

SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI (c1182-1226)—Life and Teachings

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Saint Francis, whom the noted Catholic theologian G.K. Chesterton called “the most original genius of the thirteenth century,” was, very simply, a man completely devoted to and infused by God. His inward life of transparent communion with God, his outward life of virtue and compassionate good works, his chivalrous and loving attention to each and every creature (not “creatures or creation in general”), combined with an ardently devotional spirituality to make Francesco of Assisi a potent exemplar and a powerhouse of blessing force. A master spiritual director, savvy about the workings of the ego-mind (“the flesh,” as he called it), Francis transformed the lives of countless people of his time and ever since then has been regarded as one of the most lovable and memorable saints in the history of western Christianity. Francis has been designated by the Church (in 1939) not only as the patron saint of Italy but also (in 1980) patron saint of the modern-era ecology movement, he who called himself “brother of the Sun and Moon” and regarded each being—human and nonhuman—as precious in God’s eyes.

Born in 1182 in Assisi, a south-facing little medieval town of considerable charm overlooking the Umbrian agricultural valley of central Italy, Francesco, originally named Giovanni by his mother, was the son of a wealthy textile merchant, Pietro di Bernardone, and his French wife Giovanna, called Pica. Francis spent his teens engaged in fun and sporting with his friends in drinking, singing, dancing, and “wenching.” For a brief time in his twentieth year, he fought as a soldier in the battle between Assisi and the neighboring town of Perugia. Captured at Collestrada, he spent most of year 1203 in prison. The following two years he wallowed in illness, existential angst and disgust over his meaningless life. In 1205, Francis decided to go off to fight in the Crusades, but he fell ill in Spoleto, 27 miles to the south, and here he experienced the first of the visions that wrought his full conversion to spiritual life. He returned home and tried to resume his old life of partying and feasting with friends, but the emptiness of it all drove Francis into a solitary, prayerful lifestyle. He embarked on a pilgrimage to Rome, 110 miles away. Reaching the basilica of St. Peter’s, he dressed in rags and joined the beggars. Then in 1206, again back in Assisi, he lived in a cave. An encounter with a leper led him to impulsively break through his horror by kissing the poor man’s hands, seeing him as a manifestation of Christ. While meditating in the tiny church of St. Damian on the slopes of Mount Subasio above the town, he was startled to receive a revelation from the Lord speaking from the now-famous, Byzantine-style “San Damiano crucifix,” a painted wood icon of a soulful Jesus on the cross. The voice of his Lord told Francis three times to “repair My Church.”

By the end of the year 1206, Francis had undergone a full conversion, breaking off from his family and friends and publicly renouncing any inheritance from his father, literally in front of his family, the bishop and a crowd stripping off all his clothes in the church’s public square, declaring, “From now on I can freely say ‘Our Father Who art in heaven,’ not ‘father Peter Bernardone.’ To him right here I now not only return his money but give up all my clothes. Thus naked will I go my way to the Lord.” Adopting a lifestyle of extreme austerity, he spent the next several years living in and repairing (as commanded by his vision) three run-down churches nearby. He also spent much of his time in deep, contemplative prayer. His primary vocation at that time, it is now clear to historians, was to serve the lepers enclosed in the hideous “hospital” outside town—an especially courageous and compassionate vocation in his day, given the stigma the hapless lepers suffered, not to mention their considerable physical suffering, shame over their contagious condition, and grief over having been stripped from their family, home and possessions. For his sustenance, Francis begged a few scraps of food in the local towns, and there spoke about the Glory of God with those he encountered.

On February 24, 1208, while working in the little chapel of Santa Maria degli Angeli, the Portiuncula, Francis heard the great missionary discourse by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew and began to spend more of his time wandering around proclaiming a message of penance and peace. On April 16, 1209, two young men, Bernard and Peter, and, a week later, Giles, were inspired by the saintly young preacher to formally take up the same life as he. By 1210, the number of disciples had grown to twelve, and in that same year Francis wrote out a *Rule*, or way of life, for them. This *Rule* strongly emphasized the need for contemplative prayer (meditation), serving the needy (especially the lepers), itinerant preaching, and absolute adherence to total poverty, depending only on alms for support. Such radical poverty was based on Jesus’ instructions to his disciples in the *Matthew Gospel* (10: 9-10). Francis and his brother friars lived together communally, demonstrating utterly selfless love, humility, peacefulness, good humor, total focus on God, willingness to serve the needy, and long-suffering patience in weathering the elements, the poverty, and the ridicule of townsfolk who misunderstood them, thinking these merry mendicants to be knaves or

madmen. But soon this ridicule turned to great respect for their saintly lifestyle and these young men came to be loved and cherished, not only in Assisi, but also in the neighboring towns and provinces where they came to preach the timeless spiritual way of pure hearted reliance on Divine Providence.

In 1210 Francis ventured to Rome with his brethren, hoping to gain a papal audience. Pope Innocent III, a holy man with deep insight, approved Francis and his followers' unique way of life, though he thought their poverty too extreme to be long practical. On returning to Assisi in 1210, the twelve Friars Minor lived for a while in extreme destitution in a shed, called the Tigurio, at Rivo Torto, just south of Assisi. Then, as their numbers increased, they moved to the little ten-foot-long Portiuncula chapel, a few miles west of Assisi, which was given to them in 1211 by the Benedictines of Mt. Subasio. In that chapel in 1212 Francis cut off the hair of an aristocratic 18-year old girl of Assisi named Clare (Clara Sciffi, c1193-1253), and gave her a black veil, coarse woolen robe, and a knotted rope to bind it at her waist. Clare thereby became the first member and foundress of the Second Franciscan Order, the "Poor Clares," a group of contemplative nuns that soon included her two younger sisters and their widowed mother. They, too, served the needy and, in later years, became cloistered in a prayerful life of complete seclusion. Clare and Francis rarely got to see each other during the latter's subsequent years of busy preaching and traveling—a certain propriety also served to separate them physically, though never spiritually, from each other. A story tells that once when they did meet on a hillside with their companions, their spiritual love for one another in the Holy Spirit was so great that it created a miraculous radiance, and townspeople came hurriedly running up the hill, thinking a fire had broken out.

Over the following dozen years Francis traveled widely as an itinerant preacher, as far west as Spain in 1213-4 (he intended to sail for Morocco, but illness prevented him), and as far southeast as Damietta, Egypt, where, in 1219 during the Fifth Crusade, while the not-so-"Christian" Crusaders waited outside the town walls ready to massacre the inhabitants, acting gluttonously and dissolutely in the meantime, a disgusted Francis ventured forth to preach to the gracious Muslim Sultan, Malik-al-Kamil, who is said to have actually become a Christian at his death—though this part of the tale has not been verified.

