

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults  
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### CREATED IN GOD'S IMAGE

*God willed the diversity of his creatures and their own particular goodness, their interdependence, and their order. He destined all material creatures for the good of the human race. Man, and through him all creation, is destined for the glory of God.*  
—CCC, no. 353

“God created man in his image . . . male and female he created them” (Gn 1:27). In figurative and symbolic language, Scripture describes God’s creating the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, and placing them in Paradise. They were created in friendship with God and in harmony with creation. The Church teaches that theirs was a state of original holiness and justice, with no suffering or death (cf. CCC, no. 376; GS, no. 18).

The first man and woman were qualitatively different from and superior to all other living creatures on earth. They were uniquely made in the image of God, as are all human beings, their descendants. What does this mean? God’s image is not a static picture stamped on our souls. God’s image is a dynamic source of inner spiritual energy drawing our minds and hearts toward truth and love, and to God himself, the source of all truth and love.

To be made in the image of God includes specific qualities. Each of us is capable of self-knowledge and of entering into communion with other persons through self-giving. These qualities—and the shared heritage of our first parents—also form a basis for a bond of unity among all human beings. To be made in God’s image also unites human beings as God’s stewards in the care of the earth and of all God’s other creatures.

Another important aspect of our creation is that God has made us a unity of body and soul. The human soul is not only the source of physical life for our bodies but is also

the core of our spiritual powers of knowing and loving. While our bodies come into being through physical processes, our souls are all created directly by God.

God created man and woman, equal to each other as persons and in dignity. Each is completely human and is meant to complement the other in a communion of persons, seen most evidently in marriage.

Finally, we need to recognize that God created the first humans in a state of original holiness and justice, so that we are able to live in harmony with his plan. By his gracious will, he enabled us to know and love him, thus calling us to share his life. Our first parents also had free will and thus could be tempted by created things to turn away from the Creator.

*Francis: ‘Vivere Sine Proprio’*  
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(see next page)

### FRANCIS: 'VIVERE SINE PROPRIO'

In his *Testament* Francis insists that the Lord revealed to him the 'form of life' he was to live.<sup>4</sup> This way of living is fundamentally 'to observe the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ', as he wrote at the beginning of the Rule. And that included living 'without anything of one's own' (*vivere sine proprio*).<sup>5</sup>

The phrase occurs frequently in Francis' writings, especially in his *Admonitions*, which can be read as a commentary on this expression. These are mostly brief sayings, like those of the Desert Fathers of early Christian monasticism. They were most likely written by others who heard them when Francis addressed gatherings of his brothers (the chapters held each year). The various ways in which living *sine proprio* recurs in these sayings echo words of Francis from his other writings.

What does this 'non-possessing' life mean? Primarily, it means living as a disciple, following the teaching of the Beatitudes. Those who live without anything of their own are 'the poor in spirit; theirs is the Kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 5:3).<sup>6</sup> They live 'according to the Spirit'. The opposite of this way of living is 'to appropriate', to claim things as one's own. And those who live in this way live 'according to the flesh'.

This attitude of radical non-possessing touches every part of human life, from our own will to the doing of good works. We would 'repeat the sin of our first parents' if we seek to 'appropriate' our own will.<sup>7</sup> None of the brothers is to 'appropriate' a position of authority.<sup>8</sup> Those who study sacred Scripture are not to use their knowledge to accumulate riches.<sup>9</sup> No brother is to appropriate anger or disturbances<sup>10</sup> or scandal for wrongs done.<sup>11</sup>

The *Admonitions* also give us Francis' reasons for refusing to appropriate anything: it is the 'Most High' who 'says and does' every good thing.<sup>12</sup> All that is good belongs to the Most High alone, and to appropriate to ourselves anything is 'blasphemy', attributing to ourselves what belongs to God. Put in different terms, for Francis, everything was a gift. To pretend

that anything that we have or are belongs to us as 'property' is a kind of *lèse majesté*, an affront to God who is 'All Good' and gives 'every good thing'.

