not allow their knowledge to become a source of self-complacency.

We can never tell how patient or humble a person is when everything is going well for him. But when those who should do him justice, do the opposite to him, he has only as much patience and humility as he has then, and no more.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God *(Mt 5:9)*. The true peacemakers are those who preserve peace of mind and body for love of our Lord Jesus Christ, despite what they suffer in this world."

[Here mention your special intention]
Let us pray:

Let every creature in heaven, on earth, in the sea and in the depths,
give praise, glory, honour and blessing to Him
Who suffered so much for us
Who has given so many good things to us,
and will continue to do so for the future.

For He is our power and strength,
He who alone is Good.
Most High, All Powerful, Admirable and Glorious;
He who alone is Holy, Praiseworthy,
And blessed throughout endless ages. *Amen.*

The Seventh Day

Our Father

To teach his brethren, St Francis gave them lessons on prayer centred on the Our Father. He loved this Gospel prayer and would often meditate on each phrase. This prayer expresses the inner life of St Francis, filled with praise, with confidence and a deep love of God. He would so often spend himself in prayer - giving time, thought and effort, all for His Lord. Sometimes we forget to try with all our might, and too readily find ourselves saying prayers quickly without thought. St Francis urges us to stop and think deeply about our God who has given Himself completely for us, who are so unworthy of His great love. Let us pray with him, and learn from him.

Our Most Holy Father,
Creator, Redeemer, Comforter and Saviour,
Who art in Heaven: In the angels and saints,
Enlightening them to love, because You Lord are Light
Inflaming them to love, because You Lord are Love
Dwelling in them and filling them with happiness,
because You Lord are the Supreme Good,
The Eternal Good,
from Whom comes all good without Whom there is no good

Hallowed be Your Name:
May our knowledge of You become ever clearer,
that we may know the breadth of Your blessings,
the steadfastness of Your promises, the height of Your Majesty
and depth of Your judgements.

Your Kingdom come:
So that You may reign in us by Your Grace and enable us to come to
Your Kingdom, where we shall see You clearly,
love You perfectly, be blessed in your company and enjoy You forever.

Your Will be done on earth as it is in Heaven:
That we may love You with our whole heart by always thinking of You;
with our whole soul by always desiring You,
with our whole mind by directing all our intentions to You and by seeking Your Glory in everything;
and with our whole strength by spending all our energies and affections of soul and body in the service of Your love alone. And may we love our neighbours as ourselves, encouraging them all to love You as best as we can, rejoicing in the good fortunes of others, just as if it were our own and by sympathising with the

misfortunes of others,
while giving offence to no one.

Give us this day our daily Bread:
Your own Beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,
to remind us of the love He showed for us and to help us understand and appreciate it and everything that He did and said and suffered.

And forgive us our trespasses:
In Your infinite mercy, and through the power of the Passion of Your Beloved Son,
together with the merits and intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all Your chosen ones

As we forgive those who trespass against us:
And whatever we do not forgive perfectly,
do You O Lord, enable us to forgive to the full so that we may truly love our enemies and fervently pray for them before You, returning no one evil for evil and striving to help everyone in You.

And lead us not into temptation,
hidden or obvious, sudden or persistent,

But deliver us from evil,
past, present and to come.
Amen

[Here mention your special intention]
Let us pray:

May the power of Your love O Lord,
fiery and sweet as honey,
wean my heart from all that is under heaven
so that I may die for love of Your Love,
You who were so good as to die for love of my love.
Amen

Prayer and Thanksgiving

To pray constantly and to always give thanks to God – a Gospel precept which St Francis lived. The thought of ***always*** praying is a thought which at the very least seems impossible to most people. Yet, St Francis as well as many other saints were able to achieve this in their lives. It is clear that they also accomplished a great deal. Somehow they were able to make everything they did a real prayer to the Father - they became a "living sacrifice" *(Rom 12:1)*. It is evident from the following prayer of St Francis, which flowed from his heart that he was constantly aware of the Divine Presence, Mercy and Love, and he constantly gave thanks for such immeasurable love.

Let us now join him in prayer and lift our hearts and minds and souls and bodies to God.

> All-powerful, Most Holy, Most High and Supreme God,
> Holy and just Father, Lord, King of Heaven and earth,
> We thank you for Yourself for through Your Holy Will
> and through Your only Son with the Holy Spirit,
> You have created all things spiritual and physical,
> and having made us in Your own image and likeness,
> You placed us in Paradise.
>
> And through our own fault we have fallen.
>
> We thank You for as through Your Son You created us so also, through Your Holy Love, with which You loved us,
> You brought about His birth as true God and true man, by the glorious, ever-virgin, most blessed, holy Mary, and You willed to redeem us captives through His Cross and blood and death.