Says Paul Sabatier, who in the 19th century revived studies of the saint, "There are in this world crowds of people capable of heroism if only a leader will guide them. Saint Francis was for them the leader, and the best of humanity at that time were eager to follow his footsteps." (Quoted in Lawrence S. Cunningham [Ed.], *Brother Francis: An Anthology of Writings by and about St. Francis of Assisi*, Harper & Row, 1972, p. 26.) The Poverello, or "little poor man," as he was known, saw his revolutionary, "anti-monastic" lay Franciscan order grow at a fantastic rate, soon including hundreds, then over a thousand, chapter houses in Italy, France, Spain, Germany and the Middle East. Francis insisted, not always successfully, that these be very simple, austere "places"—not big, wealthy "monasteries," such as were often found among the Benedictines of the day, whose abbeys were veritable fortresses. His failure to inspire radical poverty in all the houses set up in his order's name was a source of great distress to him. While in Rome in 1215, Francis befriended Saint Dominic, the great founder of the "Order of Preachers" or Dominicans, the other main group of itinerant friars of medieval times. Francis' saintliness and emphasis on total poverty was greatly appreciated by Dominic. And it is notable that, whereas the Dominicans valued a long period of higher education, Francis, himself relatively unlearned, wanted his friars and nuns to remain quite simple in this regard, relying more on Divinely-inspired knowledge over bookish knowledge. Sabatier says that Francis derived "nothing either from the church or the school [university], he was truly a 'theodidact'—a God-taught man." (*Ibid.*, p. 24.)

The always-humble Francis never became a priest, only a deacon. And he wanted to make contact with people, not be reclusive. When not immersed for those long hours in contemplative prayerfulness, he actively served human beings—and, if the tales are accurate, certain animals as well. (We fondly note here the anecdotes depicting Francis preaching to the flocks of birds and his renowned reconciling of the ravenous wolf of Gubbio to the fearful townspeople by talking to and calming the wolf and getting the people to regularly feed him and the pet dogs to accept him.) Sabatier notes that the Benedictine and other monks "were, in large measure, deserters from the war of life, and often, for motives not always religious, they fled behind the secure [monastic] walls in those days.... At times they drew away along with hundreds of their disciples to the solitudes of Clairvaux, Chartreuse, Vallombrosa, and Camaldoli. But even as a multitude, they are alone. They were dead to the world and to their brothers.... But this denial of action—is it really Christian? Saint Francis thought not.... He wanted to act like Christ, and his imitation of Christ was more closely aligned to Christ than that of Thomas à Kempis [1380-1471, German author of *Imitation of Christ*]. Jesus went out into the desert but only to find in prayer and communion with the Father the [divine] strength and force.... He did not avoid the multitude; he sought them out to console,

enlighten, and convert them. This is what Saint Francis wanted to imitate. More than once he felt the seductive charm of the purely contemplative life, but each time his own intuition was that such was disguised egotism. To save himself he must save others.... He went not to the healthy... he went to the sick, the forgotten, the dregs." (*Ibid.*, pp. 27-8).

In 1220, Francis turned over leadership of the Order to Peter Catani. The *Later Rule*, written by Francis in 1221, and revised to support the Franciscan way of life for the large number of Friars then in existence, was officially approved by Honorius III in 1223. But Francis was disappointed to learn that key passages of his Rule concerning his much-emphasized total reliance on "Lady Poverty" had been deleted. By this point, as Friedrich Heer observes, the lay order founded by Francis and his brother friars had definitely become a "Religious Order... like all the other Orders prepared to fight for their privileges in every town in Christendom.... Inevitably, the friars minor became entangled in the affairs of bishops and parish priests and of men of all kinds; and they were drawn into the academic atmosphere of the universities. Francis spent his last years in the crucifying knowledge that his ideals were being mutilated." (Heer, *The Medieval World*, NY: Mentor Books, 1962, quoted in Cunningham [Ed.], *Brother Francis*, p. 16.) "Poor Francis!" remarked Sabatier. "The final years of his life were a genuine *via dolorosa* as torturous as the one suffered by his Master as he sunk under the weight of the cross."

Along this line, in 1224, while fasting for forty days during a contemplative retreat with his close companions Brothers Leo, Masseo and Angelo at Mt. Alverna (70 miles north of Assisi), Francis underwent an astonishing mystic experience akin to crucifixion: having been praying to God to be able to participate in the sufferings that Jesus had undergone for the sake of humanity's sins, the Poverello saw a vision of Christ as a Seraphic angel... This angelic Christ anointed Francis with beams of fire which left the *stigmata*, the wounds of Christ, on his own hands, feet, and side. Many Christian holy people have manifested the *stigmata* since Francis' time, most famously Saint Pio (1887-1963) of Pietrelcina, Italy, in our own era. Francis appears to have been the first. These miraculous wounds, which bled, but not excessively, and which never healed, remained with Francis until his death in 1226. He hid them as best he could.

During these last two years, Francis was quite ill with the *stigmata* and other conditions. He labored with disorders of the stomach and spleen, and an eye-disease finally rendered him blind. He allowed himself to be burned around the temples in a painful cauterizing procedure, performed by ignorant physicians. Yet the Poverello bore all these tribulations patiently and lovingly, taking every opportunity he could to minister to the physical, psychological, and spiritual needs of others—his fellow friars, townspeople, and lepers. It was during this twilight of his life that he composed, in several stages, his most famous work, "Canticle to Sir Brother Sun."

Saint Francis finally passed on to his Lord on October 3, 1226, amidst many beloved disciples at the little chapel of Portiuncula near Assisi, to which he was carried on a litter. He had himself laid on the bare earth, and with his left hand on the stigmatic wound in his side, urged them, "I have done what I had to do; may Christ teach you what is your part." He was canonized a saint less than two years later by the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy.

Before and since his passing, the Franciscan Order, with its motto *Pax et Bonum*, "Peace and Goodness," grew famously. By 1282, it possessed 1,583 houses in Europe. It has since become one of the largest in Christianity, and Francis himself has no doubt become, judging from the number of statues in people's gardens, the most popular saint in all the Christian world next to Mary, the Mother of Christ (and, for Eastern Orthodox Christians, St. Seraphim of Sarov, 1759-1833).

These are the details of Francis' life. What was he like in person?

Thomas of Celano reports on Francis' lovable personality and also his actual physical appearance: "How fair, radiant and glorious was the sinlessness of his life, the simplicity of his words, the purity of his heart, his love of God and his neighbor, his unquestioning obedience and his fidelity to his Master! To this must be added his angelic appearance, the charm of his manner, his natural gentleness, the kindness of his conversation, the delicacy of his admonitions, the loyalty with which he treated anything told him in confidence, the wisdom of his counsel, the energy of his actions and his general loveliness..."

"He was a man of great eloquence; the expression of his face was gay and kindly, equally free of torpor as of arrogance. He was of middling stature, rather small, his head of moderate size and round, his face rather long and narrow, the forehead smooth and low, the black eyes of middling size, friendly and candid, the hair dark, the nose regular, straight and small, the ears close to the head and small, the temples smooth; his speech was winsome but fiery and spiritual, his voice powerful, pleasant, clear and harmonious; his teeth were ... an even white row behind narrow, gently rounded lips, his beard dark and somewhat

thin; the neck slender, resting on straight shoulders, ... the hands delicate with long fingers and nails; his spare, fragile body with its slender legs and small feet was covered by a rough gown. His sleep was brief, his hand ever open to give. He was the humblest among the humble, mild in his manner towards all men and able to adapt himself to the behavior of everyone. ... Who would be able to describe the measure of the love which he bore to all that is God's?"

