

**Praises of St. Francis – Bernard of Besse**  
**St Francis of Assisi – The Prophet Vol 3**  
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Chapter VII

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this, they would progress in virtue beyond their expectations. The deeds of this man and graces done for him demand time.

<sup>131</sup>The following theme now concerns a vocation. But it has been proved that this religion, accepted by God, to which He calls people by means of a special sign, and which He first founded on perfect men as though on *holy mountains*. He adorned with most illustrious people as though with polished stones. Bishops, abbots, archdeacons, and established Masters of Theology entered the Order. So too did princes, nobles, and innumerable others who were noted for their dignity, their nobility, and their knowledge. They were the flower of nobility and learning. If an example is needed, we can omit all others and take Brother Alexander who is remembered to have been the greatest cleric or theologian in the world at that time.<sup>a</sup> There was also Lord John, a soldier valiant in arms, a king and an emperor. He became a brother when he was emperor, in order that the Lord might fulfill the prophesy in Francis: *I will go before you and humble the great men of the earth.*<sup>b</sup>

<sup>134</sup>Who could count the number of brothers of the Order, who were approved and celebrated Doctors of Theology? We should not be silent in our praise for Christ who exalted the humble and wonderfully saw to it that just as a soldier of great dignity and goodness was found in the Order of Minors, so too there was found a very great Master of Philosophy and Theology who was also a great preacher. He was Brother John de La Rochelle who was renowned for his reverence for God, for his knowledge, and for his discernment.<sup>c</sup> He possessed such talent that he added to the subtlety of his teachers and handed down the art and the excellent ways of preaching, and of lecturing in the Faculty of Theology. Both he and Brother Alexander were the authors of formal and useful writings.

<sup>138</sup>After him there came the venerable Father, Brother Odo Rigaldi, who was illustrious in birth but more so in character.<sup>d</sup> He was a Master of Theology, Archbishop of Rouen, and a most famous

a. Alexander of Hales (1185-1245), born in Hales Owen, Shropshire, England, studied in Paris, and became master of theology in 1210 and later regent master. He entered the Order in 1231 and, at Paris, taught Brothers John de La Rochelle, Odo Rigaldi, and Bonaventura of Sagnonegio. Known as the *Doctor irrefragabilis* [The Irrefutable Doctor] and the *Doctor doctorum* [The Doctor of Doctors], he died on August 25, 1245.

b. A reference to Jean de Brienne, 1 cf. supra 55 a, 55-7.

c. John de La Rochelle (c. 1190) is first listed among the friars and masters of theology in Paris. He is noted for his close association with Alexander of Hales and contributed to his *Summa theologica*. cf. Alexander of Hales, *Summa theologica* (Ad Claras Aquas, Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1948). He died in Paris in 1245.

d. Odo Rigaldus (+1275) entered the Order in 1236, studied at the University of Paris between 1240-41, and collaborated on the *Exposition of the Rule of the Four Masters*. He was consecrated Archbishop of Rouen in 1248, a post he held until his death on July 2, 1275.

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preacher. He was urged to become a member of the Curia and, just as he was illustrious for his life and teaching before in the Order, so now he was so excellent in guidance that he was considered a model for prelates.

<sup>140</sup>The Second Order founded by blessed Francis is that of virgins and continent married women, whose proposal is to serve God in the enclosure, in perpetual silence, and in mortifying the flesh.<sup>a</sup> The first member of this Order was the blessed Clare, a most devout disciple of blessed Francis. Seeing them living in a most holy way according to his teaching under the profession of the most exalted poverty, he promised her and the other women professing poverty in a similar way of life his counsel and assistance and that of the other brothers. Blessed Clare and her monastery have always observed this same proposal of poverty up to the present day.

