



Song of
RECONCILIATION



Letter for the 8th
Centenary of the Canticle of
the Creatures (1225-2025)



Introduction

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Franciscan Family Around the World,
May the Lord give you peace!

With this letter we wish to share with you our joy for the 8th Centenary of the Canticle of Creatures, a date we cannot ignore. This anniversary fits fully into the sequence of centenaries that form the unique Franciscan Centenary, from Fonte Colombo to Greccio, to La Verna, to San Damiano and finally to St. Mary of the Angels.

Between the pain and love of La Verna, where Francis received the Stigmata, and the encounter with “Sister Death”, we find this song of praise and reconciliation that sums up Francis’ view of God and the world, of creatures and human beings, of himself and the Most High. The Canticle is a summary of the way Francis saw reality, and together we still want to sing it with joy of spirit!

In 2025, the Holy Year and the Year of the Canticle of Creatures, we wish to rediscover together the depth of this prayer that has spanned the centuries and still speaks to the heart of humanity and the Church. The Canticle, composed gradually by Francis between 1225 and 1226, is not just a poetic text, but a testimony to a comprehensive vision of God the Creator, creation, universal fraternity and integral ecology, themes that Pope Francis has taken up forcefully in his encyclical *Laudato si’*.



A. *In the Path of the Church*

Hymn of Jubilee

What praise can exist without singing? And what song can exist without a sound to accompany it? “Praise be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures”.¹ The *Canticle of God’s Fool* is music, perhaps, even before words, because Francis wanted forgiveness and peace to be proclaimed to the conflicting powers through song. This is what happened later with the “paceri” movement, also called the *Alleluia* movement. The *Canticle* belongs to the genre of medieval *laudes* and is, first and foremost, a praise. It was not created to be read in silence, but to be declaimed in song.

The Jubilee, too, begins with a sound: that of the shofar, the ram’s horn which, when intact and prepared in the right way, becomes the Yobel, the trumpet of the jubilee. What liturgy can exist without music? And what music can exist without the help of an instrument, which only creation, the work of God’s hands, can provide? Not mechanical instruments, but woodwinds and harpsichords, made from animal and plant materials, were allowed to express in the liturgy the sublimity of praise to God who is “all good, the highest good, Lord God living and true”.² As the Psalm says, “Awake, lyre and harp, I will awake the dawn”.³ Truly, the human being cannot be saved without creation. When we act against the *opus Dei*, we damage ourselves and our covenant with the Creator. According to Eastern tradition, the human being who mistreats nature loses his sense of beauty, the one who does not care for it becomes lazy, and the one who ignores his natural otherness falls into ignorance. The spirituality of praise accompanies Francis of Assisi from conversion to his

¹ The Canticle of the Creatures (Cant.) 3, *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Vol. I* (FAED I), p. 113.

² The Praises of God 3, FAED I, p. 109.

³ Psalm 108:2.

encounter with sister death, going through the difficulties of human existence, such as those described in the parable of “true and perfect joy”.⁴ “Praise be to you my Lord, for... who bear infirmity and tribulation...”.⁵ There can be no reconciliation with the brethren without reconciliation with the earth, as the Jubilee proclamation prescribes. Indeed, is it ever possible to proclaim the liberation of slaves if injustice in the possession of the land is not eliminated? Yes, liberation of slaves not without the rest of the land! “Cry of the earth and cry of the poor!” Francis knows no opposition or polarization. In the language of the Canticle, difference becomes harmony and not opposition, complementarity and not dissonance. Even the grammatical genders of nouns mark the rhythm of reciprocity: *Brother Sun and Sister Moon, Brother Wind and Sister Water, Brother Fire and Our Sister Mother Earth*.⁶ And this is not just a stylistic quirk, but a true theological vision that Francis matured in his evangelical journey. The cosmic brotherhood he proclaims does not eliminate differences but integrates them into an order of respect and reciprocity, reflecting the original bond between man and woman, heaven and earth, light and darkness. Thus, his song not only enumerates creatures, but binds them into a unity in which even the most radical contrasts - day and night, cold and heat - are reconciled into a greater totality. Nothing is excluded from this symphony, where the diversity of creation is not fragmentation but richness, and where every being, in its singularity, is called to participate in the common praise of the Creator: *Praise be to you my Lord, for Brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather*.⁷ Francis learned that unity is not uniformity, but communion: an interconnection of relationships in which each creature exists not for itself, but in relation to the others, in an order of integration and reciprocity that reflects divine goodness.

