

# The Canticle of the Creatures

## THE CANTICLE OF THE CREATURES IS BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN WRITTEN BY ST FRANCIS AT SAN DAMIANO IN 1224-1225.

Much had been written about the Canticle over the years since it was sung for Francis on his death bed. Certainly, Francis' love of creation is a well-known and well celebrated aspect of his life and spirituality, but as Julian csf reminds us *...equally important was Francis' sense that because God had created all things and all people, he was Father of all, and therefore all people and all creation were brother and sister to Francis* (Julian, 2001, p.57).

Francis finished this Canticle as he was dying, adding a verse on forgiveness after witnessing a bitter dispute between the Bishop and Mayor of Assisi and a verse on death itself. According to tradition, Francis had the friars sing the Canticle to him for the last time on his death bed at the Portiuncula in 1226.

The Canticle was written in the common language, Umbrian Italian, rather than Latin and it is said that these verses were the first recorded poetry in the Italian language.

Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si* takes its name and its inspiration from the Canticle; *Laudato Si* translating as Praise Be to You. This phrase is used throughout the Canticle of the Creatures.

On the next page, the Canticle of the Creatures is presented with artwork by © Piero Casentini, made for the Sanctuary of San Damiano at Assisi. Some ideas on using the Canticle in prayer and reflection, retreat and formation activities are included below.

- Use the Canticle for staff prayer using Lectio Divina. Invite those present to spend reflective time with the Canticle and to choose words or images that speak to them. Bodo (1995) says of the Canticle *...sometimes when I am reading the Canticle of Brother Sun, I get the strange feeling that Francis is in the poem looking out at me...* (p.130).

### Ask: What is St Francis saying to us today?

- There are many artworks which are inspired by the Canticle. Some of these are included in the final section of this resource. Use art to invite participants to pray a Visio Divina and to share what imagery, colours, symbols etc. speak to them.

### Ask: How has the Canticle been captured in Art? How might contemporary artists present the message of the Canticle today.

- Invite participants in groups to illustrate the Canticle themselves using images, colours, photographs or other objects. These can be shared in the group as a form of reflective prayer.
- Use a Natura Divina where participants take the Canticle and go for a walk in nature as a reflective prayer experience (Ideas for using Natura Divina as a prayer form are included in the prayer chapter of this resource).
- Create reflection cards using lines from the Canticle and images which capture the beauty of the natural world. Gift these to others in the group.
- As a ritual, undertake a group presentation of the Canticle. Standing in a circle, invite people (one for each stanza of the Canticle) to step forward with a candle and a symbol representing each element. Add music or other enhancement to the message of the Canticle. Prayer outside would be ideal for this experience.
- In a reflection day, use Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si* and the Canticle of the Creatures to examine a Franciscan approach to caring for the Earth.

