

Saynt Frances, to the I say

Words by John Audelay (fl. 1426), Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 302, fol. 32r. Sung to the music of 'Pray for us the Prince of Peace' from the Trinity Carol Roll.

John Audelay was a blind and deaf chaplain at Haughmond Abbey in Shropshire, and this is the only medieval English carol in honour of St Francis. The burden (refrain) returns after each verse. The English on the left is a modern rendering of Audelay's fifteenth-century Shropshire dialect; the spelling on the right is what we sing. A few words to watch: 'preynt' is print, 'sonde' is a message sent, 'wond' is shrink from, 'chent' is ruined, 'fyndis fray' is the devil's attack.

English translation

Middle English (as sung)

Burden

Saint Francis, to you I say:
keep your brothers safe both night and day.

*Saynt Frances, to the I say,
Saue thi breder both nyght and day.*

Verse 1

A holy confessor you were, one
who lived in contemplation,
meditating on Christ's passion,
he who suffered death on Good Friday.

*A hole confessoure thou were hone
And levydist in contemplacioun,
To thyng on Cristis passioun,
That sofyrd deth on Good Fryday.*

Verse 2

His passion burned in you so fervently
that he appeared to you in person;
upon your body he set his print,
his five wounds; there is no denying it.

*His passion was in the so fervent
That he aperd to the present;
Vpon thi body he set his preynt,
His v wondis, hit is no nay.*

Verse 3

Christ granted you a special grace,
because you had pity on his passion:
to fetch your brothers out of purgatory,
who lie there in a pitiful state.

*Crist he grawnt the specialy,
Fore on his passion thou hadist pete,
To feche thi breder out of purgatori,
That lyin ther in rewfyl aray.*

Verse 4

You thanked Christ for his sweet message
and planned to go to the Holy Land;
for fear of death you would not shrink
from teaching the people your Christian faith.

*Thou thongis Crist of his swete sonde
And thoghtist to go to the Holy Londe;
Fore dred of deth thou woldist not wond
To teche the pepil thi Cristyn fay.*

Verse 5

Then Christ, who knew your intention well,
turned you from that desire
and bade you make your testament
and 'Come to me for ever and always.'

*Then Crist he knew well then entent
And turned the out of that talent
And bede the make thi testament
And 'Come to me fore ens and ay.'*

Verse 6

'Ah, holy Francis, now I see
that for my love you would die;
you shall have everlasting joy,
which you have longed for many a day.'

*'A, hole Frawnces, now I se
For my loue that thou woldist dye;
Thou schalt have joy perpetuale,
Thou hast dyssired mone a day.'*

English translation**Middle English (as sung)**

Verse 7

His holy Rule for the religious life
he wrote down at once for his brothers,
and begged them, for Christ's passion,
to keep it well both night and day.

*His hole reule of religiowne
To his breder he wrote anon
And prayd ham, fore Cristis passiowne,
To kepe hit wel both nyght and day.*

Verse 8

Let us pray to Francis, who is here among us,
to keep safe his brothers and his community,
that they may never be shamed nor ruined
by wicked men nor by the devil's assault.

*Pray we to Frawnses, that beth present,
To saue his breder and his couent,
That thai be neuer chamyd ne chent
With wyckid man ne fyndis fray.*

The burden is sung again after the last verse.
