



Praised Bee



FRANCIS COMPOSES
A SONG OF PRAISE

Praised 'Bee'

By choosing Francis as his papal name, Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio honored St. Francis of Assisi, a 13th century saint known for his devotion to the poor and his love for creation. St. Francis regarded all works of the Creator's hand as one family, thereby permitting him to call his fellow creatures "brother" and "sister." This love affair with creation is most eloquently expressed in St. Francis' *Canticle of Brother Sun*.

Two years after his election, Pope Francis engaged all peoples in a dialog about the environmental challenges facing the modern world and our moral obligation to care for the poor. Unsurprisingly, Pope Francis borrowed the first line from the *Canticle of Brother Sun* – "LAUDATO SI', mi' Signore" or "Praised be to you, my Lord" – for the title of his papal encyclical: *LAUDATO SI', On Care for our Common Home*.

There is one small creature, however, that stands apart as a model of communal living. Through her praises, we can learn much on how to preserve our planet.



“Once we start to think about the kind of world we are leaving to future generations, we look at things differently; we realize that the world is a gift which we have freely received and must share with others.”

Pope Francis,
Laudato Si',
Chapter 5 - 2015

Mother Bee

An ancient song glorifying God's saving hand in creation is the Easter Proclamation, the *Exsultet*. Bathed in the light of the paschal candle, a deacon sings this hymn of praise to begin the Easter Vigil, the night when all creation is born anew through Christ's triumphant resurrection. The *Exsultet* extols the virtues of the Easter candle, and sings the praises of the creatures responsible for its making.

Accept this candle, a solemn offering. The work of Bees. And of your servants' hands... for it is fed by melting wax, drawn out by Mother bees.

~ *Exsultet*

The work of the "Mother bee" remains critical for the balance of our world.

PRAISED BE YOU, my Lord, with all Your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun, Who is the day and through whom You give us light. And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor; and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.

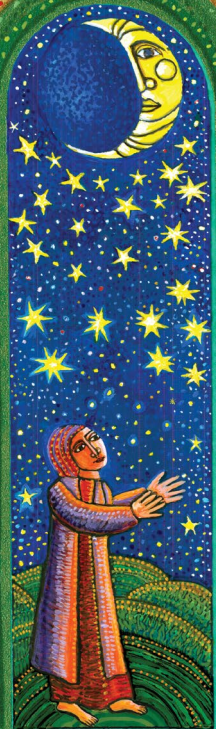
PRAISED BE YOU, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars, in heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

In light of Pope Francis' recent challenging encyclical on the environment, what should we know about American agriculture, the stewardship of creation, and the preservation of the bee?

The honey bee, *Apis mellifera*, is not native to America. Yet, our modern lives today would be vastly different without the gifts of the bee. While honey and wax are perhaps most notable, another gift of the bee is even more vital to human survival. Countless numbers of honey bees travel the country collecting pollen and nectar for their survival while pollinating our crops. No other native pollinator can compare to the prolific ability of the honey bee to pollinate. One crop alone, almonds, depends entirely upon the honey bee for pollination at bloom time. No honey bees, no almonds.



BROTHER SUN



SISTERS MOON AND STARS

Plight or Flight

It is estimated roughly one-third of the fruits and vegetables consumed by Americans are dependent on honey bee pollination. Yet the beloved bee – vital to our agricultural system – is in peril.

Bees are perishing at an alarming rate. It is estimated we have roughly 2.4 million managed hives in the US today, compared to roughly 6 million hives in the 1940s.

What are the causes of this decline? Climate change and global warming have negatively impacted the bees' natural habitat resulting in a reduction in their population. Continued overdevelopment of natural land reduces the areas in which bees have to forage for food.

PRaised BE YOU, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather, through whom You give sustenance to Your creatures.

PRaised BE YOU, my Lord, through Sister Water, who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

The model of American agriculture – to produce more food on less land – has detrimental consequences for the honey bee and other animals. Small farms with diverse and varied crops have been replaced by large acreages of mono cultures, oftentimes planted with genetically modified seeds and treated with pesticides. Left unchecked, these external pressures will continue to diminish bee populations.

A honey bee will fly up to five miles from its hive to forage for what is seasonally and locally available. To maximize the production of our crops, two-thirds of the bees in the US travel the country on flatbed trucks as migratory pollinators. Throughout the year, these honey bees move from almond orchards in California, to pumpkin patches in Texas, to orange groves in Florida, and to blueberry fields in Maine.



BROTHER WIND



SISTER WATER

To Have or To Keep

We often use the word “have” when referring to pets or animals under our care. We may “have” a dog or cat, a horse or pony – not so with bees.

Those who manage bees are *beekeepers*, not “*bee havers*”. We do not own the bees anymore than we own any part of creation. Bees manage themselves; we simply care for them. This analogy is a good reference point in comprehending Pope Francis’ understanding of stewardship.

In his letter, Pope Francis encourages us to look at the Gospel message through the scriptural account of creation. He emphasizes all of God’s handiwork is interconnected; no creature stands alone. The book of Genesis suggests “that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor and with the earth.” (Chapter 2)

PRAISED BE YOU, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom you light the night, and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

PRAISED BE YOU, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs.

While the creator has given humans “dominion over creation”, Pope Francis warns of a distorted interpretation of this mandate. We do not “own” the earth, but rather, we are simply the caretakers, or stewards, of God’s precious handiwork.

“ biblical texts . . . tell us to “till and keep” the garden of the world (cf Gen 2:15). “Tilling” refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while “keeping” means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature. Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations. ”

Pope Francis, Laudato Si', Chapter 2 - 2015



BROTHER FIRE



**OUR SISTER,
MOTHER EARTH**



All the Believers Were Together and Had Everything in Common [Acts 2:44]

While some species of bees are solitary creatures, the honey bee is not. It thrives in community; typically one queen and as many as 60,000 daughters live in a single colony. This model of communal living appears to be reminiscent of the early church, as recorded in the book of Acts. In a beehive, tasks are undertaken by all, food and natural resources are held in common, and the survival of the colony supersedes any individual's particular interest. In the short six weeks of her life, a worker bee never sleeps, tirelessly working around the clock. Observing such a selfless lifestyle prompted St. John Chrysostom in the fourth century to write, "The bee is more honored than other animals, not because she labors, but because she labors for others."

The honey bee forages among flowers to gather sweet nectar. She ingests it, adds enzymes, and regurgitates it in the comb as honey – which we then delight to eat. We too can be like the bee. We can go into the world to gather what we find beautiful, transform it inside our own lives, and give it back to the delight of those we meet. In so doing, we too can give praise to the Creator.

“The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. The Creator does not abandon us; he never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us. Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home.”

Pope Francis, Laudato Si', Chapter 1 - 2015

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