

Living in Harmony with God's Will and Christ's Example

Practical steps for committed daily living.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, and in the spirit of Saint Francis, it is truly an honour and blessing to gather with you today. As secular Franciscans, we are called to embody virtues like humility, poverty, and love—reflecting the Gospel in all aspects of our daily lives. Today, let us explore how living in harmony with God's will and following Christ's example are deeply intertwined, guiding us on our spiritual journey.

At the core of our vocation is **discernment**—listening carefully to the voice of the Good Shepherd. Discerning God's will is not a one-time event but a lifelong process of conversion, openness, humility, and trust. Jesus models this perfectly in Gethsemane when He prays, “Not my will, but Yours be done!” (Luke 22:42).

Living in harmony with God's will begins each day with prayer—asking God to open our hearts to His plan. It involves reflecting on our attitudes and actions, ensuring they align with Christ's teachings. As followers of Christ, like Saint Francis, we are called to remain attentive to the needs of others, seek justice, and act with mercy.

To walk this path, we must **nurture** virtues—good habits that shape our character and guide our actions. The Catechism reminds us that virtues are "firm attitudes, stable dispositions, habitual perfections" that govern our conduct (CCC 1803).

Virtues in the Christian and Franciscan tradition are categorized into three pillars:

- **Attitudes (Inner Dispositions):** such humility, patience, charity, hope.
- **Actions (External Behaviours):** such as acts of kindness, forgiveness, caring for creation.
- **Habits (Repeated Practices):** daily choices that strengthen our virtues over time.

Developing these virtues requires effort, grace, and perseverance. They help us grow in moral excellence and draw us closer to God's will.

Christ exemplified virtues of humility, service, and unconditional love. He washed His disciples' feet, showed mercy to the marginalized, and laid down His life for others, for us. Saint Francis echoed these virtues in his life—embracing poverty, humility, and a radical love for all creation.

As secular Franciscans, our goal is to imitate Christ in our daily routines—whether at home, work, or in the community. This means being patient, forgiving, caring for creation, and reaching out to those in need. Small acts—listening, helping, caring—are ripples that foster peace and justice.

Living in harmony with God's will also requires hope—trust that God's grace is at work in us and the world. Saint Francis was a man of hope, trusting in God's providence even amid adversity. Hope sustains our commitments and encourages us to persevere, knowing that God's plans are good and that His mercy is always present.

Yesterday, May 24, 2025, marked the 10th Anniversary of “Laudato Si”, Pope Francis’ inspiring and groundbreaking encyclical on care for our common home. Its publication in 2015 was a wake-up call for the global community—reminding us that environmental issues are moral and spiritual issues as well. “Laudato Si” emphasizes that caring for creation is integral to our faith and that our relationship with nature reflects our relationship with God.

Why is this anniversary important to us? Because it reminds us to renew and deepen the call that Saint Francis first voiced through his “Canticle of the Creatures.” Both texts—Saint Francis’s prayer and Pope Francis’s encyclical—call us to see God’s creation not as a possession or resource to be used or to profit from, but as a brother and sister, a gift to be cherished and protected.

“Laudato Si” explicitly links ecological health to social justice, urging us to act with compassion and responsibility. It emphasizes that environmental degradation affects the most vulnerable among us and that our response must be rooted in love, humility, and reverence—virtues exemplified by Saint Francis and Jesus Christ.

This year also marks the 800th anniversary of Saint Francis’s “Canticle of the Creatures”, a hymn of praise that celebrates God's goodness expressed through creation. Francis, even near blindness, saw all creatures as brothers and sisters, proclaiming God's glory through them.

The Canticum calls us to a renewed commitment—to live in harmony with creation, to be responsible stewards rather than possessors or consumers. It challenges us to see ourselves as part of a larger family, interconnected, caring for our common home with love, humility, and gratitude.

In today's ecological crises—climate change, deforestation, pollution—we are reminded that caring for creation is integral to our spiritual life. As Saint Francis teaches and "Laudato Si" affirms, we are called to protect and cherish every element of nature, every creature under heaven, recognizing that all are reflections of God's divine beauty. Living this out requires a posture of humility and simplicity, virtues that call us to live unencumbered by possessions and other attachments, reminding us that God's creation is a gift, not a series of commodities. St. Francis calls us to see God everywhere and in everyone and everything. We need to live with the full understanding that every action we take or fail to take, can affect our brothers and sisters, here and in other parts of the world.

Saint Francis's prayer reminds us that praise and gratitude flow from a humble heart, recognizing our smallness and God's greatness. By cultivating virtues like humility and gratitude, we align ourselves with God's will.

