

ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI – PATRON SAINT OF ANIMALS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

INTRO: St Francis lived almost 1000 years ago. He believed that we all have a duty to protect our world and care for the creatures that live in it. He was thinking of conservation and sustainability long before the world realized their importance, so it is not surprising that he is the patron saint of animals and the environment.

WILD YOUTH: In his youth, Francis didn't have much time for the environment – he was too busy enjoying himself!! He came from a wealthy family and made the most of the good times that his family money could buy. He loved sport, wore the most fashionable clothes, and enjoyed feasting on the best food and wine with his friends.

DIFFICULT TIMES: In his early twenties, Francis became a soldier, but things did not go well for him – he was captured and spent a year as a prisoner of war. Around that time, either in prison or soon after his release, he became seriously ill. He began to see the emptiness of his life and became dissatisfied with the way money had become so important to him. He began to think about what he would do with the rest of his life.

GOD'S MESSAGE TO HIM: Francis set out for war again, but then he felt that God told him to stop. Francis turned back; risking being called a coward. He decided to serve God in any way he could. Francis began by restoring churches that had become derelict. He also helped the sick and poor. He spent a lot of time walking in lonely places, praying that God would make it clear how he could serve him best.

CONTINUING HIS WORK: Eventually, Francis realized that his wealth was holding him back from serving God, so he changed his life and wearing a rough cloak and barefoot, he walked from place to place telling people about God's love and forgiveness. After a few years of living and travelling alone, Francis was joined by others who helped him in his work for God, forming the Franciscan Order. Respect for nature and animals was very important to Francis. It is said that he had a special way with animals, who did not seem to be afraid of him. We are told that one day, he even preached to the birds around him as he walked in the woods. Legend has it Francis spoke to a wolf that had been killing animals and attacking people in a village. The wolf sat at his feet and Francis warned him to stop his attacks and make peace with the people. Francis led the wolf into the village and made a pact that, if the villagers fed the wolf, he would never attack again – and that's just what happened.

HIS LONGER-TERM IMPACT: There are still people who belong to the Franciscan Order and follow the rules and teaching of St Francis. They often live in small groups, helping people who are in need. They always try to make people aware of the environment and how important it is for us to care for our world and all living things.