⁴ True and Perfect Joy, FAED I, p. 166.

⁵ Cant. 10, FAED I, p. 114.

⁶ Cf. Cant. 5-9, FAED I, p. 113.

⁷ Cant. 6, FAED I, p. 113.

To the Most High, Good Lord

Everything is connected, everything is in relationship: everything is triune. God is everything and everything is in God. How to express jubilation to the Most High Almighty, Good Lord, who after that night of physical and spiritual torment at San Damiano, had once again consoled Francis with the promise of eternal salvation, showing him a vision resembling a marvelous garden? Only the sounds, colors, tastes and smells of the creatures allow us to fully restore praise to the Creator of the universe. Only creation offers language and music to sing of its beauty; “In beautiful things he discerns Beauty Itself; all good things cry out to him: The One who made us is the Best.”⁸ “My God and my all!”⁹ Francis had repeated this all night long in the house of Bernard of Quintavalle. It was the cry of Jesus on the cross,¹⁰ combined with the hope of St. Paul: “that God may be all in all”.¹¹ And even on the mountain of La Verna, as Brother Leo recounts, Francis returned to contemplate the abyss of God’s love: “Who are you, O sweetest my God? Who am I, most vile vermin and worthless servant of you?”¹² At La Verna, finally, without more hesitation, he exclaimed, “You are everything, wealth enough for us”.¹³

God is everything and everything is in God. Francis never ceases to affirm the infinite magnificence and goodness of God: “You, Lord, are Supreme Good, the Eternal Good, from Whom all good comes and without Whom there is no good”.¹⁴ How then could he, an assiduous reader of Scripture, not recognize in creation itself the imprint of God, the book that narrates His beauty? As Thomas of Celano, his first biographer, writes:

⁸ Thomas of Celano: *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul* 165, FAED II, p. 353.

⁹ *Actus* 1, 21-22, *Fontes* 2087.

¹⁰ Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34.

¹¹ 1Cor 15:28.

¹² *FiorCons* III, *Fonti Francescane* (FF) 1915.

¹³ The Praises of God 6, FAED I, p. 109.

¹⁴ A Prayer Inspired by the Our Father 2, FAED I, p. 158.

“Who would be able to tell of the sweet tenderness he enjoyed while contemplating in creatures the wisdom, power, and goodness of the Creator? From this reflection he often overflowed with amazing, unspeakable joy as he looked at the sun, gazed at the moon, or observed the stars in the sky.”¹⁵

Thomas of Celano, his first biographer, had no doubts; he never ceases to chisel his narrative on the basis of the Canticle and its generating principle, even while writing *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul* (a.k.a. *The Second Life of St. Francis*):

“Truly, that fountain-like goodness, which will be “all in all”, already shone clearly in all for this saint.”¹⁶

B. For a Universal Fraternity

With the Help of Creatures

“Most High, Almighty Good Lord...”: there could be no higher title to define the cosmic fullness of Francis’ God! But it is precisely in contemplating the immeasurable greatness of the Father of all things that Francis discovers the abyss of his own nothingness. The vision of the sublimity of the Most High excavates in him an awareness of his own unworthiness, which prompts him to invoke the help of creatures. The excessive goodness of this God, the only one worthy of praise, renders him unable even to speak his name:

“Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honor, and all blessing. To You alone, Most High, do they belong, and no human is worthy to mention Your name.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Celano: *The Life of St. Francis* 80, FAED I, p. 250.

¹⁶ Celano: *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul* 165, FAED II, p. 354.

