

Earlier Exhortation to the Brothers & Sisters of Penance

Francis of Assisi - The Saint – Vol I pp. 41-44

The earliest manuscript of this writing, located in the Guarnacci Library in the Italian city of Volterra, introduces it with these words: "These are words of life and salvation. Whoever reads and follows them will find life and draw from the Lord salvation." While Kajetan Esser entitled it The First Version of the Letter to the Faithful, it has been more correctly seen as an exhortation given to those first penitents who came to Francis desiring to share in his Gospel way of life. Since 1976, when Kajetan Esser brought the text into prominence, it has served as the Prologue to the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order.

In the Name of the Lord!

[Chapter One] Those Who Do Penance

¹All those who love the Lord *with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind, with their whole strength* [Mk12:30](#) and love their neighbors as themselves, [Mt 22:39](#) ²who hate their bodies with their vices and sins, ³who receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴and who produce worthy fruits of penance. ⁵O how happy and blessed are these men and women while they do such things and persevere in doing them, [Mt 22:39](#) ⁶because *the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon them* [Is 11:2](#) and *make Its home and dwelling place among them*, [Jn 14:23](#) ⁷and they are children of the heavenly Father Whose works they do, [Mt 5:45](#) and they are spouses, brothers, and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ. [Mt 12:50](#)

⁸We are spouses when the faithful soul is joined by the Holy Spirit to our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹We are brothers to Him when we do *the will of the Father who is in heaven*. [Mt 12:50](#) ¹⁰We are mothers when we carry Him in our heart and body through a divine love and a pure and sincere conscience and give birth to Him through a holy activity

which must shine as an example before others. [Mt 5:16](#)

¹¹O how glorious it is to have a holy and great Father in heaven!

¹²O how holy, consoling to have such a beautiful and wonderful Spouse! ¹³O how holy and how loving, gratifying, humbling, peace-giving, sweet, worthy of love, and, above all things, desirable: to have such a Brother and such a Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who laid down His life for His sheep and prayed to His Father, saying:

¹⁴*Holy Father, in your name, save those whom you have given me in the world; they were yours and you gave them to me.* [Jn 17:11](#) [Jn 17:6](#) ¹⁵*The words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they accepted them and have believed in truth that I have come from you and they have known that you have sent me.*

¹⁶*I pray for them and not for the world.* [Jn 17:9](#) ¹⁷*Bless and sanctify them; Jn 17:17 I sanctify myself for them.* [Jn 17:19](#) ¹⁸*I pray not only for them, but for those who will believe in me through their word* [Jn 17:20](#) [Jn 17:23](#) *that they might be sanctified in being one* [Jn 17:11](#) *as we are.*

¹⁹*I wish, Father, that where I am, they also may be with me that they may see my glory in your kingdom.* [Jn 17:24](#) [Mt 20:21](#) Amen.

[Chapter Two]

Those Who Do Not Do Penance

¹All those men and women who are not living in penance, ²who do not receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, ³who practice vice and sin and walk after the evil concupiscence and the evil desires of their flesh, ⁴who do not observe what they have promised to the Lord, ⁵and who in their body serve the world through the desires of the flesh, the concerns of the world and the cares of this life: ⁶They are held captive by the devil, whose children they are, and whose works they do. ⁷They are blind because they do not see the true light, our Lord Jesus Christ. [Jn 8:41](#) ⁸They do not possess spiritual wisdom because they do

not have the Son of God, the true wisdom of the Father. ⁹It is said of them: *Their wisdom has been swallowed up* [Ps 107:27 \[Vulgate, Ps 106:27\]](#) and *Cursed are those who turn away from your commands.* [Ps 118:21 \[Vulgate, Ps 117:21\]](#) ¹⁰They see and acknowledge, know and do evil, and knowingly lose their souls.

so body and soul perish in this brief world and they will go to hell where they will be tortured forever.

¹⁹In the love which is God we beg all those whom these words reach to receive those fragrant words of our Lord Jesus Christ written above with divine love and kindness. ²⁰And let whoever does not know how to read have them read to them frequently. ²¹Because they are spirit and life, [Jn 6:63](#) they should preserve them together with a holy activity to the end.

