



CHILDREN, FEAST DAY, GODLY PLAY, SAINTS

Published on October 4, 2016 — Comments 2

Rich in Love: The Story of St. Francis

written by [thehomelyhours](#)



Thank you to Jeremy Downey for sharing with us the story of St. Francis, which he wrote for our church's Godly Play program. At the bottom of this post, you can see the books on

St. Francis recommended by Jeremy and his wife Jennifer.

Rich in Love: St. Francis, a Godly Play-Inspired Story

Francis was born in the town of Assisi, in Italy. His father was a wealthy merchant, who named his son Francis—which means “Frenchman”—because he loved the fine wares and delicious food of France. Francis grew up loving fine food and wine and beautiful clothes and music and dancing as well, and he loved to have wonderful parties with his friends so he could share these things with them. He wanted to be brave and strong and to protect his town from enemies, so when Assisi went to war against a nearby town he rode off with the soldiers to fight. In the battle Francis was captured and made a prisoner, and he had to live for a year in a dark and miserable dungeon. But even though he was in such a terrible place he still managed to laugh and joke and sing and lift the spirits of the other prisoners. When he was finally ransomed, he returned to Assisi and to his friends and parties, and everyone loved him all the more for the courage and good spirit he had shown in the battle and in the dungeon.



Francis wanted to become a noble knight, and to win glory, and to fight against the Muslims, so his father bought him a fine horse and splendid armor and a magnificent cape, and he rode off to join the Fourth Crusade. But after he had ridden only a single day, God spoke to him in a dream and told him that this was not the right path. Francis was confused, but he returned home to Assisi only to be teased by his friends who thought he had been too afraid to join the Crusade, and scolded by his father

The figures used in our Godly Play story

who was upset at having
wasted so much money on a
fine horse and armor for nothing. Francis began to spend time in prayer, asking
God what was the right path.

One day Francis saw a poor man who was a leper. He had ugly sores all over his body and wore ragged, dirty clothes and smelled bad. Francis had always loved beautiful things, and the sight of the leper upset him and made him feel afraid. But in spite of this he went up to the poor leper and embraced him and kissed his misshapen hand. Then something happened that surprised Francis. The leper embraced him back, and kissed Francis' hand, and suddenly Francis felt the most wonderful joy he had ever known. He felt God's love come into him through the leper's touch, and he knew that God's love was for the entire world, and because God loved everything, everything was beautiful. He laughed and sang because of the beauty that God's love made, but when he turned again to look for the leper, the leper had disappeared.

Another time Francis was praying in the church of St. Damian just outside Assisi, which was falling apart from neglect. There was an image of Christ on the cross above the altar, and as Francis prayed it seemed to speak to him and said, "Francis, repair my house which is falling into ruin." Francis thought this must mean the ruined church in which he was praying, so he went and sold some of his father's wares to get money to fix the broken down building. But when his father heard of it he came and took back the money and locked Francis in his room. Francis' mother helped him to escape, and he returned to St. Damian's church to repair it with his own hands. Francis' father thought he had lost his mind, and took him to the city court. There, in front of all the ruling men of the city, he said he would disown Francis and take away his inheritance and all his fine things unless he stopped acting so strangely and came back to work in the family business. Francis said, "You have always been my father. Now I will have no father except 'Our Father who is in heaven.'" And with that he took off all the expensive and beautiful clothes he wore and gave them back to his father, then went out from the court in only a shirt made of scratchy hair. He went to go live in the woods outside Assisi, and when robbers found him and beat him up and took every last thing that he owned, he sang and laughed because now he was free from all the things that had distracted him from finding the right path.

Francis took care of the poor and the sick and lived in the woods and owned nothing and preached about the love God had for everything that made everything beautiful. People began to follow Francis because they wanted to live like he did and know the love he felt for everything God loved. Francis called his followers “Little Brothers,” and he went to Rome to ask the Pope for permission to make the Little Brothers into a real religious order. At first the Pope didn’t want to meet with the strange, scruffy man who lived in the woods, but then he had a dream in which he saw the great Lateran Basilica—the Pope’s own church—about to fall over, and the man from Assisi holding it up. He realized God was telling him that Francis’ mission was very important for the entire Church. He gave Francis his blessing, and the Little Brothers became an order of monastics and were called friars.

Francis saw that because God loved everything, the whole world and everything in it was like a family. He called the sun “Brother Sun,” and the moon “Sister Moon,” and made up hymns about how the whole world praised God by being what God had made it. He once preached a sermon to some birds he saw in the woods, calling them his little sisters. When a fearsome wolf began to frighten the townspeople of the nearby town of Gubbio and eat their livestock, he went and found the wolf and said, “Brother Wolf, you have frightened these people and eaten their livestock, but since you only did so because you were hungry, will you promise to make peace with them and do them no harm if they will feed you every day?” The wolf bowed its head and put its paw in Francis’ hand, and from that day on it lived peacefully in Gubbio, and the townspeople fed it like a pet.

By the end of his life Francis had travelled far and wide telling people about God’s love and helping the poor, and had gained many followers, and everyone knew of the man of God who owned nothing and loved everyone and everything. He had even tried to stop the wars between the Christians and Muslims by going to preach to the Muslim sultan. His preaching caused a great revival among people throughout Europe, for this was the true meaning of the vision he had seen so long ago in St. Damian’s—that he would be a repairer of God’s Church throughout the land, not just a single church building.

We remember St. Francis because he was rich in love.