

FRANCESCO

KEYWORD: Compassion.

Have you ever seen the sky so blue — oh, so blue — that you just longed to sit and look at it all day? Something inside of you just sang with joy, and you felt like dancing and being merry. Well, you know, the blue of the sky is one way that our Father in Heaven gives us happiness in this lovely world! When we look at the beautiful blue sky, we think of His love for us and are happy!

In a far-away country across the sea, under just such

a lovely blue sky, many, many years ago lived a little boy. He too loved the blue sky, for it made his heart merry and happy and gay. His name was Francesco. Isn't that a pretty name? This little Italian boy — for he was born in sunny Italy — was just like other little boys, full of life and always wanting to be amused. His father was a rich trader, and so Francesco could have everything he wanted, everything his little heart desired. He was dressed so beautifully that some of his playmates looked upon him with envy and said: "He is like a prince." This, of course, made his father very proud, but it made his wise mother a little sad at times. She knew that it was not a good thing for little boys always to have everything they wanted, for that almost always makes them selfish. And God wants us to be unselfish.

Well, Francesco went on being merry and gay — and selfish — until one day something happened. He became very ill. This often happens when we think of nothing else but pleasure and make a friend of Selfishness. However, his lovely mother, who understood him so well, with her deep mother love tenderly watched over him. She sent up prayers to the Heavenly Father, and her prayers drew the Angels to her. They, too, watched over Francesco, and sent their little messengers of love to make his sick body well. These messengers took away all the unlovely things that had been living in his body, and in their places left only love and purity and sweetness.

So by and by Francesco grew stronger and stronger. And, do you know, during all his long illness Selfishness had been sick too, and it never did get well. Instead, when Francesco was quite able to be about again, *Unselfishness* came to live in his pure heart. And many, many times Unselfishness whispered to him such loving thoughts that soon he began to see things that he had never seen before. When he was selfish, he was just thinking of himself all the

time and wondering what he could do to have a good time; so, of course, wrapped up in himself, he didn't see what was going on around him, and he missed a lot of things.

But now that he listened to Unselfishness, he began to find new joys. His love grew so big and broad that he became fond of all living things, and he found most of his happiness in being kind and helpful to others. He began to spend all his time in helping others and in telling them of God and Christ Jesus, so that they would live better lives. At last he showed so much love and compassion to everyone that he was called "Saint Francis."

He made real friends of the birds in the trees and bushes, and he always spoke of the bees which flitted from flower to flower in the garden and of the little rabbits jumping merrily about as his brothers and sisters. The birds understood him, and never were the least bit afraid, but twittered and chirped in reply when he talked to them. When they saw him coming, they sang their sweetest and prettiest songs, because he understood them. Then Saint Francis would say: "Our sisters, the birds, are pleasing God."

This made his lovely mother very happy, for she had always known that hidden deep down in her boy's heart was this beautiful love of Nature, and that some day it would shine out and everyone would know what she had always known. When he was a merry lad, she had said: "If he lives like a prince now, he shall hereafter be called a child of God." Indeed he was a child of God! And each one of us too is a child of God. Isn't that wonderful?

To this day people all over the world speak lovingly of the good Saint Francis, the friend of birds and beasts and flowers, as well as of people. When you are older you will be able to read books about him and know more about how compassionate he was.