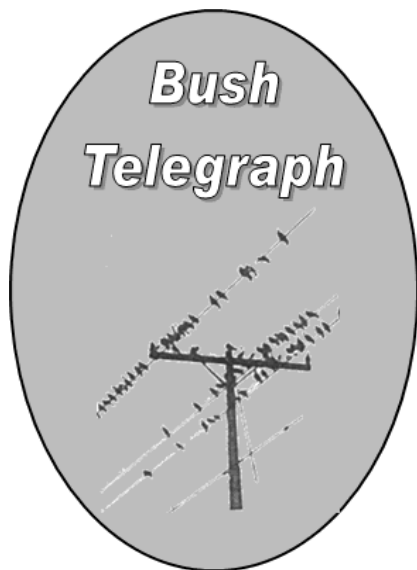


BUSH TELEGRAPH

An irregular newsletter



2021

BEST KEPT SECRET

St Francis (1182-1226) has been an inspiration to countless millions down through the centuries. Like a multi-faceted jewel people are inspired by different aspects of his life.

He had great love and reverence for creation and our interconnection with it, not dominance over it. Over 800 years ago he was singing and speaking about Brother Sun and Sister Moon, Mother Earth, Brother Fire and Brother Wind.

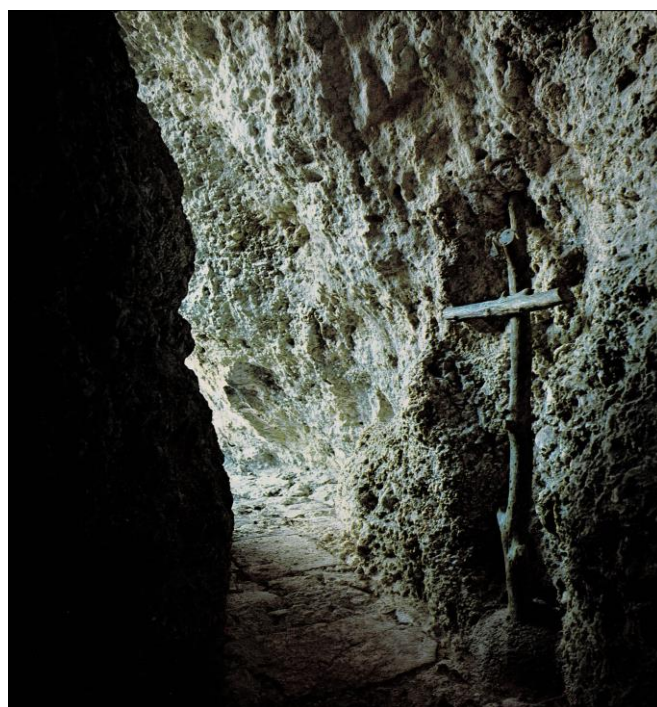
Francis reached out in love and care for the lepers, who were rejected and feared, and forced to live outside the community of his day.

His greatest love was for God who entered human history in the person of Jesus. In Jesus he saw the tremendous and costly love of God for us in his humble and lowly birth in Bethlehem, and in his suffering and death on the cross.



Source: Unknown at present. If you can help please contact the editor.

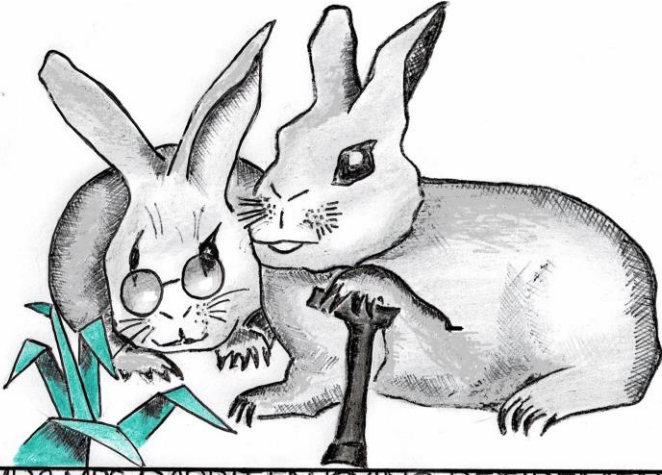
The least known part of Francis' life or what we have called 'the best kept secret', was his regular observance of times of solitude. After his conversion, Francis spent a lot of time in some caves which housed a small chapel in the wooded hills outside his home town. He began wearing a rough tunic indicating a change in his life and worn by hermits. When he was joined by a few Brothers that God gave him, they seriously thought their vocation was to be hermits. Francis consulted two trusted spiritual advisers and both said that for the good of all people and for Christ's Church, he was to be involved in active ministry.