In reading the biographical material about San Francesco by his contemporary disciples—Leo, Angelo, Rufino, Bonaventure, Thomas of Celano, and others—one is struck by his utter simplicity and austerity, and complete reliance on “Lady Poverty.” Lawrence S. Cunningham has stressed that Francis was not the first to embrace utter poverty in Christian tradition. The early monks of Christianity had done this. “However, when one compares their style of renunciation with that of Francis, there is a significant difference. The earlier tradition sought to live the poverty of Christ by imitating his flight to the desert; Francis sought poverty in the milling crowds of the world.... One would have to imagine a latter-day Francis choosing to live, not a hand-to-mouth existence on the road, but a life that included rat-infested slums, the scanty medical care of our most inadequate charity wards, long hours spent in the lines of the welfare bureau. In short, one would have to think of a man who had deliberately [abandoned his family’s high station of wealth and] deliberately inserted himself in the terribly degrading apparatus of [our modern-day] urban poverty. There was nothing romantic about this concept of voluntary poverty.” (Cunningham [Ed.], *Brother Francis, op. cit.*, pp. xii-xiii.)

Here we see that Francis showed not only a remarkable humility, but an incredible willingness to be humiliated. But lest we think of Francis only as an overly-serious, life-denying ascetic, we should also know that he was frequently expressing tremendous gratitude to God for everything, and had a magnificent love for God’s creatures, taking great joy in them, whether these be human, animal, plant, mineral, or celestial. As Saint Bonaventure writes: “Everything incited him to the love of God, he exulted in all the works of the Creator’s hands and, by the beauty of His images, his spirit rose to their living origin and cause. ... To him all creation was a stairway which led him up towards Him who is the goal of all desires.”

Theologian Chesterton over eighty years ago wisely commented on what some of us might call Francis’s “Zen-like” appreciation for the “suchness” (*tathata*) of each and every being and thing, illumined from within by Divine glory. “St. Francis was not a lover of nature.... The phrase implies accepting the material universe as a vague environment, a sort of sentimental pantheism.... The hermit might love nature as a background. Now, for St. Francis nothing was ever in the background. We might say that his mind had no background except perhaps that divine darkness out of which the divine love had called up every colored creature one by one. He saw everything as dramatic, distinct from its setting... A bird went by him like an arrow; something with a story and a purpose... A bush could stop him like a brigand; and indeed he was as ready to accept the brigand as the bush. In a word, we talk about a man who cannot see the wood for the trees. St. Francis was a man who did not want to see the wood for the trees. He wanted to see each tree as a separate and almost a sacred thing, being a child of God and therefore a brother or sister of man.... He did not call nature his mother; he called a particular donkey his brother or a particular sparrow his sister.... They were particular creatures assigned by their Creator to particular places; not mere expressions of the evolutionary energy of things. That is where his mysticism is so close to the common sense of the child.... St. Francis was a mystic, but he ... was emphatically [also] a realist.... I have said that St. Francis deliberately did not see the wood for the trees. It is even more true that he deliberately did not see the mob for the men.... He only saw the image of God multiplied but never monotonous.... What gave him his extraordinary personal power was this: that from the Pope to the beggar, from the Sultan of Syria in his pavilion to the ragged robbers crawling out of the wood, there was never a man who looked into those brown burning eyes without being certain that Francis Bernardone was really interested in him... that he himself was being valued and taken seriously.... Now for this particular moral and religious idea there is no external expression except courtesy... a certain grand manner which may be called good manners. We may say if we like that St. Francis, in the bare and barren simplicity of his life, had clung to one rage of luxury: the manners of a court. But whereas in a court there is one king and a hundred courtiers, in this story there was one courtier, moving among a hundred kings.” (G.K. Chesterton, *Saint Francis of Assisi*, Doubleday Image, 1957 ed., pp. 86-98)

Cunningham has written in the same vein, “Saint Francis set up the first Christmas crib outside of the town of Greccio because, as he tells us, he wanted to *see* the poverty and discomfort of the Christ child in a real and tangible way. In the last period of his life, while praying on Mount Alverna, Francis wished to *feel* concretely the suffering of Christ in His passion. The resulting phenomenon of the stigmata ... was a tangible expression of this desire.... Chesterton ... has put it well in saying that, properly understood,

Francis was not a lover of nature. He never even uses the world. What Francis loved were birds, flowers, fire, water, animals, and people. He was interested in the concrete: he loved men, not humanity; wolves, not wildlife; Christ, not Christianity.” (Cunningham [Ed.], *Brother Francis: An Anthology ...* pp. xi-xii.)

Francis not only displayed a rich delight over the wonders of each of God’s creatures, he actually was often prone to a kind of “spiritual drunkenness,” a spontaneous mystical, poetic rapture which was the innocent outflow of his deeply contemplative, inward nature. With regard to this contemplative aspect of Francis, not usually known by most people, it is worth remembering that he and many of his saintly disciples, even when on their itinerant preaching tours, spent *many hours each day*—sometimes more than 10 hours at a time—absorbed in a deep, ecstatic contemplative, meditative communion in God via a highly refined, wordless prayer.

This ability to commune totally with the Heart, Mind and Will of God, completely *empty* of self, absolutely *full* of God, was undoubtedly what empowered Francis and his Friars in their forceful preaching, charity, and healing work in the world (one observes the same phenomenon of deep contemplation and resulting powerful ministry among all the other great saints). As a sign of Francis’ oneness with God, the miraculous power of the Divine was evidently manifested in him, in the form of radiant transfigurations and levitations of his body, healings of others’ bodies and souls, control over the elements, knowledge of distant events, knowledge of the future, experience of demons (who came to test him, often by throwing his body around violently), knowledge of the thoughts and innermost secrets of others, ability to communicate with animals, visionary experiences of Christ and the angels, and many other wondrous abilities, *ad gloriam Dei*. The Franciscan friars Regis Armstrong and Ignatius Brady conclude a scholarly book on the saint and his writings: “It is not... Saint Francis of Assisi the medieval Italian mystic who appeals to the world so much as it is the Holy Spirit of the Lord, which penetrated his personality so totally, and continues to inspire every generation with ‘his holy manner of working’...”

