

St Francis of Assisi

Earlier this year, for the first time in 800 years, the mortal remains of St Francis were publicly displayed for veneration at the Basilica of St Francis in Assisi, Italy. Nearly half a million pilgrims registered to visit for this rare event. I didn't go. In truth, I'm not particularly drawn to that kind of devotion, though I have a great affection for St Francis and for Assisi, and I look forward to celebrating his feast on 4 October.

St Francis has often been cited as a saint for our own day because of his special sense of kinship with the environment: he called the animals and the natural world his brothers and sisters (you might like to look up his *Canticle of the Creatures*). He also famously gave up a rich-man's lifestyle and deliberately embraced social outcasts, which contrasts with the rampant consumerism that affects us all.

A less well known, but equally important aspect of Francis' ministry was his willingness to cross the divides that separate people from each other. During the Fifth Crusade



he crossed enemy lines to meet with the Muslim Sultan Malik al-Kamil in a gesture of peace and respect. Perhaps this is why the wonderful prayer-poem *Make me a channel of your peace* has often been ascribed to him. Although this is a false attribution – the poem originated in France in the early 20th century – it is a beautiful and timely text for us to take to heart. This October, and always, may we be messengers and ministers of love, healing, hope, light, joy, pardon and consolation.



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