Living like St. Francis of Assisi

Be praised, my Lord, through our sister Mother Earth, who feeds us and rules us, and produces various fruits with colored flowers and herbs.
~ St. Francis of Assisi

On Oct. 4, we celebrate the feast of St. Francis of Assisi. Because of his love of nature, he has become one of the best-known and most popular saints in the world. People imagine him as a happy-go-lucky 13th-century hippie who went around talking to animals, singing and dancing, while living a life of radical poverty. While he did believe that it was our duty and honor to be stewards of God's world, and he did love all creation, and he did embrace "Lady Poverty," he was much more complex – and interesting – than many of us realize.

Who Was Francis?

Giovanni (John) di Bernardone was born in 1181 to a well-to-do silk merchant and his wife. His father, an ardent Francophile, called him Francesco – "The Frenchman," a name that stuck. He was a typical youth, although wealthy, who enjoyed the good life, but that all changed when he joined the army and spent a year as a prisoner of war. Upon his release, he began his spiritual conversion, which culminated in his eventual rejection of his family's fortune and his founding of a group of religious that dedicated themselves to preaching the Gospel and living a life of poverty. He died in 1226. It is said he was listening to a reading of Psalm 142 when he died. Pope Gregory IX canonized him two years after his death.

Talk About It: Why do you think Pope Francis took the name "Francis" when he became pope?

Family Fun: Google Pope Francis and St. Francis of Assisi and look for ways their teachings are similar.

Church Reformer

Francis heard God's call to "rebuild my church" and first thought it meant to reconstruct a broken-down building. However, he came to realize that God was calling him to renew the entire Church. He helped reform the sacramental life of the Church, which had fallen into disarray, and instigated new devotion to the Eucharist and an increased piety among the laity.

Talk About It: How might we bring new life to our family? To our parish?

Family Fun: Choose one ministry each member of your family will help with at your parish. Enjoy the fruits of volunteering!

Light and Dark

Francis saw God's hand in all creation and radiated a profound joy wherever he went. But because of his experiences in battle and in prison, he also suffered from nightmares and periods of depression. In his dark periods, he turned to prayer, physical activity, such as walking, and being with close friends – advice we can all heed.

Talk About It: Have we ever struggled with our faith in times of darkness? How do we get through those tough times?

Family Fun: In the spirit of St. Francis, take a walk around the block as a family. Feel the sun on your face and give thanks to God!

Canticle of the Sun

One prayer we know Francis wrote was the Canticle of the Sun, also known as the Canticle of the Creatures. In it, he praises the Lord for all of creation, including the sun, moon, stars, water, fire and, finally, “our sister” Death. Say this shortened version of the prayer at mealtime this month.

Be praised, my Lord, through all Your creatures,
especially through my lord Brother Sun,
who brings the day; and You give light through him.
And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendor!
Of You, Most High, he bears the likeness.

Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars;
in the heavens You have made them bright, precious and beautiful.

Happy those who endure in peace,
for by You, Most High, they will be crowned.