

November 2022 The Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of the District of Columbia
SK Douglas N. Cohen, Grand Commander; SK Carter L. Diggs Jr. Editor



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My dear Sir Knights,

Earlier this fall, many Christians observed the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi. Francis, who lived from ca. 1181–1226, is probably best known to us from the annual custom of holding special services on that day to bless pets, and, as the name of the Catholic Pope Francis.

One of the many stories about St. Francis' life recounts when a large, ferocious wolf terrorized a town, killing both livestock and people. Francis walked out to the wolf's lair and was rushed by the wolf, but Francis made the sign of the cross and commanded the wolf in God's name to cease his attacks. The wolf immediately became docile, and Francis spoke with the wolf to arrange that, in exchange for not killing any more animals or people, the townspeople would feed the wolf, to which the wolf agreed. This event convinced Francis throughout his life of the power of the cross.

Francis is relevant to us as Masonic Templars, not just in his commitment to God, and to a chaste and poor lifestyle, but because he went to the Holy Land in 1219 to assist in the Fifth Crusade. On his arrival at the Crusader camp in Egypt, he sought to meet with the Sultan of Egypt al-Kamil, a nephew of Saladin, who was called Meledin by the French Crusaders.

Warned that he was going on a suicide mission, Francis went forth, armed only with his faith in the power of the cross, and approached the Egyptians. The Egyptians, thinking Francis was an emissary of the battling Crusaders, allowed him access to the sultan. Soon, the sultan determined that Francis was not an emissary, but had come solely to preach to Meledin to convert him to Christianity. Rather than executing Francis, Meledin politely let Francis finish his preaching, and then had him escorted in safety back to the Crusaders' camp.

Was Francis successful? Other than getting an agreement for better treatment of Christian prisoners of war, probably not. St. Bonaventure, though, a top Franciscan leader decades later, would go on to preach in 1267 that because of Francis, Meledin had made a secret conversion to Christianity, or perhaps had a deathbed baptism. St. Francis' Day this year happened to be the eve of Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement. Our Jewish companions likely spent the day giving to charity and asking those whom they had wronged for forgiveness. Then the next day they prayed in their synagogues, repented of their sins, and asked God for atonement.

Francis often preached that the world was created good and beautiful by God but suffers a need for redemption because of human sin. Our Order also teaches lessons that all men err, and erring need repentance. In the view of our Masonic patron saint St. John the Baptist, to repent, saying we are sorry and expressing remorse for our actions is not enough. John says we have to resolve not to commit the same sin in the future, change direction in our lifestyle, and make a new beginning. The Jewish custom of seeking forgiveness from those we have hurt, and truly repenting of our faults at Yom Kippur, provides a good roadmap for us Templars today.

Let us pray.

Most high, omnipotent, good Lord, grant your people grace to renounce gladly the vanities of this world; that, following the way of blessed Francis, we may, for love of you, delight in your whole creation with perfectness of joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Mark A. Wright, P.C. Grand Prelate,
Grand Commandery of the District of Columbia