²²And whoever has not done these things will be held accountable *before the tribunal of* [Rm 14:10](#) our Lord Jesus Christ *on the day of judgment.* [Mt 12:36](#)

¹¹See, you blind ones, deceived by your enemies: the flesh, ^b the world, and the devil, because it is sweet for the body to sin and it is bitter to serve God, ¹²for every vice and sin flow and *proceed from the human heart* [Mt 15:19](#) as the Lord says in the Gospel. ¹³And you have nothing in this world or in that to come. ¹⁴And you think that you will possess this world's vanities for a long time, but you are deceived because a day and an hour will come of which you give no thought, which you do not know, and of which you are unaware when the body becomes weak, death approaches, and it dies a bitter death. ¹⁵And no matter where, when, or how a person dies in the guilt of sin without penance and satisfaction, if he can perform an act of satisfaction and does not do so, the devil snatches his soul from its body with such anguish and distress that no one can know [what it is like] except the one receiving it.c

¹⁶And every talent, ability, *knowledge, and wisdom* [2Chr 1:12](#) they think they have will be taken away from them. [Lk 8:18](#) ¹⁷And they leave their wealth to their relatives and

friends who take and divide it and afterwards say: "May his soul be cursed because he could have given us more and acquired more than what he distributed to us." ¹⁸Worms eat his body and so body and ...

Those "who were with him," the brothers who write in The Assisi Compilations, tell of a number of documents or "testaments" which Francis dictated as his health deteriorated and death drew near: that of Siena in which he outlined the basic principles of his Gospel vision, that concerning the Portiuncula in which he asked his brothers to care for this special symbol of their life, and another in which he provided guidelines for building new dwellings. This document has come to be known as "The Testament," has remained a primary expression of Francis' profound wisdom and vision. While popular tradition maintains that it was written at the Portiuncula while he was dying, the document's different styles of writing suggest that it was written at different moments of those final days and was prompted by different questions swirling around his simple Gospel vision.^[1] The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, thus to begin doing penance in this way: for when I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I showed mercy to them. And when I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body. And afterwards I delayed a little and left the world. And the Lord gave me such faith in churches that I would pray with simplicity in this way and say: "We adore You, Lord Jesus Christ, in all Your churches throughout the whole world and we bless You because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world." Afterwards the Lord gave me, and gives me still, such faith in priests who live according to the rite of the holy Roman Church because of their orders that, were they to persecute me, I would still want to have recourse to them. And if I had as

much wisdom as Solomon and found impoverished priests of this world, I would not preach in their parishes against their will. And I desire to respect, love and honor them and all others as my lords. And I do not want to consider any sin in them because I discern the Son of God in them and they are my lords. And I act in this way because, in this world, I see nothing corporally of the most high Son of God except His most holy Body and Blood which they receive and they alone administer to others. I want to have these most holy mysteries honored and venerated above all things and I want to reserve them in precious places. Wherever I find our Lord's most holy names and written words in unbecoming places, I want to gather them up and I beg that they be gathered up and placed in a becoming place. And we must honor all theologians and those who minister the most holy divine words and respect them as those who minister to us spirit and life. And after the Lord gave me some brothers, no one showed me what I had to do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel. And I had this written down simply and in a few words and the Lord Pope confirmed it for me. And those who came to receive life gave whatever they had to the poor and were content with one tunic, patched inside and out, with a cord and short trousers. We desired nothing more. We clerical [brothers] said the Office as other clerics did; the lay brothers said the Our Father; and we quite willingly remained in churches. And we were simple and subject to all. And I worked with my hands, and I still desire to work; and I earnestly desire all brothers to give themselves to honest work. Let those who do not know how to work learn, not from desire to receive wages, but for example and to avoid idleness. And when we are not paid for our work, let us have recourse to the table of the Lord, begging alms from door to door. The Lord revealed a greeting to me that we should say: "May

the Lord give you peace." Let the brothers be careful not to receive in any way churches or poor dwellings or anything else built for them unless they are according to the holy poverty we have promised in the Rule. As pilgrims and strangers, let them always be guests there.

I strictly command all the brothers through obedience, wherever they may be, not to dare to ask any letter from the Roman Curia, either personally or through an intermediary, whether for a church or another place or under the pretext of preaching or the persecution of their bodies. But, wherever they have not been received, let them flee into another country to do penance with the blessing of God. And I firmly wish to obey the general minister of this fraternity and the other guardian whom it pleases him to give me. And I so wish to be a captive in his hands that I cannot go anywhere or do anything beyond obedience and his will, for he is my master. And although I may be simple and infirm, I nevertheless want to have a cleric always with me who will celebrate the Office for me as it is prescribed in the Rule. And let all the brothers be bound to obey their guardians and to recite the Office according to the Rule. And if some might have been found who are not reciting the Office according to the Rule, and want to change it in some way, or who are not Catholics, let all the brothers, wherever they may have found one of them, be bound through obedience to bring him before the custodian of that place nearest to where they found him. And let the custodian be strictly bound through obedience to keep him securely day and night as a man in chains, so that he cannot be taken from his hands until he can personally deliver him into the hands of his minister. And the minister be bound through obedience to send him with such brothers who would guard him as a prisoner until they deliver him to the Lord of Ostia, who is the Lord, the Protector and the Corrector of this fraternity. And the brothers may not say:

