

Life

Saint Francis was born in Assisi in 1181. His father was a silk merchant. Francis liked to feast with friends when he was young. Later, he claimed to live in sin during this period. He hoped to be a noble knight, so he joined the army, but was almost defeated right away and was captured. After being imprisoned with some nobles for one year, he was freed and returned home but he got seriously ill. On recovery, he continued to live his life as in the past. In preparation to go to war again, he acquired a golden armour with a large sum. On the way, he saw a poorly clad defeated knight, and he gave his armour to him. That night, he dreamt of himself in a gorgeous fortress, and weapons with a cross on each hung on the walls. A voice was heard saying: "The weapons are for you and your soldiers". He misunderstood that he should continue in the army, but he suddenly fell ill and heard in his bed: "Go back quickly, it is better to serve the Lord than the ordinary people." Francis somehow understood and immediately returned home. He began to lose interest in feasting and be a knight, but began to pray alone. One day on the road, he met a beggar who was a leper. Francis kissed the hand of the leper while taking out money. From then on, Francis personally waited on patients in the hospital and those with leprosy on the street, helped the poor generously, and even gave out his own clothes, which made his father very angry.

One day, Francis prayed in the tattered church at San Damiano and heard a voice from an icon of the crucified Christ, "Go Francis, and repair my house, which as you see is falling into ruin". He thought he was ordered to repair that church (in fact, it referred to the universal church of God), so he went home to sell his father's fabrics and sent money to the priest. Francis' father was furious after finding this out, beat him up and dragged him in front of the bishop to reason this out, and the bishop stated that he should return the money. Francis complied and returned everything, including the clothes he was wearing to his father, and never went home again. In the following few years, Francis begged in order to repair churches. One day, he read this from the Bible: "As you go, make this proclamation: 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand ...Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give. Do not take goldor a second tunic, or sandals, or walking stick.'" (Mt 10: 7-19) So he joyfully embraced poverty of spirit, and only wore rough clothing in barefoot to spread the gospel with love. The Lord gave him the grace of working miracles, but his loving heart made him more popular. For example, a patient had an ulcerated tumor on his face and after Francis kissed his face, the man was immediately cured. Francis not only loved people, he also loved nature; even animals obeyed him and he regarded them as brothers and sisters. He advised wild wolves to live peacefully with humans, and even preached to the birds. Many people followed Francis. After writing out the rules of a proposed new religious order that Francis hoped to create, he requested to meet with the Pope for his approval. The Pope dreamt that Francis and Dominic (refer to St. Dominic) had supported the crumbling Lateran Basilica, so he endorsed his request. The Franciscan Order flourished rapidly. In 1224, Francis received the stigmata. St. Francis died in 1226 at the age of 45. The church named him as the patron saint of ecology. He is also the patron saint of animals.

Reflection

Saint Francis did not solve the problem of poverty, but he made poverty sacred. He promoted poverty in spirit, simplicity in everything and non-materialism, so humans can acquire real freedom. For him, to possess wealth but ignore other's lack of food and clothing is the lack of love. Saint Francis challenged us to let go of the pursuit of material things, and instead care about the needs of the least of our brothers around us, and share our love to build a kingdom of heaven.

Prayer

Saint Francis felt that both nature and humans are created by God. Therefore he called the sun, the moon, and even the birds and wolves his brothers and sisters. The entire universe is a big family. Before he died, he had very poor health and had photophobia which caused him severe pain in his eyes, but at that time he wrote the famous "Canticle of the Sun". The content was that all things in the world praised God for his goodness. Let us also learn from Saint Francis to open our minds, contemplate the beauty of nature, and sincerely praise the beauty, goodness and wisdom of the creator.

<p>May we learn from St. Francis' poverty in spirit, share with love and build the Kingdom of God. May we also contemplate the beauty of nature and sincerely praise the Lord. Saint Francis of Assisi, pray for us.</p>
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