<sup>144</sup>The Third Order is of the Brothers and Sisters of Penance, shared by clerics, laity, virgins, widows, and married couples. Their purpose is to live uprightly in their own homes, to devote their attention to works of piety, and to flee the world's allurements.<sup>b</sup> Therefore, you might see among them nobles, and even knights, and other people great in the world's estimation, dressed in proper cloaks of black fur,<sup>c</sup> humble in both their clothing and mounts, so modestly associating with the indigent, that you would not doubt they are truly God-fearing. From the beginning a brother was assigned to them as a minister, but now, in each region, they are released to their ministers, but who, as confreres begotten by the same father, are still encouraged by the brothers with counsel and assistance.<sup>d</sup>

a. Bernard provides an insight into the *propositum* [purpose] of the Second Order, officially called "the Order of Saint Clare" in a rule given to these women by Pope Urban IV in 1263. [For *propositum*, cf. FA:ED (189 d)]. Their life of serving God, in Bernard's terms, is "in sermo Godi sub clausura perpetuo in silentio et carnis maceratione [in the enclosure, perpetual silence, and starving the flesh]."<sup>140</sup> While *sub clausura* [under the enclosure] appears in the *Rule* of Urban, the other phrases do not and seem to be expressions of the author alone.

b. As with the Second Order, Bernard now identifies the *propositum* of the Third Order, now known as the Secular Franciscan Order: *in domibus propriis honeste vivere, operibus pietatis intendere, pompam saeculi fugere* [in their own homes, to live honorably, to concentrate on works of piety, and to flee the world's allurements].

c. A reference to Nicholas IV, *Supra mortem* (1289), Chapter III: "The brothers may also have cloaks or furled coats without an open neck, either sewed or uncut, or at least laced up as decent people should, and the sleeves should be clothed. The sisters should wear a mantle and a tunic made from the same common cloth, or they should at least wear a mantle with a black or white skirt or petticoat, or an ample gown of hemp or linen, sewn without any pleats."

d. *Ibid.*, Chapter 15: "Let each member devoutly undertake and faithfully execute the office of minister or any other duty mentioned in this document, when such might be laid upon them." Further information on the background of this expression of government can be found in Raffaele Fazzelli, *St. Francis and the Third Order* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1989), 149; Octavian Schmekel, "The Third Order in the Biographies of St. Francis," in *Greyfriars Review* 6 (1992): 94-6 (hereafter GR).

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<sup>147</sup>In composing the rules or forms of living for their Order, Lord Pope Gregory of holy memory, at that time in a lesser capacity, united with blessed Francis through an intimate closeness, devoutly supplied what the holy man lacked in knowledgeable judgment.<sup>a</sup> But not content with just these Orders, the saint was busy giving to every class of people a way of penance and salvation. One time when a parish priest told him that he wanted to be his brother while still retaining the church, after he gave him a way of living and acting, he is said to have told him that each year, when the income of the church had been collected, he should give for God whatever was left over from the preceding year.

<sup>150</sup>Thus the Lord made his servant, Francis, grow into a great nation, thus He gave him the blessing of all nations.

D:30:1; 50:44:21

**LEGEND OF THE THREE COMPANIONS**  
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*Chapter III*

HOW THE LORD VISITED FRANCIS'S HEART FOR THE FIRST TIME  
 FILLING IT WITH MARVELOUS TENDERNESS THAT GAVE HIM STRENGTH  
 TO BEGIN TO PROGRESS SPIRITUALLY IN LOOKING DOWN ON HIMSELF  
 AND ALL VANITIES,  
 IN PRAYER, ALMSGIVING, AND POVERTY

<sup>7</sup>A few days after he returned to Assisi, one evening his friends chose him to be in charge so that, according to his whim, he would pay their expenses. He made arrangements for a sumptuous banquet, as he had done so often in the past.

When they left the house bloated, his friends walked ahead of him, singing throughout the city. Holding in his hand the scepter of

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his office as their leader, he fell slightly behind them.<sup>a</sup> He was not singing, but was deeply preoccupied. Suddenly he was visited by the Lord who filled his heart with so much tenderness that he was unable to speak or move. He could only feel and hear this marvelous tenderness; it left him so estranged from any sensation that, as he himself said later, even if he had been completely cut to pieces, he would not have been able to move.

When his companions glanced back and saw him so removed from them, they went back surprised at seeing him already *changed into another man*. They asked him: "What were you thinking about that you did not follow us? Were you perhaps thinking about taking a wife?"

