

## St. Francis of Assisi.

A rich Italian merchant of Assisi had a son called Francis. He was so rich that he could give the boy whatever he wanted. In the summer Francis wore clothes made of soft fine silk embroidered in gold, while in winter he had velvet coats lined with fur. He had horses and money, and lived a very happy life.

One day Francis caught a fever and for a long time he lay on his bed in great pain. The best doctors helped him to get better, but while he lay there his thoughts were of all the sick and poor people in Assisi. He decided that it was wrong for him to waste his youth and strength seeking pleasure, while many were ill with no one to care for them.

When he was well, Francis sold his fine clothes, went to live like a beggar, and gave money to beggars in the road. His father was very angry; he put Francis in prison, thinking that he would be glad to return to his fine house when he was released. But Francis went back to the poor people. He even took some cloth from his father's warehouse and sold it to give money to a poor priest who was repairing a shrine. His father took him to court. The judge said "God cannot accept something that is not yours, you have no right to your father's money." Francis said "I understand. All that I have belongs to my father. I will give it back to him." Then he took off his clothes, gave them to his father, and left the court wearing just underclothes.

Very soon all the friends who used to dance and hunt with him began to desert him. They thought he was mad, and threw mud and stones at him. But Francis took no notice. He wandered about the country, helping the poor and sick, teaching about the goodness of God. He had no money nor food, but he was always so kind and cheerful that people began to love him. When they saw him coming, barefooted and bareheaded, they came to meet him and gave him bread.

Soon other rich men were attracted by his teachings and way of life, so they joined him. Although they were not related, they called each other "brother". Other people called them Francis-can friars, which means "Brothers of Francis". They wore coarse grey-brown robes, with ropes knotted around their waists, and were never weary of helping and serving, for they believed "God is love", and this made them happy.

One day, when Francis was walking through the woods, all sorts of birds were gathered together. He went to meet them and they were not afraid. He talked to them: "My bird brothers, you ought to praise God, who has given you such fine feathers." He walked among them and touched them, not one moved away until he had blessed them all.

A rabbit was rescued from a trap and brought to Francis. It had a sore leg. He picked it up and stroked it. Even when the leg was better, the rabbit would not run away, but stayed near Francis.

As time passed, Francis gathered more “brothers” and made rules for them all. His brotherhood was called the Franciscan Order. He went to the Pope, showed him the rules and asked for his blessing.

Then he thought that other people in the world needed help, not just those in Italy, so he divided his brothers into groups and sent them far and wide. So it happened that in many countries were groups of Franciscan friars tending the sick and caring for the poor. At first they lived in little huts, but after a while people gave them the means to build monasteries where they could live and worship God. Francis stayed in Italy and many years later people remembered how good and loving he had been, so they made him a saint.

Questions.

- 1.How do our own acts of friendliness help us to be happy?
- 2.How do the Manifestations of God teach us how to behave towards our neighbours?
- 3.Why is it difficult for us to be friendly towards strangers?
- 4.How can we overcome these difficulties?
- 5.How can you make a new student in your class feel welcome?
- 6.What might make him/her feel unwelcome?