
May the Lord Give You Peace

**A meditation for Evensong and 5:22 Contemplative Eucharist
observing the Feast of St. Francis**

In the name God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

May the Lord give you peace. Today the Church celebrates the feast of St. Francis of Assisi.

St. Francis is someone I am sure many of us hear about year after year. For many of us, when we talk about St. Francis, we immediately think about his love for God's creation.

There are two beautiful sculptures of St. Francis in our front yard. My son loves to play around them and sometimes even tries to push them over. In one of them, St. Francis is holding a bird in his hand, and other birds are gathered around him, almost as if they are listening to his teaching.

We also know the beautiful stories of St. Francis: how he gave up wealth and privilege, embraced a life of poverty, obedience, and chastity, and devoted himself completely to following Christ.

But today, I want to talk about another part of St. Francis's life that we sometimes overlook:

St. Francis the peacemaker and sharing the love of Christ to everyone.

Francis believed deeply in Beatitudes particularly this one:

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

Francis lived in a world that was deeply divided by violence, war, wealth, and power. And he chose a different way. He believed that the Gospel was not simply something we believe with our minds or something we hear on Sunday, but Gospel is meant to change the way we live. It is meant to make us instruments of God's peace and love in the world.

Blessed are the peacemakers meant something very real to Francis.

Francis was born in Assisi at the end of the twelfth century and lived into the early thirteenth century. His hometown was caught up in political and military conflict. Assisi and neighboring cities were frequently at war.

There were deep social divisions different classes based on economic circumstances. The Crusades were taking place, and the religious authorities were deeply involved with political powers and in country's decision making.

During the Fifth Crusade, Francis and another friar crossed the lines of the Christian army and went into the Muslim camp in Egypt. They went to meet the Sultan, al-Malik al-Kamil.

Think about that for a moment. They crossed the line. They went toward the people on the other side.

According to the Franciscan tradition, when Francis finally stood before the Sultan, he greeted him with words that have become deeply associated with the Franciscan tradition:

"May the Lord give you peace." - "May the Lord give you peace."

The encounter did not end the Crusades. Francis did not convert the Sultan.

But Francis was able to speak with the Sultan. He was received with respect by Sultan, and he was allowed to speak about his faith. And Francis shared what he had come to share: the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. He went into the middle of a conflict and carried a different message. A message of love. A message of peace. And perhaps that is what it means to be a peacemaker. Francis was willing to see the humanity of the person on the other side. Someone willing to say, even in a world filled with fear and hostility, "May the Lord give you peace."

But the story of Francis and the Sultan did not end with that meeting. In mid fourteenth century Franciscans were entrusted the with the custody of the Holy Places. And that is a ministry they continue to carry out to this day.

Brothers and Sister, on this St. Francis day, I wonder where God is calling us to be instruments of peace and love. Where is God asking us to cross a line of division and to share the good news of Jesus Christ? Because the Gospel brings peace to our lives, and the Gospel brings the love of God into this world.

May God bless us with the same love for others and the same desire to be instruments of peace that we see in St. Francis. And wherever we go, may we carry with us the words of Francis: "May the Lord give you peace." - "May the Lord give you peace."

Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we 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; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. *

"May the Lord give you peace." Amen!

*A Prayer attributed to St. Francis – *Book of Common Prayer*, page 832