He answered in an unequivocal voice: "You are right! I was thinking about taking a wife more noble, wealthier, and more beautiful than you have ever seen." *They laughed at him*. For he said this not of his own accord, but because he was inspired by God. In fact, the bride was the true religion that he later embraced, a bride more noble, richer and more beautiful because of her poverty.<sup>b</sup>

<sup>8</sup>From that very hour he began to consider himself of little value and to despise those things which he had previously held in love. Since he was not entirely detached from worldly vanities, this change was not yet perfect. He retired for a short time from the tumult and business of the world and was anxious to keep Jesus Christ in his inmost self, and, *after selling all he had*, he desired to buy the *pearl*, concealing it from the eyes of mockers. Often, almost daily, he withdrew secretly to pray. He was inclined to do so by that same tenderness he had tasted earlier, which now visited him ever more frequently, driving him to prayer in the piazza and in other public places.

Although he had been for some time a benefactor of the poor, he proposed *in his heart*, from then on, never to deny alms to any poor person begging from him for God's sake, but rather to give more willingly and abundantly than usual. When away from home, if he could, he always gave money to any poor person requesting alms. If he had no money, he gave him his hat or belt, making sure never to send him away empty-handed. If he lacked even these things, he would go to a deserted place, take off his shirt, and give it to the poor

a. Fortini believes that this is a reference to the celebration of the second patron of Assisi, Saint Victorinus, for which the *Compagnia di San Vittorino*, or the *Compagnia del Bastone*, was organized. Its leader carried a large staff to show his office and, on the day of his election, his companions swore him allegiance by touching his staff. Cf. Fortini, *Francis*, 132.

b. Although this is a reference to 1C 7, L3C underscores the identity of the noble, richer bride as being such because of poverty.

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man, begging him to take it for the love of God. He would even purchase furnishings for adorning churches, and would secretly send them to poor priests.

<sup>9</sup>When his father was away and he was at home alone with his mother, although only two of them took their meals, he filled the table with loaves of bread as if he were preparing for an entire family. When his mother asked why he put so much food on the table, he answered that it would be *given as alms* for the poor, since he had resolved to give to anyone begging alms for God's sake. Because his mother loved him more than the other children, she tolerated him in such matters, noticing the things he did and admiring in his heart many more.

For he was so accustomed to setting his heart on joining his companions when they called him, and was so captivated by their company, that he would frequently leave the table even if he had eaten only a little. In this way he would upset his parents by his thoughtless flight. Now, however, his whole heart was intent on seeing the poor, listening to them, and giving them alms.

<sup>10</sup>He was so changed by divine grace that, although he was still in secular attire, he yearned to be in another city where, as someone unknown, he would take off his own clothes and, in exchange, put on the rags of a poor man. And he would try begging alms for the love of God.

At this time he happened to go to Rome on pilgrimage. As he was entering the church of Saint Peter,<sup>a</sup> he noticed the meager offerings made by some, and said to himself: "Since the Prince of the Apostles should be greatly honored, why do they make such meager offerings in the church where his body rests?" With great enthusiasm, he took a handful of coins from his money pouch, and threw them through a grating of the altar, making such a loud noise that all the bystanders were astonished at his generosity.

As he was leaving and passed the doors of the church, where there were many poor people begging alms, he secretly exchanged clothes with one of those poor people and put them on. Standing on the steps of the church with the other poor, he begged for alms in French, because he would speak French spontaneously, although he did not do so correctly.<sup>b</sup>

a. Pilgrimages to the tomb of Saint Peter in Rome were important events in the Middle Ages. The first recorded pilgrimage was that of Aliberius, Bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia in 216. The church of Saint Peter described in the text was the basilica begun by Constantine c. 324 and completed by his son, Constantius, c. 354. Cf. Jonathan Sumption, *Pilgrimage: An Image of Medieval Religion*, (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975), 217-231.

b. For Francis's use of French, see FA:ED I 194b.

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After taking off the beggar's clothes and putting on his own, he returned to Assisi, and began to pray that the Lord would direct his way. He did not share his secret with anyone; nor did he seek counsel from anyone, except from God alone, and, periodically, from the bishop of Assisi. For at that time no one possessed the real poverty that he desired more than anything else in this world, in which he yearned to live and die.