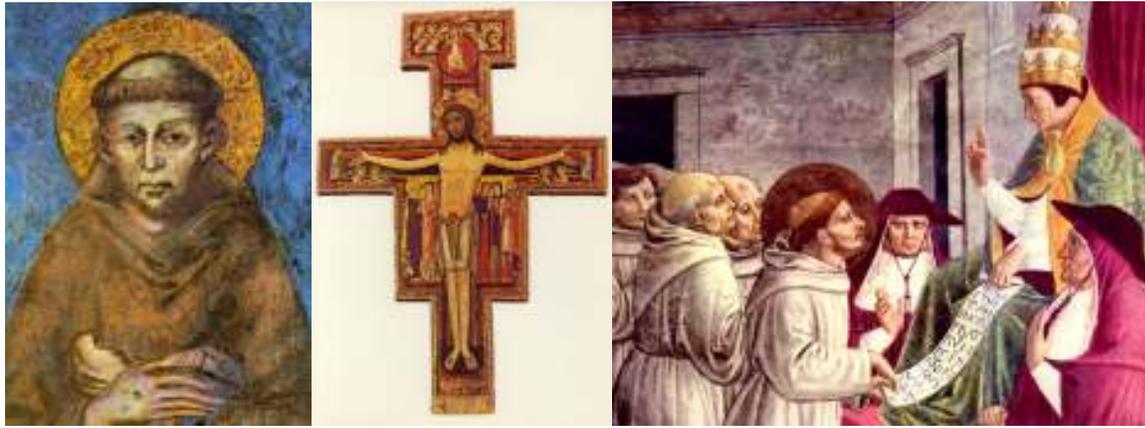
Heer, Cunningham and others have observed how thoroughly Francis was a “medieval man.” (He was also a faithful, orthodox son of the Church, no “protestant.”) And yet the life and actions of Francis, as Cunningham sums it, “had a rebuke and a word for many segments of medieval culture: to the medieval Manichaeans [the Cathars/Albigensians], he preached the goodness of the flesh and the material universe; to the rulers, both secular and ecclesiastical, he pointed out that Christ was not only a king but also a servant; to the warring city-states, he reiterated the message of the Christian as peace-maker; to the theologians and the prelates, he pointed to the presence of God in the faces of the lowly.... In an age that brutalized or manipulated women, he exalted them and ... took them into partnership.... Yet all of this preaching was accomplished more by his life than his words.... He was not a graceful writer or a spellbinding preacher or an artist. He was a poor, ragged man who led the life of a hobo. But he was a saint.... This seriousness changed him from the wealthy man of a comfortable Umbrian home to the blind, ragged figure of Mount Alverna.... To men in the church, the figure of Saint Francis is an embarrassing one. He keeps the Christian a bit off guard, because his life is a totally serious attempt to answer the question that the Gospel itself asks: What think ye of the Christ?... Someone once wrote that Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it simply has not been tried. Francis tried Christ and was not disappointed. That is the whole point of his life.” (Cunningham, *op. cit.*, pp. xiv, xvii-xx.)

And so it is almost predictable what would be done to his ministry by others, even during his own lifetime. “He started as a solitary, almost quixotic figure and ended up as the inspirer of thousands of followers. He wished to lead a hidden and simple life and found himself, even in his own lifetime, lionized, venerated, and imitated. He also found himself greatly misunderstood.... Toward the end of his life, Francis lost control of his own order and ... was ‘kicked upstairs.’ In a process that began in the last years of his life and greatly accelerated after his death, some very basic ideas of Saint Francis (especially on poverty, the question of higher education for his brothers, ecclesiastical privilege) had not only suffered neglect but were ultimately modified or legislated against. There were sporadic attempts to revive the ideals of Francis, but they met powerful resistance. Men who did attempt to revive these earlier ideals, such as the spiritual Franciscans, were harassed into untenable positions or persecuted out of existence. The Franciscans became, in a relatively short time, a property-bound monastic group [like the other orders] which, for whatever good the order did do, bore little resemblance to the more or less unstructured life preached by Francis and his earlier followers.... Francis wanted to live literally by some injunctions in the Gospel. Many of his followers found this idea of his to be overidealized, impractical, and romantic. His proposed mode of life could not answer such hard-nosed questions as, Who pays? How does one provide? What if? When Saint Francis answered such queries with ‘Our Father, who art in heaven,’ he was being serious. But it was only an answer that a saint would understand....” (*Ibid.*, pp. xiv-xvi.)

Chronological account of the life of St. Francis of Assisi

[Adopted from Agostino Ghilardi, *The Life & Times of St. Francis* (Salvator Attanasio, Tr.), NY: Curtis, 1967]

- 1182—Francesco (Francis) Bernardone is born in Assisi, son of Pietro Bernardone and Giovanna (Pica).
- 1190-1195—Francis attends school at the church of St. George.
- 1195-1200—Francis spends his youth in pleasure haunts.
- 1201-1202—he takes part in the struggle between Assisi and Perugia and fights in the battle of Colles-trada, where he is taken prisoner.
- 1203, Nov.—released from prison, he returns to a carefree life, but undergoes major psychological change.
- 1204—he is struck down by a serious illness and feels disgust for his empty life.
- 1205—Francis tries to give a purpose to his life by arming himself as a knight, and sets out for Apulia to enlist in the army of Gualtieri of Brienne. He becomes ill in Spoleto and has a vision that marks the beginning of his conversion. He returns to Assisi, gathers his old friends around him, but derives no pleasure from their feasts, only disillusion. He seeks solitude. Fully converted, he goes on a pilgrimage to Rome. Arriving at St. Peter's, he dresses in rags and joins the beggars.
- 1206—in meditation in the tiny church of St. Damian on Mount Subasio, Francis hears the voice of the Crucifix on the altar, which asks him to “rebuild My Church.” In October, Pietro Bernardone has his son summoned before the magistrates to demand restitution of the money spent in the restoration of St. Damian. Francis appeals to Guido, bishop of Assisi, and publicly renounces his hereditary rights.
- 1207-9—dedicated to a life of prayer and solitude, Francis helps and lives with lepers, and restores some churches in the area.
- 1209—he establishes himself in the little Portiuncula chapel of St. Mary of the Angels and here, one day during Mass, he hears a passage from the Gospel in which Christ outlines the apostles' mission; thus, Francis has a revelation of what his task is to be. The words of Jesus in the Gospels are his first *Rule*.
- 1209-1210—the first followers join Francis; they eventually number twelve, not including Francis. April 16, 1209 is considered the founding date of the Order. During this time he composes the first regulations of their religious life.
- 1210—the Franciscan movement begins to spread in the adjoining regions, though with some opposition. Francis goes to Rome with eleven friends, seeking papal approval of his *Rule*. Pope Innocent III receives the men and verbally approves the *Rule*. Thus the Order achieves legal status.
- 1211—after the return from Rome the friars live first in Rivotorto and then in Portiuncula, but they move about in order to preach. They take the name “Friars Minor” or “Lesser Brothers.”
- 1212—18-year-old Clare of Assisi, stirred by Francis' words, enters into religious life after a long preparation, giving rise to the Second Order of Franciscans. Francis, now dedicating himself to preaching, decides to go to the East. He sails for Palestine but contrary winds return him to Ancona.
- 1213-May 8—Count Orlando offers him Mount Alverna as a gift.
- 1213-1214—he leaves for Morocco, passing through France and Spain, but he is forced to return to Italy after he is struck by a serious illness before reaching his destination.
- 1215—meeting of the first General Chapter of Franciscans on the feastday of Pentecost.
- 1216—July 16: Pope Innocent III dies and is succeeded by Honorius III.
- 1219-1220—Francis sails again for the Orient. Preaches before the Sultan of Egypt. Returns to Italy upon being notified of the crisis in the Order, due to the conflicts between the “laxists” and the “spirituals.”
- 1221—the famous Chapter of the Mats is held.
- 1222—the apostolic journeyings continue. Towards the end of the year, he is worn out by his labors, and retires to the hermitage of Fonte Colombo, near Rieti.
- 1223—he prepares the *Second Rule* (or *Later Rule*) at Fonte Colombo and in October of that year he obtains sanction for it from Honorius III in the papal bull *Solet annuere* of November 29. On Christmas night of that year he celebrates the birth of Jesus in Greccio, setting up the first crib.
- 1224—after retiring in penance and mortification to Mount Alverna, he suffers the *stigmata* on Sept. 14.
- 1225—gravely ill with an eye ailment and suffering from the *stigmata*, he goes to Rieti to be medically treated at the papal court, but no improvement results from the painful cauterization.
- 1226—he winters in Siena but when his illness worsens he is taken to Assisi. Composes the *Canticle of Creatures*. Sensing the end is near, he asks to be taken to the Portiuncula. Exhausted, he dies on Oct 3, surrounded by his friars who, in accord with his wishes, have placed him naked on the ground. The mortal remains are taken to St. George's Church in Assisi. Four years later, in 1230, Francis' physical remains are interred in the new Basilica named after him.



