

Meet St. Francis of Assisi! • Saints for kids

LIVED: 1182-1226 in Italy during a time of cultural renewal across Europe. His real name was Giovanni, but his father called him Francesco, or “the Frenchman.” Later, Francis was called “God’s fool” and il Poverello, “the little poor one.”

MISSION: While praying in the little church of St. Damian, Francis heard Christ speak: “Francis, go and repair my house, which you see is falling down.” Francis repaired Christ’s “house” (the Church) by living the Gospel to the fullest, especially Matthew 10:7-19.

ADVENTURES: One day when Francis was just beginning to discover God’s mission for him, he went riding in the countryside to think about the words the Lord had spoken to him in prayer: *Francis, all the worldly things you loved, you must despise, if you wish to know my will. Once you begin doing this, what before seemed sweet will be unbearable and bitter; and what before made you shudder will offer you great sweetness.*

Suddenly, his horse stopped. There in the road ahead was a leper clothed in gray, his limbs twisted by disease. Large, bloody sores marred his face, and flies crawled all over him. The man silently held out his disfigured hand.

Francis shuddered. Always before he had kept far, far away from lepers, but this time, Francis did not turn away. He got off his horse and slowly approached the leper; taking the man’s hand, he kissed the rotting flesh and pressed a gold coin in it. Then he turned and remounted his horse. But when he looked for the leper again, the man was nowhere to be seen.

Francis was overjoyed, because the words the Lord had spoken to him had come true. Several days later, he made his way to

the hospital for lepers outside Assisi, and calling them all together, he gave each one a gold coin, a kiss on the hand, and a kiss on the lips. Francis stayed there for several months, caring for the lepers by washing their bodies and treating them with kindness and respect.

Many years later, Francis recalled his encounter with the lepers in this way: "When I was in sin the sight of lepers was too bitter for me. And the Lord himself led me among them, and I pitied and helped them. And when I left them I discovered that what had seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness in my soul and body."

Learn more

EWTN has the full text of [The Flowers of St. Francis](#), a collection of stories about the saint and his friends; parents will want to skim the text in advance to find an appropriate excerpt.

You'll find several older movies about St. Francis online (search YouTube).

<https://youtu.be/SEqsGWfuUPg>