

# The feasts of Francis and Michael

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Feasts of Francis and Michael – Jrm 22 13-16, Ps 148 1-13, Rev 12 7-12a, Mt 11 25-30

(Patron saint of ups and downs.) Today, one of those we celebrate is Francis. He's a wanderer whom we remember with love for his words of encouragement and wisdom to people and to birds and animals. Our Psalm this morning could virtually be his theme song. Praise (□□□□□ boast of) the Lord from the Earth! *All the creatures in this Psalm are cause to boast of God's greatness – land and sea creatures, forces of nature, all types of people; everything boasts of God, source of our being.*

Psalm 148 takes us back into the journey of our last four weeks where we've joined together with forests, soils, wilderness and rivers to praise / boast of God who is with us. In our hearts and minds, we've walked in forests where the sounds of the life surrounding us gradually still our talk, and the peace of listening prayer settles in. We've acknowledged that we and all life are born of the soil; so we're all one family. We've heard the invitation to stay long enough in the outback that its seeming changelessness brings about deep spiritual change in us. And last week, we recognised rivers as the living bloodstream of this Land – like the blood of Christ is for us, bringing new life, protection and deep healing.

Nature is the constant work of the living God; teaching us about God's nature. As spring erupts, God's love for all life and for Earth who sustains us is now on show for anyone to see. May our eyes and hearts keep opening up to embrace a much

bigger family than just our fellow humans. This past month, Earth has been our spiritual guide. In Francis we meet a daring ancestor who opened himself, body and soul, to her leading; to the spiritual journey we've walked this Season of Creation.

We know Francis gave up a life of wealth and luxury. He set out on his new journey of service to God, barefoot and wearing only rags. His new life was marked by poverty and humility. His vocation – his calling – was to rebuild a Church which was being ruined by its power and wealth, just as he had been.

Alongside his challenge to the church – and that's still going on – Francis was himself 'rebuilt'. His new life of poverty and simplicity led Francis to learn that God's love is for all, not just for the great and the lucky; and not just for the human race either. Francis lived that new insight more deeply as time went on. He taught that all creatures bear witness to God as we do; he called them our sisters and brothers; fellow servants and witnesses of God with us.

So Francis's original calling from God was to reform the Church.

As his understanding of his vocation developed, it was obvious that Francis's life would become a challenge to the whole social order. Society should be just and compassionate; all people should be cherished. This conviction lies behind the confronting nature of the scriptures set for his special day. I can imagine Francis preaching from today's passage in Jeremiah as he takes a rich person to task for using the unpaid work of neighbours to build a luxury home. The example of Francis's life directly challenged the greed and abuse this represented.

Francis, like Jesus, lamented the idea some have, that only the wise and intelligent are qualified to exercise spiritual authority, or are capable of receiving spiritual guidance.

Francis, like all the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures, and like Jesus, his model and his master, defied the curse of self-importance; the delusional contempt of this world's 'great and powerful' for the welfare and wisdom of the vulnerable.

A barefoot man dressed in rags lived a life which defied this very powerful delusion. And there's no point in denying that the delusion lives on. Deluded human beings still seek to take the place of God, and they bring disaster to millions. But a barefoot man in rags who wandered and taught as his Master had done still speaks with a moral authority which human power can't silence.

Our reading from Revelation 12 reminds us that this is a spiritual, cosmic struggle; one we don't fight alone. Angels and archangels fight for us in a battle against the forces of hatred. Michaelmas is a time to celebrate with thanksgiving the myriad angels God sends to defend, heal and sustain all life.

As if our mortality weren't enough, every generation is compelled to endure greed, injustice, hatred and destruction. Michaelmas is a time to stop and remember that God never lets us face these trials alone.

Over the Season of Creation, we've looked at the way greed and the abuse of power have been allowed both to ravage the world's forests, soils, wilderness and rivers; allowed to ruin the lives of the creatures and ordinary people who depend on them for their livelihoods. The feasts of Francis and Michael remind us to be humble, vigilant and outspoken.

In God's strength, and with the saints and angels beside us, we are called as a prophetic people to name and challenge wrongs when we see them, and to offer support and healing to those who are weary with carrying these heavy burdens. Let us be angels sent by Jesus to give help, rest and hope to these

dear ones.

Amen