The Franciscan movement flourished during and after Francis' lifetime. The Friars Minor already numbered several thousand at the death of St. Francis. Towards the end of the 13th century the figure rose to 25,000. According to statistics gathered in 1316 there were 30,000 friars in nearly 1,600 houses. By the 1960s, the Franciscans alone represented one-fifth of the Church's vowed religious: 45,000 members out of 250,000. The Franciscan friars are divided into three great families: the Friars Minor, the Conventual Friars Minor, and the Capuchin Friars Minor. The first wear a chestnut-colored habit, girded by a white rope, with the cowl hanging from a short cape. They wear sandals and do not use a hat. The Conventuals wear a black tunic, girded by a white string, with black cape and cowl. They wear shoes and hats. The Capuchins can be distinguished by their beards, prescribed by regulation. They wear a chestnut-colored habit, with a long and pointed cowl; sandals but no hats. Despite these external dissimilarities, the Franciscan friars live according to the same Rule, that which was dictated by St. Francis and which is inspired by the unchanging ideals of evangelical poverty, purity, humility and gladness. (Adapted from Ghilardi, *The Life & Times of St. Francis.*)

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The Habit of St. Francis



The Tomb of St. Francis

Writings and sayings of Saint Francis of Assisi:

On the writings of Francis of Assisi, 28 have been authenticated as composed by him, along with five dictated letters. Despite his wishes to preserve them, many of his writings have been lost: the letters to Saint Clare, to Cardinal Hugolino, to Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, to a mother who desired a cure for her son. Many texts that began to circulate in the next century have been shown to be spurious or doubtful at best. The famous prayer “Lord make me an instrument of Thy peace” is most certainly *not* by Saint Francis, but rather by a 20th century author. Francis’ own writings are short, unlearned, without any great style. They have been classed in three

groups: legislative works (e.g., the *Rules and Testament*), spiritual advice, and expressions of prayer and praise. (See below, for excerpts.) Another schema by a modern Franciscan bishop indicates a different threefold schema: 1) works by Francis wherein he can express himself freely and spontaneously; 2) those urging some cause or conveying a particular “responsible” message (e.g., *Letters and Testament*); and 3) those in which he is joined by those sharing control of the Order who induced him to write things with which he did not agree (e.g., the *Later Rule* of 1223). Except for the following *Canticle*, I have mainly drawn these writings and sayings from Fr. James Meyer, OFM (Tr.) *The Words of Saint Francis: An Anthology*, Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, paper ed., 1966/1952.

The Canticle (Song) of Sir Brother Sun, by St. Francis of Assisi

(Note: This is the earliest poem in the Italian language, when Latin was being transformed into vernacular tongues. Despite its title, it is a hymn to God, not to the sun, richly appreciating God’s wondrous revelation in/as this world. Two of its most eminent translators, the Franciscan friar-scholars Regis Armstrong and Ignatius Brady, observe, “Song, music, and poetry were so deeply a part of the nature of Saint Francis that in times of sorrow and sickness as well as of joy and good health he spontaneously gave voice in song to his feelings, his inspirations, and his prayers. The clearest expression of this aspect of the personality of the Poverello is the *Canticle of Brother Sun*.... The *Legend of Perugia*, 43, narrates the circumstances of the composition of the first section of the *Canticle*, in which the saint invites all creation to praise its Creator. The author describes the intense suffering of the Poverello in that period after he had received the stigmata. ‘For his praise,’ he [Francis] said, ‘I wish to compose a new hymn about the Lord’s creatures, of which we make daily use, without which we cannot live, and with which the human race greatly offends its Creator.’ The second section of the *Canticle*, consisting of two verses concerning pardon and peace, was composed a short time afterward in an attempt to unite the quarrelling civil and religious authorities of Assisi. The same *Legend of Perugia*, 44, describes the reconciling power the *Canticle* had in the resolution of the conflict. The final verses of the work, which constitute the third section, were written at the death of Saint Francis. Once again the *Legend of Perugia*, 100, provides the details of the scene at the Portiuncula where the Seraphic father enthusiastically sang the praises of Sister Death and welcomed her embrace. This magnificent hymn expresses the mystical vision of the Saint of Assisi and, since it springs from the depths of his soul, provides us with many insights into the profundity of his life of faith in the Triune God, Who so deeply enters into creation. In this vision, however, the Little Poor Man does not lose himself in space or in the vastness of the created world. He becomes so intimate and familiar with the wonders of creation that he embraces them as ‘Brother’ and ‘Sister,’ that is, members of one family. More than any other aspect of the *Canticle*, this unique feature has enhanced the spiritual tradition of Christian spirituality.” The translators, writing in 1982, note that in the 20th century, “more than five hundred articles have examined the *Canticle* and within the past twenty years ten books have been written about it.” *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, NY: Paulist Press, 1982.)

Canticle of Sir Brother Sun

1. Most High, all-powerful, good Lord, Yours are the praises, the glory, the honor, and all blessing.
2. To You alone, Most High, do they belong, and no man is worthy to mention Your name.
3. Praised be You, my Lord, with all your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun, Who is the day and through whom You give us light.
4. And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor; and bears a likeness [or gives witness] of You, Most High One.
5. Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars, in heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.
6. Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather through which You give sustenance to Your creatures.
7. Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water, which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.
8. Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom You light the night and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.
9. Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs
10. Praised be You my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love and bear infirmity and tribulation.
11. Blessed are those who endure in peace for by You, Most High, they shall be crowned
12. Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death, from whom no living man can escape.
13. Woe to those who die in mortal sin. Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will, for the second death shall do them no harm.
14. Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks and serve Him with great humility.