A cave of significance for Francis at the Hermitage of 'Fonte Colombo'.

However, despite people flocking to hear Francis preach, thousands joining this new movement, his deep desire was for solitude, silence, and to be alone with the most important person in his life – Jesus. This remained central. It is estimated that Francis spent nearly half his life in solitude and silence with a few brothers who would accompany him. Francis wrote a rule for those living in a hermitage out of his experience. This 'Rule for Hermitages' is a source of inspiration and central in our journey and vocation as Little Brothers of Francis.

MRS & MR RABBIT



MRS & MRS RABBIT ENJOYING RETIREMENT

Mrs Rabbit had reached old age and was no longer able to produce offspring. Like all our breeders, rather than being killed because no longer 'useful and productive', she retires until she dies naturally. This is our small way of saying - thanks!

But Mrs Rabbit rather than enjoying the freedom from giving birth and raising a myriad of babies over the years, became very depressed. Retirement was not for her! So a decision was made to let her out and taste 'free range' for the time left to her. This of course, was a great risk because we have no wild rabbits here. The reason for this is that we have a large number of predators - carpet snakes, quolls, phascogales, birds of prey, small eagles, owls and goshawks, who all value rabbit as an important food source, as we do ourselves.

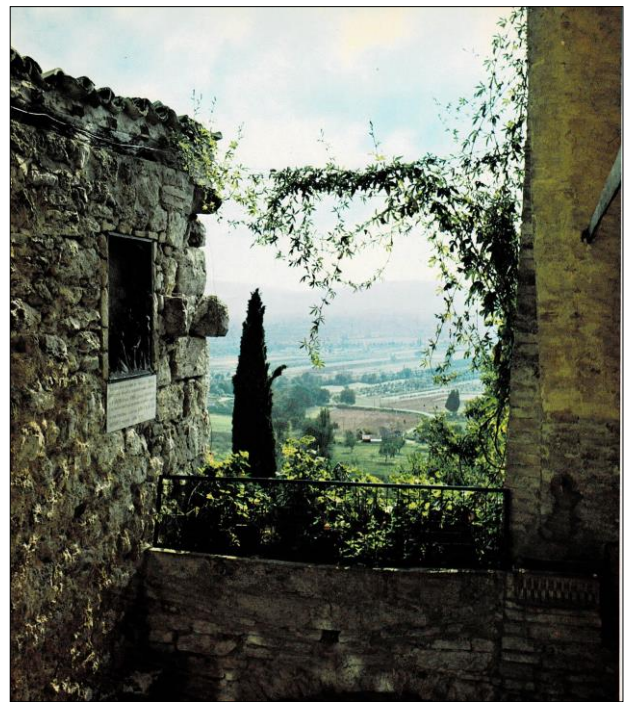
Then Mr Rabbit because of old age, failed in siring any offspring. Because rabbits are very social creatures, it was decided to let him out to be a companion for Mrs Rabbit. Of course, they had a great time and became fully integrated with the brother's activities, and would appear at the gate to the vegetable garden for hand-outs.

Months later, a single baby rabbit was seen. Later two, then three, and eventually five. All these 'surprises' were promptly caught and housed. So began many generations of the descendants of Mr & Mrs Rabbit who died eventually of old age.

SAINT CLARE

Clare's greatest desire was to love Jesus and follow him; it was the first priority in her life. The hall-marks of her vocation were silence, solitude, enclosure, poverty and love for the Sisters God had called to share her life.

Clare was a spiritual giant in the early Franciscan movement. Her family opposed her vehemently and tried to force her to leave her monastery. The church was reluctant to approve the Rule for her community until she was on her death bed. However, through all this she remained true to her vocation from our Lord Jesus Christ.



Clare's little garden within the monastery

ST FRANCIS SPEAKS BY SILENCE

Francis was asked to preach to Clare and the Sisters. On his arrival Clare and Sisters gathered to listen to him. Francis asked for some ashes which he then used to mark out a circle and stood in the middle of it. He then placed some ashes on his head. After observing silence, he recited psalm 51, which is about confessing our faults and failures, forgiveness, and a new beginning. To everyone's astonishment he then left quickly.

INTO GREATER SILENCE AND SOLITUDE

There has been a noticeable shift in the life at the hermitage to greater silence and solitude. Each year it begins on the 1st June for a period of 4 months, ending on St. Francis's Day on the 4th October.