¹⁷ Cant. 1-2, FAED I, p. 113.

In the praise raised to God by the twenty-four elders of the *Apocalypse*,¹⁸ Francis had identified the culmination of his spiritual journey, which from “knowledge” of God – “every good, the highest good, all good” – moves to “appreciation” of his gentleness, strength and beauty, to arrive at the “restitution” of everything through praise:

“Let us refer all good to the Lord, God Almighty and Most High, acknowledge that every good is His, and thank Him, “from Whom all good comes, for everything.”¹⁹

If in the Rule it is Christ who comes to the rescue of humanity that “is not worthy to name you”,²⁰ in the Canticle it is the creatures who lend their voices to humankind. It is this great insight of Francis that Pope Francis takes up in *Laudato si'* when he points to the saint of the Canticle as a model of integral ecology:

“I believe that Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically [...]. He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself.”²¹

Footsteps of the Word Made Flesh

It is only in creatures that the unworthy human being finds succor to return praise to God “as it pleases him.” As Francis recalls in his *Admonitions*, creatures “serve, know and obey their Creator, each according to its own nature, better than you”.²² This is not a poetic invention of Francis, but the result of his careful reading of the Bible. In the liturgy, first of all, creatures appear as a sound book that

¹⁸ Rev 4:11.

¹⁹ The Earlier Rule XVII, 17, FAED I, p. 75.

²⁰ The Earlier Rule XXIII, 5, FAED I, p. 82.

²¹ Pope Francis: *Laudato si'* 10.

²² The Admonitions V:2, FAED I, p. 131.

proclaims “the glory” of their creator: “The heavens proclaim the glory of God and the work of his hands proclaims the firmament”.²³ There has been much discussion among scholars about the value of that “with” in “Praised be You my Lord with all your creatures.” Is it a companion complement (“*be praised Lord and with you be praised all creatures*”) or a middle complement (“*be praised Lord through all creatures*”)?: The declaration of the unworthiness of the human being at the beginning of the Canticle would lean toward the second interpretation. Not finding in himself a voice worthy of praise, Francis accepts the Psalmist’s invitation, “All Your works give You thanks, Lord”.²⁴ In Francis’ writings always standing out with the *with* your creatures is also the *by*; by which you enlighten and sustain us; is not the flesh the hinge of salvation?

In the Poetic Gaze

That creatures are not the product of an evil demiurge, as the Cathar heresy of Francis’ time claimed, but the fruit of the beauty of the Most High, Good Lord. This is especially evident in the stanza on “Mother Earth”. By carefully reading the text of Genesis:

“Let the earth bring forth vegetation ... plants ... Let the earth bring forth living things, cattle, creeping things, wild animals ... God formed man out of the clay of the ground.”²⁵

Francis recognizes the maternal dimension of the earth, seeing it as the “co-generator” of all other creatures, including human beings. The earth not only co-generates at the beginning of the world, but continues its maternal role throughout history, “nurturing” and “governing” every living being. Mother Earth governs because she nourishes, she performs a political service because she wears the

²³ Psalm 19:1-2.

²⁴ Psalm 145:10.

²⁵ Gen 1:11, 1:24, 2:7.

apron of the wet nurse, similar to the one Jesus wore for the washing of the feet.

“... who produces varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs.”²⁶ That the herb is not only food, limiting its role to a mere utilitarian function, but also a creature worthy of admiration along with the colorful flowers, is an insight born of Francis’ poetic genius. Even Thomas of Celano is amazed by it:

“How great do you think was the delight the beauty of flowers brought to his soul whenever he saw their lovely form and noticed their sweet fragrance? Whenever he found an abundance of flowers, he used to preach to them and invite them to praise the Lord, just as if they were endowed with reason.”²⁷

C. *Blessed Are Those Who Bear Infirmary and Tribulation*

On the Stairway of Creation

Finally, we human beings arrive. The entry of men and women seems to cause a deviation, a jolt, a sudden surge in the Canticle. It is as if Francis has so far prepared the ground for the novelty or diversity of these latest motifs of praise. Franciscan ecology, to be truly integral, cannot keep human beings out. But the real question is: what human beings?