The 'All Good' God, Father, Son and Spirit, far from holding on jealously to all good gifts, gives generously, even divine life itself. Francis sees this good God when he looks at Jesus. Quoting John's Gospel (14:6-9) at the beginning of the *Admonitions*, he recalls that 'the Lord Jesus' said to Philip, 'whoever sees me sees my Father'. Using the Eucharist as his point of reference, Francis declares that 'every day' this same Jesus 'descends' from the Father into the hands of the priest, and comes to us 'in humble appearance', as he did when he 'descended from the royal throne' into the 'womb of the Virgin'.<sup>13</sup>

In the incarnation, as in the Eucharist, Francis sees 'the Lord Jesus Christ' (and therefore the 'most holy Father'). Instead of holding onto high status and power ('the royal throne') this Lord chooses to 'descend', to be among people 'in humble appearance'. For Francis, poverty begins with the example of God, seen in Jesus. Two texts of St Paul express this 'poverty of God' as Francis perceived it, one from the Letter to the Philippians, another from the Second Letter to the Corinthians:

Have this mind among you, which was in Christ Jesus who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, and being born in human likeness. And being found in human form he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven, on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11)

... our Lord Jesus Christ, though he was rich, for your

sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. (2 Corinthians 8:9)

The poverty of Francis is a response to Christ Jesus, who did not 'grasp' or cling to divine status, but let go of it to be among humans as a servant. This Jesus who was born in lowly status, lived as a poor man and died on the cross, the ultimate 'letting go'. Since he is 'the Way, the Truth, and the Life' (John 14:6), as Francis states,<sup>14</sup> the way into God is the way of relinquishment, without grasping or appropriating anything.

Without this christological understanding, poverty becomes a penitential practice in its own right, simply a means of ascetical discipline or moral self-improvement. And to understand poverty primarily as a matter of having fewer of these, or less of that, counting and measuring with the eye of a spiritual accountant, makes a caricature out of Francis' vision.

In the Rule of the Lesser Brothers, Chapter Six expresses this vision:

The brothers shall claim nothing as their own: neither a house, nor a place, nor anything. As pilgrims and strangers [1 Peter 2:1] in this world, serving the Lord in poverty and humility, let them confidently seek alms. Nor should they be ashamed, because the Lord made himself poor [cf. 2 Corinthians 8:9] for us in this world. My dearest brothers, this is the excellency of the most high poverty, that makes you heirs and kings of the kingdom of heaven, making you poor in things but rich in virtues. Let this be your portion that leads you to the land of the living [Psalm 141:6]. Dearest brothers, totally joined to this poverty, do not wish to have anything else under heaven, forever, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>15</sup>

The promise of this 'most high poverty' is life, abundance, the kingdom of heaven, life with Christ. Francis, the former merchant, sold all he had to possess this treasure; and in the Rule required all those joining the brothers to do the same. Those who want to accept 'this life' should be sent to the

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ministers (superiors), who shall tell them 'the word of the Holy Gospel', namely that they 'go and sell all they have and strive to give it to the poor'.<sup>16</sup> The word of the gospel here is from Matthew 19:21, where the young man with many possessions hears the words of Jesus: 'If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me.'<sup>17</sup>

Francis saw the 'life according to the Holy Gospel' as necessarily including this transaction, selling and giving, as a concrete participation in the dynamic of Christ 'who was rich and made himself poor' for humanity. Once again, the letting go is not for its own sake, as a moral virtue; it is a letting go for the sake of the poor, modelled on the generous self-giving of God seen in the birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus.

## Fifth Lesson

### *The Minor Legend of St. Francis – St Bonaventure Francis of Assisi – The Founder – Vol II Page 691*

#### Fifth Lesson

Strengthened then by grace from on high and by the authority of the Supreme Pontiff, Francis with great confidence took the road to the Spoleto valley. He wanted to teach by word and carry out by deed the truth of the evangelical perfection which he had conceived in his mind and solemnly vowed to profess. When the question was raised with his companions whether they should live among the people or go off to solitary places, he sought the pleasure of the divine will by the fervor of prayer.<sup>4</sup> Enlightened by a revelation from heaven, he realized that he was sent by the Lord to win for Christ souls which the devil was trying to snatch away. Discerning, therefore, he chose to live for everyone rather than for himself alone, he went to an abandoned hut near Assisi to live with his brothers according to the norm of holy poverty in every hardship of religious life and preach the word of God to the people whenever and wherever possible. Having been made a herald of the Gospel, he went about the cities and towns *proclaiming the kingdom of God not in such words taught by human wisdom, but in the power of the Spirit with the Lord directing him by revelations as he spoke and confirming the preaching by the signs that followed.*

## Scripture Reflection

## Matthew 21:28-32

### The Parable of the Two Sons.

<sup>28</sup>"What is your opinion? A man had two sons. He came to the first and said, 'Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.'

<sup>29</sup>He said in reply, 'I will not,' but afterwards he changed his mind and went.

<sup>30</sup>The man came to the other son and gave the same order. He said in reply, 'Yes, sir,' but did not go.

<sup>31</sup>Which of the two did his father's will?" They answered, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you.

<sup>32</sup>When John came to you in the way of righteousness, you did not believe him; but tax collectors and prostitutes did. Yet even when you saw that, you did not later change your minds and believe him.