



## **St Francis at 800: A Legacy of Peace, Simplicity and Service**

This year marks the 800th anniversary of the life and spiritual legacy of Saint Francis of Assisi, one of Christianity's most beloved and influential saints.

Around the world, Franciscans, parish communities, pilgrims and admirers are reflecting on the enduring message of the humble saint whose example continues to inspire people of all ages and backgrounds.

Born in Assisi, Italy, around 1181 or 1182, Francis was the son of a wealthy cloth merchant. As a young man, he enjoyed comfort, status and dreams of becoming a knight. But after illness, war and a deep spiritual awakening, he experienced a profound conversion. He turned away from wealth and ambition and embraced a Gospel-centred life of poverty, humility and joy.

Francis dedicated himself to rebuilding the Church, serving the poor and preaching peace and reconciliation. His love for creation became a defining part of his spirituality. He saw all living things as gifts from God, calling nature "Brother Sun" and "Sister Moon." Today, he is recognised as the patron saint of ecology and the environment.

This year's Franciscan centenary celebrations focus on the final years of his life and the spiritual events that shaped the Franciscan movement.

Pilgrimages, prayer services, retreats and charitable works are being held worldwide to honour his lasting influence. More than a historical commemoration, the anniversary invites people to rediscover values that remain deeply relevant today: simplicity, peace, compassion and care for creation.

An important branch of the Franciscan family is the Secular Franciscan Order, also known as the OFS (Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis). Unlike Franciscan friars and sisters who live in religious communities, Secular Franciscans are lay people and diocesan clergy who follow the spirituality of St Francis while living ordinary daily lives.

The Secular Franciscan Order traces its roots directly to St Francis. Men and women inspired by his example wanted to follow his spirituality without leaving their families or work. Francis welcomed them and offered a simple Gospel-based rule of life.

Today, Secular Franciscans include married and single people, teachers, nurses, office workers, retirees and clergy. Rather than taking monastic vows, we make a public profession to live the Gospel in the spirit of St Francis and bring Franciscan values into everyday society.

Our Parish is the meeting place of our own Solent OFS whose spirituality centres on prayer, simplicity, fraternity and service. With Brothers and Sisters from across the south coast, Fareham, Parkgate, the Isle of Wight and Bournemouth, we meet at Sacred Heart (or sometimes at St Phillip Howard) every third Saturday of the month for prayer, formation and mutual support. We aim to go from Gospel to life and life to the Gospel. Inspired by Francis, we seek to live with humility, generosity and joy. If you would like to find out more about the Solent OFS, join a meeting or drop a line to: [Solentofs@outlook.com](mailto:Solentofs@outlook.com).

The Franciscan message remains especially relevant today. In a world shaped by consumerism, conflict and environmental crisis, St Francis offers a vision grounded in simplicity, compassion and respect for creation. Although an early 20<sup>th</sup> Century prayer not written by St Francis, the well-known prayer, “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,” continues to resonate across cultures and generations.

For Secular Franciscans, the 800th anniversary is both a celebration and a challenge. It celebrates a spiritual heritage that has touched millions of lives; while also reminding Christians that Francis calls them not only to admire his example, but to live it.

Eight centuries later, the light of St Francis still shines brightly. Through the work of Franciscans worldwide — friars, sisters and secular members alike — his message of peace, humility and love for creation continues to inspire modern society. The centenary celebrations remind us that the spirit of Assisi is not confined to history but remains a living invitation to build a more compassionate and peaceful world.

The Solent OFS are planning a series of initiatives to remind us all of St Francis and this legacy and ask you to join us in the coming months to celebrate the life of this humble radical who did indeed rebuild the church. Check upcoming newsletters to see what more is to come.

Pax et Bonum  
(Peace and Joy)  
Solent OFS