A silent meal in the Refectory

The Guest Hermitage, which is for one person is closed during this time. All meals are in silence and often taken alone, except for Wednesdays and Fridays. On these two days the Brothers meet in the evening for the office of Vespers, a silent meal together, then Cross Prayers (a devotion before the crucifix inspired by St. Francis himself, to the passion of Christ). The day ends with Compline before we disperse to our hermitages in silence.

Sunday morning is different, starting with an hour of Meditation and then the Divine Office, a relaxed morning working and talking together. A community lunch follows Midday Office, then back into solitude.

At the discretion of the community, a Brother may also make arrangements to pray and work in their hermitage.

This desire to enter greater 'silence and solitude', is expressed well by Sr. Margaret Carney OSF, in her preface of the book 'Franciscan Solitude'.

"It is the actual living again – retaining, remembering, practising the life and rule that Francis engendered. It is the determination to cherish, guard, love deeply the life expressed in the Rule for Hermitages, so that it becomes incarnate again with the light of Christ's power and presence.

WHAT A JOY AND SURPRISE!

We had an unexpected and very generous gift from a friend of four Wiltshire Horn Sheep. This was a source of great joy for a number of reasons. With a recent three year drought, severe bushfires, and not having a ram to breed with for a number of years, our flock numbers had dwindled. The other reason is that Wiltshire Horn Sheep are a rare breed, originally thought to have been brought to Britain by the Romans.

In Australia all Wiltshire Horn sheep are descendants from a very small group of stud sheep imported from England to Western Australia by the Crosthwaite family. These were then sold to Les Harwood in Victoria, who had the insight to see their potential as meat sheep, able to graze on poor country, and easy to care for as they shed their fleece. Ideal for us and we needed them to reduce the fuel load in the bush as part of our bushfire management strategy.

Then we discovered on arrival that all four ewes were pregnant! A few days later one gave birth to a healthy lamb. So mum we called 'Joy' and the lamb 'Surprise'.



NIGHT LIFE AT THE HERMITAGE!

NIGHTLIFE! The word for many suggests nightclubs, theatres, entertainment of various sorts. But here at the hermitage in this remote location we have a nightlife that is unique and breathtaking.

We begin with music, and there are a large number and variety of musicians but to mention a few. Mopokes with their soft and melodious notes, one higher than the other, who mark the passage of time through the night. Channel-billed cuckoos who are visiting musicians from overseas and like some tourists, are loud and raucous. But then we should mention our local Koalas, who shatter the night with their deep loud guttural grunts. Still, it's their sound and contributes to the music of the night. The visiting echidna with its gentle sound as it rustles through the undergrowth of the bush, is like a drummer who gently plays very lightly in the background. Then from time to time the sound of a rock being over-turned as the echidna searches for ants, is like the drummer with a strong sounding beat to interrupt the flow of the soft sound of his music.



As the shadows darken so begins the arrival of the audience with the rock wallabies. Listed as endangered, there were very few when the Brothers first arrived in this valley over 30 years ago. With the predation of domestic and wild dogs they became almost extinct, but with care and protection from the Brothers, they are thriving. After dark there are the lovable but at times pesky possums, also bandicoots, sugar-gliders and mouse bats that in the daytime roost in the ceiling of a Brother's hermitage, and countless others.

Then with the transition of day into night the most amazing light show anyone could hope for or imagine, can be experienced. This is heralded by the kookaburras with their distinctive call known also as the 'Bushman's Angelus.'

As evening falls one of the Brothers rings the bell for our Angelus and the beginning of Vespers, which concludes with the prayer:



Lord Jesus; we lay aside the works of day, now that the sun has run its course. As we experience the transition of the day to night, with the wonders of the evening sky, abide with us, and may we abide with you.

Then after the evening meal we lift our hearts in prayer with Compline which begins:

As darkness falls and the stars shine out, we thank you for the Southern Cross; a sign you have given us of your great love. Praise to my Lord, for Sister Moon and the stars which you have set in the heavens, exquisitely beautiful are they.

Bush Telegraph

We are dependent on the good will of others to pass it on, photocopy it and financially support us. We are grateful for those who do this and wish to thank them and encourage others to join us and them in the distribution of the Bush Telegraph.

Little Brothers of Francis.

Franciscan Hermitage *Eremophila*

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We are a recognised contemplative Religious Order in the Anglican Church

