

The Canticle of Brother Sun (1225)

Background: The companions of Saint Francis tell us that the *Canticle of Brother Sun* was composed while he was staying in a small hut next to San Damiano. The saint had completed a long and no doubt exhausting preaching tour after his time on LaVerna, August to September, 1224, and spent time convalescing close to Saint Clare and the Poor Ladies. Almost blind and completely helpless, his body racked in agony, Francis lay in a little darkened cell. In those long hours of interior and exterior darkness, he endured severe temptations of despondency. Yet during one of those moments of discouragement, the Lord assured him that he would enjoy heavenly glory and this inspired this canticle of joy that will always characterize Franciscan spirituality.

We might wonder what were the intentions of the stigmatized mystic Saint Francis in desiring to spend time at San Damiano. Thomas of Celano and Bonaventure write of his desire to return to his beginnings, that is, to practice once again the patterns of his conversion that first led him to the Lord. No doubt San Damiano was a sentimental favorite in this regard since it was there that the call to rebuild the Lord's house was first made known to him. But it may also be that Francis realized how completely Clare and her sisters had come to live a fuller Trinitarian life.

In any case, this canticle of praise, filled with Francis's vision of a universe mirroring the presence of the Triune God, could only have come from the heart of a mystic. When seen in the light of San Damiano, filled as it is with images of both saints Francis and Clare, the *Canticle of Brother Sun* becomes a beautiful, meaningful reflection of both.

The Canticle of Brother Sun

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory, the honor, and all blessing,
To You alone, Most High, do they belong,
and no human is worthy to mention Your name.

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

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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,
through which You give sustenance to Your creatures.

Praised be You, My Lord, through **Sister Water**,
Who 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 colored flowers and herbs.

Praised be You, my Lord, through **those who give pardon
for Your love**, and bear infirmity and tribulation.

Blessed are **those who endure in peace**
for by You, Most High, shall they be crowned.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our **Sister Bodily Death**,
from whom no one living can escape.

Woe to those who die in mortal sin.

Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will,
for the second death shall do them no harm.

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