

Following in the Footsteps of Christ: St Francis of Assisi and Jesus



By **Revd Mark Ackford** on 07/10/2026



I have been reflecting over the past few days on my love of St Francis and if that is somehow clouding my greater love of Christ, here are my reflections so far.

Few Christian lives reflect the example of Jesus as vividly as that of St Francis of Assisi. Born in Italy in the late twelfth century, Francis grew up in comfort and dreamed of status and adventure. Yet a profound conversion led him to reject wealth, embrace poverty and devote himself to God. Although Christians understand Jesus as the Son of God and Francis as a human disciple, their lives share striking themes: simplicity, compassion, peace, service and a love that crossed social boundaries.

Simplicity Over Status

Jesus lived without the security and prestige commonly associated with power. He travelled from place to place, taught ordinary people and warned that possessions could distract the heart from God. Francis adopted this pattern deliberately. After renouncing his inheritance, he wore a rough tunic, depended on the generosity of others and called his way of life “Lady Poverty.” For

both, simplicity was not misery for its own sake. It created freedom: freedom to trust God, to serve others and to value people more than property.

Compassion at the Margins

Jesus repeatedly approached those whom society avoided: people who were poor, sick, excluded or publicly judged. He touched lepers, ate with outcasts and treated each person as worthy of dignity. Francis followed the same path. His encounter with a leper became a turning point, transforming disgust and fear into compassion. He went on to care for people affected by leprosy and urged his followers to live among those in need. In both lives, love was practical. It meant drawing near, listening, serving and restoring a sense of belonging.

Peace, Community and Creation

Jesus taught his followers to love their enemies, forgive others and become peacemakers. Francis carried this message into a violent age marked by conflict and crusade. His peaceful meeting with Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil showed his willingness to cross religious and cultural divides through respectful encounter rather than force. Like Jesus, Francis also gathered a community around a shared mission. The friars were sent to preach through both words and conduct, depending on one another and serving the wider world.

Francis is also remembered for delighting in creation, addressing the sun, moon, animals and elements as members of one family under God. This echoes Jesus' use of birds, flowers, seeds and harvests to reveal divine care. Neither treated the natural world merely as a possession; creation became a sign of God's generosity and an invitation to gratitude.

A Life That Points Beyond Itself

The closest similarity is also the key difference. Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God with unique authority; Francis sought to imitate him. Francis did not present himself as another Christ, but as a follower whose life directed attention back to Christ. His humility, joyful poverty and care for the vulnerable made the teachings of Jesus visible in a fresh historical setting.

That is why the comparison still matters. Both lives challenge us to ask what genuine faith looks like in practice. Their shared answer is demanding but clear: and this is the path that I hope I am walking that of choosing service over status, reconciliation over hostility, generosity over possession and love over exclusion. Francis's achievement was not that he matched Jesus perfectly, but that he allowed the pattern of Jesus' life to reshape his own.

So in conclusion I am a Christian first and foremost but I am also a Franciscan, one who I hope and pray that like St Francis allows the pattern of Jesus' life to reshape my life and hopefully touch and redirect yours to Christ also.