Until now, the human being, expelled from the garden and left without words to praise his God, has had to lean on all of creation, almost asking for its mediation. Now he is ready to re-enter the game, having found other words. Which ones? Although the Can-

²⁶ Cant. 9, FAED I, p. 114.

²⁷ Celano: *The Life of St. Francis* 81, FAED I, p. 251.

ticle has no unity of composition in time and place, it expresses a coherent unity of thought.

The natural elements described so far are praised for what they naturally are and what they do for the benefit of human beings. Recognizing this and praising God for it is already a step forward. But Francis does not praise the human being in the same way. He does not praise man for innate characteristics, but for something not spontaneous: the ability to inhabit the mystery of life, even in its margins. Did not Francis himself compose the *Canticle* from his existential “margin”?²⁸ Francis praises only “this man”, not all men in general. The human being is capable of consciously standing even in conflictual situations, in the breach, in the wound, in the contradiction, in the apparent defeat.

Francis knows well that the opposite of love is not hatred, but possession, which in turn can trigger hatred. He knows that embracing is different from withholding: and Francis no longer wants to possess anything, not even himself, not even his own limitations and frailties, his own fears, the evil that others do to him.

The Final Steps

The *Canticle* is first of all Christology. It tells us something about Christ, and consequently Franciscan anthropology; that is, it tells us who the human being should be in the image of Christ. If Jesus forgave from the cross, in the strength of this same forgiveness (“for Thy sake”) the human being is such because first and foremost he forgives, even in the midst of evil. He knows how to respond in an alternative way to the evil received, interrupting its cycle. He is free because he has the possibility of not increasing the evil that already exists in the world.

²⁸ *The Assisi Compilation* 83, FAED II, p. 184.

Along with this, the greatness of the human being, still in the image of Christ, lies in the ability to welcome and make sense of illness and frailty, not seen merely as accidents of the road. As a leper says in an episode narrated in the *Little Flowers*: “What peace can I have from God? He has taken from me peace and every good thing, and has made me all decayed and stinking!”²⁹. To this Francis replies, after exhorting the friars to care for their sick brother, “I beg the sick brother to thank God for everything and to desire to be whatever the Lord wills, whether sick or well...”³⁰

Finally, we come to welcome death, every death even daily death, the hurdle where any of our dreams of omnipotence break down, and to call her “sister”. This means reconciling with her, almost forgiving her. Provided that we come alive, fully and evangelically alive, to the encounter. It is a matter of life, not death: encountering death means confronting the deep meaning of our life.

Only after passing through forgiveness and acceptance of human frailty and death, can that human being who at first was unworthy even to raise his face to the Lord, finally dare to praise him in full voice, in chorus with all creation! For this is St. Francis, and with him every person who is free, becalmed and conformed to Christ. To serve (to be in the service of, to prefer the last place, to be submissive to all³¹ and to do so “cum grande humilitate” in the steps of Christ who “daily humbles himself”³² along with praise, blessing and thanksgiving) is what every man and woman should come to master in order to remain truly human. So much so that the meek Francis foresees in the *Canticle* the possibility of only one problem, reserved precisely for those who will not apply themselves.

²⁹ *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* 25, FAED III, p. 607.

³⁰ The Earlier Rule X:3, FAED I p. 71.

³¹ Cf. The Earlier Rule V:9, FAED I p. 67; The Later Rule X:9, FAED I p. 105; SalVir 16-18 FF 258; 2Lf 47 FF 199.

³² The Admonitions I:16, FAED I, p. 129; Cf. The Praises of God 4, FAED I p. 109.

D. *Into the Heart of God*

Reflect Upon It Carefully

The Canticle was not written in a single moment, but in the rhythm of Francis' own life:

- In the fall of 1225, a guest at San Damiano and by then almost blind, he composed the stanzas dedicated to creatures.
- In July 1226, while staying at the residence of the bishop of Assisi, he adds the stanzas on forgiveness and peace.
- At the end of 1226, now close to death, he inserts the stanza on Sister Death.