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You alone are holy, O Lord God... You are strong. You are full of majesty. You are the most high. You are the Lord God, threefold and one, all that is good... You are charity and love. You are wisdom. You are humility. You are patience. You are assurance. You are restfulness. You are gladness. You are justice and temperance. You are all the wealth desirable. You are beauty. You are gentleness. You protect. You guard and defend. You are fortitude. You are refreshment. You are our hope. You are our faith. You are our great relish. You are our eternal life. (From the special message on parchment given by Francis to Brother Leo during their time on Mount Alverna in Sept. 1224.)

Almighty, eternal, just and merciful God, grant us in our misery [the grace] to do for You alone what we know You want and always want whatever pleases You. Thus, inwardly cleansed, interiorly enlightened, and inflamed [or aglow] by the fire of the Holy Spirit, may we be able to follow in the footsteps of Your beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. And, by Your grace alone, may we make our way to You, Most High, Who live and rule in perfect Trinity and simple Unity, and are glorified, God all-powerful, forever and ever. Amen. (*A Letter to the Entire Order*, 50-2)

There is nothing good for you either in this world more in the next. You think you are going to keep these worldly vanities a long time, but you are deceived, because the day and the hour will come of which you neither think nor know nor notice anything. The body begins to fail, death approaches, relatives and friends come and say, arrange your affairs. Wife and children, kin and friends pretend to weep... And so the wretched man dies a better death... Let every creature in heaven and on earth and in the sea and its depths render God praise, glory, honor and blessing, for he is our strength and power, who alone is good, alone the most high, alone almighty and admirable, alone glorious and holy, praiseworthy and blessed ... for ever. Amen. (Excerpts from *Letter to All the Faithful*)

The rule and life of these brothers is this, namely to live in obedience, in chastity, and without property, and to follow the teaching and footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ. (From *The Earlier Rule*)

[On the virtue of religious obedience:] I know what the blessing of obedience is [for dissolving self-will], and that none of the person's time passes without gain who has put his neck under the yoke of another. (*Vita Secunda*, Second Life, written by Thomas of Celano, 151)

Take a corpse and put it where you please. You will see, it does not resent being moved, nor grumble at the place it is put, nor want back the place it left.... That is your true obedient person. He does not reason about why he is moved, does not mind where he is placed, does not insist on a transfer elsewhere. Raised to office, he keeps his habitual humility. The more he is honored, the more unworthy he regards himself. (*Vita Secunda*, 152)

The demons cannot hurt a servant of Christ when they see him filled with holy mirth. But when his spirit is tearful, forlorn, downcast, it is readily swallowed up completely by sadness, or it is carried to the extreme of vain enjoyments... When a servant of God, as commonly happens, is troubled about anything, he ought to get right up and pray, and insist on staying in his sovereign Father's presence until He restores the joy of his salvation to him. (*Vita Secunda*, 125)

[Spoken to his brother friars before they embarked toward Rome for papal approval of their way of life:] Let us go to St. Peter and St. Paul and ask them to teach us and help us get possession of the measureless treasure of holy poverty; for it is a treasure so exceedingly valuable... It is that heavenly virtue by which all earthly transitory things are trodden under foot and every hindrance is removed from the soul, so that it can commune freely with the eternal God. It helps the soul while still on earth to converse with the angels in heaven, it was the companion of Christ.... It is the virtue, too, which renders their flight to heaven [God] easy for those who love it. It protects us with the armor of true humility and charity. (*Fioretti*, Little Flowers, 13)

To the extent the brothers turn away from poverty, the world will turn away from them, and they will seek and not find. But if they cling to my Lady Poverty, the world will support them, because they have been given to the world for its salvation. There is an understanding between the world and the brothers: the latter owe the world a good example, the world owes them provision for their needs. If belying their trust they withdraw their good example, the world in just reproof withdraws its hand. (*Vita Secunda*, 70)

[The friars' watchword was to be:] Go, and cast your care upon the Lord, and he will provide for you. (Thomas of Celano's *Vita Prima*, First Life of St. Francis, 29)

[To his brother friars, in *The Earlier Rule*, section xxii:] After we have left the world, there is nothing else for us to do except to follow the will of the Lord and to please Him.... Let us keep a close guard on ourselves, lest under the pretext of some compensation or of work or advantage we let our mind and heart stray or be withdrawn from the Lord.

Each of you [friars] should have regard for his own nature. Though this [friar] or that one may be able to sustain himself on less food than someone else, still I will not have him who needs more food try to imitate the former in that. Taking his own nature into consideration, let him bestow on his body what he needs to be able to serve the spirit. Just as we are bound to avoid superfluity in eating, for it harms body and soul, so must we beware of excessive abstaining.... (From the *Speculum Perfectionis*, or Mirror of Perfection, 27)

I want my brothers to act like children of the same mother among themselves; and that if one should ask for a tunic or a cord [waist-sash] or whatever else, the other should give it freely. Let them share their books and everything that is agreeable.... (*Vita Secunda*, 180)

Let the brothers wherever they may be, in hermitages or other places, take heed not to make any place their own and maintain it against anybody else. And let whoever may approach them, whether friend or foe, or thief or robber, be received kindly. And wherever the brothers are and in whatever situation they find themselves, they should be careful to show the right spirit of reverence and honor toward one another, without murmuring (cf. 1 Peter 4, 9). And let the brothers take heed not to appear sad exteriorly and be gloomy hypocrites, but let them prove to be joyful in the Lord, and merry and becomingly courteous.

... And every one of them should love and take care of his brother like a mother loves and takes care of her sons. (*The Earlier Rule*, vii, ix)

[Concerning the rich:] God is the Lord over them as well as over us. He can call them to his service and justify them when called.... They are our brothers, because they have the same Creator as we; and our masters, because they lend their help [as patrons] so that the good can pursue penance with them supplying their bodily needs. (From *Legend of the Three Companions*)

The malice of detraction [backbiting] is greater than that of robbers, inasmuch as the law of Christ, which finds its fulfillment in charity, binds us to desire the welfare of people's soul more than that of the body. (From *The Major Legend of St. Bonaventure*, 8)

And all the brothers, ministers and servants as well as the rest, should take care not to be disturbed or angered over anyone else's sin or bad example, because the devil likes to worsen many over one person's sin; but let them spiritually, as well as they can, help the one who has sinned, for it is not the healthy who need the physician, but the sick.... And no one should be called prior, but let all in general be called Less Brothers [Friar Minors]. And each should wash the other's feet. (*The Earlier Rule*, v-vi)

The Lord revealed to me that we should speak this greeting: "The Lord give you peace." (*Testament*)

[To the priests inside and outside his Franciscan Order:] ... Be holy since He is holy.... Hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves, so that He Who gives Himself totally to you may receive you totally. (From *A Letter to the Entire Order*, 23,29)

It is a great pity and a pitiable weakness that you should have Him thus present and still be interested in anything else in all the world. (*Letter to the Chapter General and all the Friars*)

What [you] must desire above all things: to have the Spirit of the Lord and His holy manner of working. (From *The Later Rule*, x.8)