Living in right relationship with creation reflects brotherhood/sisterhood, humility, and gratitude. True care for the environment begins with conversion—a change of heart—remember, St. Francis called us to daily conversion. This inner transformation leads to external actions like focussing on reducing waste, conserving resources (water), advocating for justice, and living simply. Our lives become a testament when our attitudes—humility, mercy, reverence—are reflected in our actions: caring for the environment, forgiving others, and living simply so others may simply live.

As secular Franciscans, we are called to bring Franciscan values into the world—living out the Gospel in our everyday lives, showing others what it means to be followers of Christ. We do this through our actions, primarily, and if necessary, through words, actions that mirror our commitment to the virtues of love, humility, and service. Our ongoing commitment involves translating these words into daily actions—acting with love and reverence in all we do so that we might restore integral human dignity to our brothers and sisters, everywhere.

To live more fully in harmony with God's will and Christ's example, there are concrete steps to take:

- Begin each day with prayer, seeking guidance and strength to live virtuously. Ask God to guide our will and to help us see Jesus in all our brothers and sisters, to treat them with dignity, to act in love and humility.
- Reflect regularly on our attitudes and actions—are they Christ-like? Like St. Francis?
- Make time for reading the Bible, allowing God's Word to inspire, challenge, and inform our choices and actions.
- Engage in acts of service, no matter how small, for example help a neighbour, listen to someone in need, care for creation (triage the trash, compost, use recyclable containers, reuse previously owned clothes, conserve water and so forth)
- Practice patience and understanding in relationships. embodying Christ's mercy.
- Stay connected with fraternity and our faith community for ongoing formation, support, and encouragement.
- Cultivate virtues like patience, humility, charity—persevering even when it is difficult.
- Join community efforts to protect the environment and advocate for justice for all.

In conclusion, living in harmony with God's will and Christ's example is a lifelong journey, rooted in daily prayer, reflection, and concrete acts of love and stewardship. The 10th anniversary of “Laudato Si” invites us to recommit to embracing our role as caretakers of creation, to “universal kinship”, inspired by Saint Francis's “Canticle of Creatures.”

Our Franciscan vocation is a lifelong journey—a continuous process of growth and renewal. We will face challenges, but remember, we are not alone. God's grace is always available to strengthen us. Ask and we shall receive!

May the Holy Spirit fill our hearts with peace, strengthen our resolve, and guide us in living Gospel values each day. Let us encourage one another, trusting that God's grace is sufficient for us, and that through our efforts, we can be signs of hope and reconciliation in a world desperately in need of peace, love, connectedness and belonging.

My prayer for us

As we continue this journey together, may we encourage one another to remain steadfast, trusting in God's love and mercy.

Let us be witnesses of Christ's humility and compassion, shining as beacons of hope in a world ravaged by war, division, and strife.

May the Holy Spirit empower us, fill our hearts with peace, and guide our pathways through our daily routines.

May the Good Lord see our perseverance in secret, and bless His humble servants abundantly.

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,

Yours are the praises, the glory, the honour, and all blessing.

Help us to live in harmony with Your divine will,

inspired by Christ, Saint Francis, and Pope Francis's 'Laudato Si'.

May we embrace a life of servant leadership and faithful stewardship.

May our hearts be humble, our actions responsible, and our love boundless.

Amen.

Reflective Questions to Strengthen the Virtue of Commitment

- In what areas of my daily life am I deeply committed to living out my Franciscan values?
- Are there aspects of my life where my commitment is lacking, weak or inconsistent? Why? What might I do to change that?
- How well do my daily decisions and actions align with God's will and the example of Jesus Christ?
- In what ways can I better discern God's plan for me in my current circumstances?
- Do I regularly dedicate time to prayer and reflection to renew my commitment to my Franciscan vocation?
- How can I deepen my prayer life to strengthen my resolve to follow Christ more faithfully as St. Francis of Assisi showed me?
- When faced with challenges or setbacks, how do I respond? Do I persevere in faith and hope?
- What practices can I adopt to remain steadfast in faith and abiding in hope during challenging times?
- What virtues or habits do I need to nurture to become a more committed disciple of Jesus?
- How can I actively "sharpen the saw"—grow in my faith, hope, and love—on a regular basis?
- Are there specific acts of service or kindness I can commit to doing more consistently?
- How can I show greater compassion and humility in my interactions with others?
- Who can I partner with for mutual encouragement and accountability in my spiritual journey?
- How can my community support me, and I support others in strengthening our commitments?
- What is my vision for living out my Franciscan vocation over the next year? The next five years?
- What concrete steps can I take today to move closer to that vision?

Reflecting on these questions regularly can help us identify areas for growth and set practical goals.

Remember, commitment is a journey—each small step taken in faith, hope and love builds toward a more profound fidelity to our calling.