The Canticle is not only an interior reflection but the fruit of a missionary soul. In the verses dedicated to peace and forgiveness, the desire emerges for the brothers to “go with him throughout the world preaching and singing the praises of the Lord”.³³ The choice of vernacular language instead of Latin shows the desire that his message could reach every heart, without cultural or social barriers. The Canticle is, in essence, a gentle invitation to conversion, a call to change lives, not as a moral imperative, but as an openness to the experience of God in creation. To enter into this mindset of praise, Francis offers two keys: purity of heart and poverty of spirit.

An Authentic Theological Vision

The Canticle embodies a dual-movement liturgical dynamic: a descent, in which the gaze opens to recognize the divine presence in every creature, and a return, in which all that exists is offered back to the Creator. It is Francis' own Christian experience that directs

³³ *A Mirror of the Perfection* 100, FAED III p. 366.

his gaze toward salvation history, caught in a circular rhythm that unites and reconciles. Francis becomes the voice of a song of decentralization, as he who praises strips himself to recognize that good is not possession, but a gift received and shared.

The Canticle is an expression of the redeemed vision of the world that Francis matured on his journey of faith. Francis sings drawing on a deep inner peace, reconciled with himself, with others, with creation and with the mystery of death. This universal brotherhood stems from the certainty that everything God has created is good. His gaze, far from being marked by the suffering that afflicted him at the time of composition, opens to the paschal experience: in darkness, the blind man sings to the light; in sickness, the sick man exalts the beauty of the earth; in the imminence of death, the dying man proclaims eternal bliss: “Praised be to You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death”.³⁴

In the Canticle, Francis unfolds a vision in which the beginning and the end of creation are woven into the same praise, as an echo of the original justice and an anticipation of the fullness of God’s Kingdom. This hymn, woven with the pure gaze of one who has learned to see the world with the eyes of faith, not only recalls the primordial harmony in which everything was created good, but also proclaims the final fulfillment of the divine plan, when all reality, transfigured by grace, will regain its unity in God. Thus, Francis sings the past and the future of the divine dream, in a hymn that is memory and prophecy, certainty and hope, celebration and desire. His praise is not a mere recognition of created beauty, but a confession of faith in the One *who is good to all and compassionate toward all his creatures*,³⁵ sustaining the cosmos with his love and leading it to its ultimate fullness.

³⁴ Cant. 12, FAED I p. 114.

³⁵ Psalm 145:9.



Conclusion

Dear brothers and sisters of the Franciscan Family,

We invite you to joyfully celebrate the 8th Centenary of the Cantic of Creatures in the Jubilee Year 2025. Let us make our own the clear and prophetic gaze of the Poverello of Assisi, capable of recognizing in every creature the imprint of the Creator, and of calling us all to a universal fraternity that embraces the entire cosmos.

At a time when the wounds of the earth and the cry of the poor are being powerfully heard, Francis' voice invites us to rediscover the beauty of being pilgrims and strangers in this world, custodians and not masters of creation, brothers and sisters of every living thing. His song urges us to become artisans of peace and forgiveness, to live vulnerability not as a limitation but as openness to the other, to integrate death into the great mystery of life.

With Francis, we learn to welcome every reality – from the brightest to the darkest – within an experience of praise and restitution. The Cantic teaches us that there are no meaningless lives, no voiceless creatures, and no situations outside of divine compassion. Everything is embraced by the Father's tenderness, and everything can become an occasion for praise.

May this centennial celebration help us to recover Francis' pure gaze, capable of seeing beyond appearances and grasping the dignity and beauty of every being.

May we thus become, like him, singers of reconciliation and hope for our time, awakening in hearts the capacity to wonder, to give thanks and to care for the common home.

With gratitude and hope, we bless you all in the Lord.

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Assisi, 1st of September 2025

Prot. n. 38/25