[To Brother Masseo:] Do you want to know why everyone follows me? That is happening to me because of the eyes of God on high taking in everywhere the good and the bad. Those most holy eyes have espied nobody among sinners more useless, incompetent and sinful than me, and, to do the marvels he has in mind, he has found no more worthless creature on earth. And so he has chosen me, to put to shame what is noble and grand and powerful and fair and wise about the world, so that it may be clear that all virtue and all that is good comes from him and not from any creature; and no person may glory in his sight, but whoever glories, shall glory in the Lord, to whom be all the honor and glory forever. (*Fioretti*, 10)

[It grieved Francis to see learning pursued where virtue was neglected:] My brothers who are led by curious craving for knowledge, will find their hands empty on the day of retribution. I would rather have them growing strong in virtue, that when the periods of tribulation came they could have the Lord with them in their distress. (*Vita Secunda*, 195)

There are so many eager for the climb to knowledge that the man is blessed who keeps himself barren of it for the love of God.... A man has only as much knowledge as he puts into action, and a religious is only as good a preacher as he puts into action. (*Speculum Perfectionis*, 4)

Let not the unlettered be concerned about learning, but let them mind that above everything else they should desire to have the Spirit of the Lord and his holy operation, to pray to him always with a pure heart, to have humility, patience amid persecution and infirmity, and love for those who persecute, reproach and accuse us.... (*The Later Rule*, x)

Nobody ought to flatter himself with undue applause over anything that a sinner can do. A sinner can fast, pray, weep, mortify his flesh. But this he cannot do: remain loyal to his Lord. (*Vita Secunda*, 134)

Nothing ought to be so disagreeable to a servant of God but sin. And no matter how anybody else may sin, if a servant of God gets disturbed or angry over it except out of charity, he heaps up guilt for himself. The servant of God that does not get angry or upset on anyone's account, lives as is right and without sin. ... You can tell by this whether a servant of God has anything of the spirit of God, that, when the Lord does anything good through him, ... [he] is not puffed up about it and he rather regards himself the more unworthy in his own eyes and considers himself inferior to all other people.... You cannot tell what degree of patience and humility a servant of God has about him as long as he has been having his way. But let the time come when those who should oblige him, do the contrary to him, and what degree of patience and humility he has *then, that* is the degree he has, and no more. (*Admonitions/Reminders*, 11-13)

They are truly friends of peace who, no matter what they have to suffer in the world, still preserve peace within and without for love of our Lord Jesus Christ. (*Admonitions/Reminders*, 15)

Where there is charity and wisdom, there is neither fear nor ignorance. Where there is patience and humility, there is neither anger nor loss of composure. Where there is poverty borne with joy, there is neither grasping nor hoarding. Where there is quiet and meditation, there is neither worry nor dissipation. Where there is fear of the Lord to guard the gateway, there the Enemy can get no hold for an entry. Where there is mercy and discernment, there is neither luxury nor a hardened heart. (*Admonitions/Reminders*, 27)

Blessed is the servant that does not think himself any better when people make much of him and exalt him than when they consider him worthless, ordinary, and contemptible. For what a person is before God, so much he is, and no more.... Blessed is the servant that takes direction, blame, and reproof as patiently from anyone else as from himself. Blessed is the servant that on being reproved cheerfully agrees, modestly complies, modestly complies, and readily makes amends. Blessed is the servant that is not quick to excuse himself, and humbly accepts the embarrassment and the reproof for a sin where he was not guilty of any fault. (*Admonitions/Reminders*, 20, 23)

The Son of God was nobler than we, and he made himself poor in this world for our sake. For love of him we have chosen the path of poverty; we ought not to be embarrassed at going out for alms. (*Vita Secunda*, 74)

When a servant of God asks for alms, he offers the love of God to those whom he asks, and compared with that everything there is in heaven and on earth is nothing. (*Speculum Perfectionis*, 22)

The love of God is something so sublime and precious it ought never to be mentioned except rarely and under great necessity, and with much reverence. (*Speculum Perfectionis*, 34)

[Excerpt from a *Letter to a certain minister*:] ... Whatever gives you trouble in loving the Lord God, and whoever causes you such trouble, whether it be the brothers or other people, even were they to give you a beating, you ought to regard that as a favor. You should want it that way and not otherwise. Regard that as true obedience to the Lord God and to me, for I know positively that that is true obedience. And love those who do such things to you, and do not wish for anything else from them except whatever the Lord thus gives you, and love them so far as to wish they might be better Christians. And let that be of more value to you than any hermit's life. And I will take this as proof of whether you love the Lord and me, his servant and yours, if you act as follows: namely, that there be no brother in the world who has sinned as much as ever he could sin, yet who, after looking in your eyes, would ever go away without mercy from you if he seeks mercy, and if he were not to seek mercy you would ask him if he wished for mercy. And if he appeared before your eyes after that a thousand times, love him more than me, to the end that you may drag him to the Lord, and may you ever have pity on such persons.

Those ought to have the care of souls who expect nothing for themselves of it, but heed only the will of God in all things; men who put nothing above their salvation; who have regard not for the applause of their subjects but for their benefit; who care not for show in the sight of men but for glory before God; who do not aspire to office...; whom an office conferred does not make proud but humble, and an office taken away does not cast down but lift up.... (Francis further stated that it is perilous to rule and more profitable to be ruled.) (*Vita Prima*, 104)

Brother Leo, were it to please God that the Lesser Brothers [Friars Minor—the Franciscans] gave in every country a grand example of holiness and edification in virtue, nevertheless write it down and take careful note of it: *there is not perfect joy in that*. (And a little farther on:) O Brother Leo, though a Lesser Brother give sight to the blind, drive out demons, give hearing to the deaf, make the lame walk, give speech to the mute, and still more, raise up the four-day day, write down that *there is not perfect joy in that*. (Still farther on:) O Brother Leo, if a Lesser Brother knew all the languages and all the sciences and all the Scriptures, so that he could prophesy and reveal not only things future but also the secrets of consciences and minds, write that *perfect joy is not in that*. (Then again, in a loud voice:) O Brother Leo, little lamb of God, though your Lesser Brother spoke the language of angels and knew the course of the stars and properties of the herbs, and there were disclosed to him all the treasures of the earth, and he knew the characteristics of the birds and fish and animals and of men and of trees and stones and roots and waters; write that *perfect joy is not in that*. (And later:) O Brother Leo, though your Lesser Brother could preach so well as to convert all the infidels to the Faith of Christ; write that *perfect joy is not in that*. (And finally, responding to Leo's demand for what is perfect joy:) If we get to St. Mary's of the Angels [the Portiuncula] so drenched with rain and frozen with cold and spattered with mud and afflicted with hunger, and knock at the door of the place and the porter comes in anger and says, Who are you? And we say, We are two of your brothers; and if he says, You are not telling the truth, you are rather two loafers who are going about fooling the world and robbing the alms of the poor—get out!; and he does not open the door for us, and makes us stay outdoors in the snow and rain amid the cold and our hunger, until nightfall; then if we endure all those insults and cruelties and rebuffs patiently and without being ruffled or murmuring at him; and we humbly and charitably think that this porter really knows us but that God is having him talk up to us that way: *O Brother Leo, write that there is perfect joy in that*. And if we go on knocking, and he comes out all wrought up and drives us away with abusive language, and cuffs us as if we were impudent clods, saying, Get out of here, you low-down thievish fellows, go on to the hostel... if we take that patiently, with good cheer and charity: O Brother Leo, write that *therein there is perfect joy*.... (Etc.) And now listen to the conclusion, Brother Leo. Above all the graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit that Christ grants his friends, there is that of overcoming themselves and gladly for the love of Christ bearing pain, insults, disgrace and discomfort, because we cannot glory in any of the other gifts of God—they are not ours, but God's.... But in the cross of tribulation and affliction we may glory because that is our due, and so the Apostle [Paul] says, “I do not wish to glory in anything but in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (*Fioretti*, 8)