**BENEDICT XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* Par 36-37**

36. When we consider the immensity of others' needs, we can, on the one hand, be driven towards an ideology that would aim at doing what God's governance of the world apparently cannot: fully resolving every problem. Or we can be tempted to give in to inertia, since it would seem that in any

event nothing can be accomplished. At such times, a living relationship with Christ is decisive if we are to keep on the right path, without falling into an arrogant contempt for man, something not only unconstructive but actually destructive, or surrendering to a resignation which would prevent us from being guided by love in the service of others. Prayer, as a means of drawing ever new strength from Christ, is concretely and urgently needed. People who pray are not wasting their time, even though the situation appears desperate and seems to call for action alone. Piety does not undermine the struggle against the poverty of our neighbours, however extreme. In the example of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta we have a clear illustration of the fact that time devoted to God in prayer not only does not detract from effective and loving service to our neighbour but is in fact the inexhaustible source of that service. In her letter for Lent 1996, Blessed Teresa wrote to her lay co-workers: "We need this deep connection with God in our daily life. How can we obtain it? By prayer".

37. It is time to reaffirm the importance of prayer in the face of the activism and the growing secularism of many Christians engaged in charitable work. Clearly, the Christian who prays does not claim to be able to change God's plans or correct what he has foreseen. Rather, he seeks an encounter with the Father of Jesus Christ, asking God to be present with the consolation of the Spirit to him and his work. A personal relationship with God and an abandonment to his will can prevent man from being demeaned and save him from falling prey to the teaching of fanaticism and terrorism. An authentically religious attitude prevents man from presuming to judge God, accusing him of allowing poverty and failing to have compassion for his creatures. When people claim to build a case against God in defence of man, on whom can they depend when human activity proves powerless?

### Scripture Reflection

### Acts 15:3-23

<sup>3</sup>They were sent on their journey by the church, and passed through Phoenicia and Samaria telling of the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers.

<sup>4</sup>When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church, as well as by the apostles and the presbyters, and they reported what God had done with them.

<sup>5</sup>But some from the party of the Pharisees who had become believers stood up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and direct them to observe the Mosaic law."

<sup>6</sup>The apostles and the presbyters met together to see about this matter.

<sup>7</sup>After much debate had taken place, Peter got up and said to them, "My brothers, you are well aware that from early days God made his choice among you that through my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe.

<sup>8</sup>And God, who knows the heart, bore witness by granting them the holy Spirit just as he did us.

<sup>9</sup>He made no distinction between us and them, for by faith he purified their hearts.

<sup>10</sup>Why, then, are you now putting God to the test by placing on the shoulders of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear?

<sup>11</sup>On the contrary, we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they."<sup>\*</sup>

<sup>12</sup>The whole assembly fell silent, and they listened while Paul and Barnabas described the signs and wonders God had worked among the Gentiles through them.

<sup>13</sup>After they had fallen silent, James responded, "My brothers, listen to me.

<sup>14</sup>Symeon has described how God first concerned himself with acquiring from among the Gentiles a people for his name.

<sup>15</sup>The words of the prophets agree with this, as is written:

<sup>16</sup>After this I shall return and rebuild the fallen hut of David; from its ruins I shall rebuild it and raise it up again,

<sup>17</sup>so that the rest of humanity may seek out the Lord, even all the Gentiles on whom my name is invoked. Thus says the Lord who accomplishes these things,

<sup>18</sup>known from of old.'

<sup>19</sup>It is my judgment, therefore, that we ought to stop troubling the Gentiles who turn to God,  
<sup>20</sup>but tell them by letter to avoid pollution from idols, unlawful marriage, the meat of strangled animals, and blood.

<sup>21</sup>For Moses, for generations now, has had those who proclaim him in every town, as he has been read in the synagogues every sabbath."

<sup>22</sup>Then the apostles and presbyters, in agreement with the whole church, decided to choose representatives and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. The ones chosen were Judas, who was called Barsabbas, and Silas, leaders among the brothers.

<sup>23</sup>This is the letter delivered by them: "The apostles and the presbyters, your brothers, to the brothers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia of Gentile origin: greetings.