We thank you for Your Son himself will come again in the glory of His majesty to send the wicked ones who have not done penance and who have not known You into the eternal fire, and to say to all those who have known You and have adored You and have served You in penance:
"Come, you blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom which has been prepared for you from the beginning of the world." *(Mt 25:34).*

We are all poor sinners not even worthy to mention Your name, and so we humbly ask that our Lord Jesus Christ Your Beloved Son in whom You were well pleased together with the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, give You thanks as it pleases You and Him, for everything, He who always satisfies You in everything through Whom You have done such great things for us!

Through Your love we humbly beg the glorious Mother, most Blessed Mary ever-virgin, Blessed Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael, and all the blessed choirs of seraphim, cherubim, thrones, dominations, principalities, powers, virtues, angels, archangels, blessed John the Baptist, John the Evangelist, Peter and Paul, and blessed patriarchs, prophets, the Innocents, apostles, evangelists, disciples, martyrs, confessors, virgins, the blessed Elijah and Enoch, and all the saints who were, who will be and who are to give You thanks for these things as it pleases You, the Supreme and True God, eternal and living with Your most beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, world without end.
Amen.

[Here mention your special intention]

Let us pray:

May the power of Your love O Lord,
fiery and sweet as honey,
wean my heart from all that is under heaven,
so that I may die for love of Your Love
You who were so good as to die for love of my love.
Amen

The Ninth Day

Glory to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit

God, who has first loved us invites us to Himself that we may be raised up into an eternal communion of love with Him. St Francis responded to this invitation with his whole being. He longed for nothing else, desired nothing else, took pleasure in nothing else than his Lord. We receive the same invitation of love and we are free to respond. Let us make a new decision for God. Choosing Him above all others, let us abandon ourselves to Jesus Christ, with complete confidence and trust in Him. Our Lord is Mercy, our Lord is Love, our Lord is our Hope. Therefore:

Let us desire nothing else
let us wish for nothing else
let nothing else please us and cause us delight
except our Creator and Redeemer and Saviour,
the One True God, Who is the Fullness of Good,
all good, every good, the true and supreme good;

Who alone is Good, Merciful and Gentle,
delectable and sweet;
Who alone is Holy, just and true, holy and right;
Who alone is kind, innocent, pure,
from Whom and through Whom and in Whom is
all pardon, all grace, all glory of all the penitent
and the just, of all the blessed who rejoice
together in heaven.

Therefore let nothing hinder us,
nothing separate us or nothing come between us.
Let all of us, wherever we are,
in every place,
at every hour
at every time of day,
everyday and continually
believe truly and humbly,
and keep in our heart,
and love, honour, adore and serve,
praise and bless, glorify and exalt,
magnify and give thanks to
the Most High Supreme Eternal God,
Trinity and Unity,
the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,
Creator of all, Saviour of all who believe in Him,
and hope in Him, and love Him.

Who is without beginning and without end,
Unchangeable, Invisible, Indescribable,
Ineffable, Incomprehensible, Unfathomable,
Blessed, Worthy of Praise, Glorious,
Exalted on High, Sublime, Most High,
Gentle, Lovable, Delectable and totally Desirable
above all else, forever,
Amen!

[Here mention your special intention]

Let us pray:

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace,
Where there is hatred, let me sow love,
Where there is injury, pardon,
Where there is doubt, faith,
Where there is despair, hope,
Where there is darkness, light,
And where there is sadness, joy

O Divine Master
Grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,
in pardoning that we are pardoned
and in dying that we are born to Eternal Life. Amen

Concluding Blessing

May the Lord bless us and keep us,
May He show His Face to us and have mercy on us,
May He turn His Countenance towards us and give us Peace

The Friars of St Francis are a reform community of Franciscans who strive to live the spirit and charism of St Francis of Assisi in our modern age in Australia.

The Friars dedicate themselves to the service of the Church in living the Gospel precepts according to the life and teachings of St Francis. They work in the Diocese of Parramatta, living a contemplative prayer life with an active apostolate. They proclaim Jesus Christ and His holy Gospel with great joy and simplicity.

Fr Christopher founded the community in 1993, and since then, though small in number, they have been great in spirit. They have preached and worked in many places throughout Australia, which includes playing a dynamic role in World Youth Day in 2008. Their love for the Church and their neighbour, and their happiness shine in their works.

This Novena was written as a means to make the beautiful prayers of St Franis readily available to one and all.

Further copies of the Novena can be obtained by writing to:

Friars of St Francis

frcfsf@mac.com