[The following can be read in light of the idea of reaping what one sows, that is, the law of *karma*.] It is a token of great love if the Lord punishes his servant well for his faults in this life so that he may not be punished in the next. (*Fioretti*, 1st Stigmata) In those whom the Lord loves with tender love, he does not allow anything to remain unpunished in this life. (*Speculum Perfectionis*, 67)

So great is the good I have in sight, that any pain is my delight. (*Fioretti*, 1st Stigmata)

[Upon traveling with a fellow friar and seeing someone even more destitute than themselves, Francis would give that person his cloak or robe, saying to his companion friar:] Brother, we must give this mantle back to this poor fellow, to whom it belongs. We had it as a loan until we might find someone poorer than ourselves. (*Vita Secunda*, 87)

I have always taken less than was due to me for fear other poor people be cheated of their portion. To do otherwise would be robbery. (*Speculum Perfectionis*, 12)

Francis would frequently say, during certain long prayer-periods later in life (when he was famous): “My God and my all! Who are you, O God most dear, and who am I, your worthless, useless little worm of a servant!” And: “You are my God, teach me to do your will.” (*Fioretti*, 3rd Stigm and *Vita Prima*, 6)

[At one time—it was on his resignation as Minister General in 1221—Saint Francis wondered whether he should go out into the world at all, and not, rather, spend his time in prayer; he asked the friars close to him:] Brothers, what do you advise and commend? That I gave myself wholly to prayer, or that I go about and preach? For of course as an insignificant and unlettered person without skill in speech I have received the

grace of prayer rather than that of speech. Moreover, in prayer one seems to win and heap up graces whereas in preaching one, as it were, distributes the gifts received from heaven. In prayer there is purification of the interior affections and union with the one true and sovereign Good, together with invigoration of virtue. . . . Finally, in prayer we address and listen to God, and associate with the angels as if leading an angelic life; in preaching we have to exercise much condescension toward the people and in living among them as people do, we have to think and see and speak and hear things that are human. On the other hand, there is one thing that seems to outweigh all this before God, namely that God's only begotten Son, who is the supreme wisdom, descended from the bosom of the Father for the salvation of souls in order to instruct the world by his example and speak the word of salvation to the people. . . . And since we ought to do everything according to the model of what we see in him as on a high mountain, it seems to be more pleasing to God for me to interrupt my retirement and go out for such work. (*The Major Legend of St. Bonaventura*, 12)

I am so at one with my Lord that I will not be sad over dying, nor rejoice any more over living longer. I will be equally pleased at life or death. (*Book of Conformities*, xii)

May we love You with all our heart by always keeping You in mind; with all our soul by always longing for You; with all our mind by directing all our intentions to You and seeking Your glory in everything; and with all our strength by exerting all the forces and faculties of soul and body in Your loving service and in nothing else. So may we love our neighbors as ourselves, by getting them all so far as we can to love You, by being as glad at the good fortune of others as at our own, while feeling for their misfortune, and giving no offense to anybody. . . . For Your sake may we truly love our enemies and devotedly intercede with You for them, giving nobody evil in return for evil and trying to be helpful toward everybody, in Your name. (Excerpt from *The Praises of God in the 'Our Father'*)

With all our heart and soul and mind and strength and fortitude and understanding in all our faculties: with all our endeavor, affection, and yearning: with all we desire and will, let us all love God the Lord, who has given and still gives us all our whole body, soul and life. . . . So let us desire nothing else, wish for nothing else, take pleasure and delight in nothing else but our Creator, Redeemer and Savior, the only true God, who is the perfect good, everything good, wholly good, the true and sovereign good; he who alone is good, loving and gentle, sweet and lovable; he who alone is wholly just, true and fair; who alone is kind, innocent and clean; from whom, and through whom, and in whom is all pardon, all grace, and all glory for all the repentant and just and for all the blessed, rejoicing together in Heaven. Everywhere, at every hour and at any time, day after day and without ceasing let us all believe in him with a true and humble faith, cherish him in our heart, and love, honor, adore, serve, praise and bless him, glorify, exult and extol him, and give thanks to him, the most high, sovereign, eternal God, in Trinity and unity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Creator of all things, the Savior of all who have faith and hope and love for him; who is without beginning and without end, unchangeable, invisible, unutterable, ineffable, and incomprehensible, unfathomable, blest, worthy of praise, glorious, exalted above all, sublime, supreme, yet sweet, lovable, delightful, and always together desirable beyond everything forever and ever. (*The Earlier Rule* xxiii)

Be resolved at heart to bear everything in patience and humility. (*Legend of the Three Companions*, 10)

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On the apocryphal “Peace Prayer of Saint Francis”—According to the Franciscan priest and scholar, Kajetan Esser, OFM, editor of the critical edition of St. Francis’s writings, the “Peace Prayer of St. Francis” is **most certainly not one of his writings**. Rather, as Dr. Christian Renoux has discovered, this prayer first appeared in 1912 in a little French spiritual publication, *La Clochette*, and was then sent to the Pope in 1915, the next year printed in Italian in the Vatican’s daily newspaper, *L’Osservatore Romano*. Around 1920, the prayer was penned by a French Franciscan priest on the back of an image of St. Francis with the title *Prière pour la paix* (Prayer for Peace), but without being attributed to the saint. Between the two world wars, the prayer circulated in Europe and was translated into English, likely for the first time, in the 1936 book *Living Courageously*, by Kirby Page, a Disciples of Christ minister. He attributed it to St. Francis; it had been so attributed for the first time to the saint back in 1927 by a French Protestant movement, Les Chevaliers du Prince de la Paix (The Knights of the Prince of Peace). In sum, this famous prayer only goes back to about 1912. See www.franciscan-archive.org/franciscana/peace.html.

(By an anonymous French author, c1912, **not by Saint Francis**, though obviously in line with his views:)]

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

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See also Franco Zeffirelli's 1972 Italian film on St. Francis, *Brother Sun, Sister Moon* (135 mins), a gorgeous film with fine dramatizations of key moments in the saint's life; but many parts of the film seem a romanticized rendering of Francis as a "hippy flower child," under-emphasizing really key aspects of his life, e.g., his brave ministry with the lepers, his radical poverty, and his rapturously ecstatic contemplative prayer life—which occupied him most hours of most days each year.