“This is another rule.” Because this is a remembrance, admonition, exhortation, and my testament, which I, little brother Francis, make for you, my blessed brothers, that we might observe the Rule we have promised in a more Catholic way. And let the general minister and all the other ministers and custodians be bound through obedience not to add to or take away from these words. And let them always have this writing with them together with the Rule. And in all the chapters which they hold, when they read the Rule, let them also read these words. And I strictly command all my cleric and lay brothers, through obedience, not to place any gloss upon the Rule or upon these words saying: “They should be understood in this way.” But as the Lord has given me to speak and write the Rule and these words simply and purely, may you understand them simply and without gloss and observe them with a holy activity until the end. And whoever observes these things, let him be blessed in heaven with the blessings of the Most High Father, and on earth with the blessing of His Beloved Son with the Most Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, and all the powers of heaven and with all the saints. And, as far as I can, I, little brother Francis, your servant, confirm for you, both within and without, this most holy blessing.

The Latter Rule (of the First Order 1223)

Francis of Assisi - The Saint – Vol I - pp. 99-106

The Earlier Rule of Francis's brothers had its origins in the statement presented to and approved by Pope Innocent III in 1209/10. It grew as the experiences and structures of the brothers became more complex. The Rule which received its final redaction at the Chapter of 1221, inspirational as it may have been, received a re-working that its vision would be more succinct and forthright. This later description of the Gospel life became a papal document on November 29, 1223,

when Pope Honorius III placed the papal seal on it. Since that time it has been the foundational document forming and inspiring the Gospel vision of Franciscans of the First Order (Conventual, Capuchin Friars as well as those of the Leonine Union), of the Sisters of Saint Clare whose Rule incorporates many of its passages, and of the Religious and Secular Third Order. While some of the language of this document seems foreign to that of Francis himself and thus suggests the presence of canonists or other religious, e.g. the Cistercians, who helped with its composition, there is no doubt that it expresses his Gospel vision.

Bull of Pope Honorius III

¹Honorius,
Bishop, Servant of the servants of God,
to His Beloved Sons,
Brother Francis and the other brothers
of the Order of the Lesser Brothers,
Health and Apostolic Benediction.

²The Apostolic See is accustomed to grant the pious requests and favorably to accede to the laudable desires of its petitioners. Therefore, beloved sons in the Lord, attentive to your pious prayers, ³We confirm with Our Apostolic Authority, and by these words ratify, the Rule of your Order, herein outlined and approved by Our predecessor, Pope Innocent of happy memory, ⁴which is as follows:

[Chapter I]

In the Name of the Lord!
The Life of the Lesser Brothers Begins

¹The Rule and Life of the Lesser Brothers is this: to observe the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ by living in obedience, without anything of one's own, and in chastity.

²Brother Francis promises obedience and reverence to our Lord Pope Honorius and his successors canonically elected and to the Roman Church. ³Let the other brothers be bound to obey Brother Francis and his successors.

[Chapter II]

Those Who Wish to Adopt This Life,
and How They Should Be Received

¹If there are any who wish to accept this life and come to our brothers, let them send them to their provincial ministers, to whom alone and not to others is permission granted to receive the brothers. ²Let the ministers examine them carefully concerning the Catholic faith and the sacraments of the Church. ³If they believe all these things, will faithfully profess them, and steadfastly observe them to the end; ⁴and if they have no wives, or if they have wives who have already taken a vow of continence and are of such an age that suspicion cannot be raised about them, and who have already entered a monastery or have given their husbands permission by the authority of the bishop of the diocese, ⁵let the ministers speak to them the words of the holy Gospel that they go and sell all they have and take care to give it to the poor. [Mt 19:21](#) [Mk 10:21](#) [Lk 18:22](#) ⁶If they cannot do this, their good will may suffice. ⁷Let the brothers and the minister be careful not to interfere with their temporal goods that they may dispose of their belongings as the Lord inspires them. ⁸If, however, counsel is sought, the minister may send them to some God-fearing persons according to whose advice their goods may be distributed to the poor.

⁹Then they may be given the clothes of probation, namely, two tunics without a hood, a cord, short trousers, and a little cape reaching to the cord, ¹⁰unless, at times, it seems good to these same ministers, before God, to act otherwise. ¹¹When the year of probation has come to an end, they may be received to obedience promising always to observe this rule and life. ¹²On no account shall it be lawful for them to leave this Order, according to the decree of our Lord the Pope, ¹³for, according to the Gospel: *no one who puts a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God.* [Lk 9:62](#)

¹⁴Those who have already promised obedience may have one tunic with a hood and another, if they wish, without a hood. ¹⁵And those who are compelled by

necessity may wear shoes. ¹⁶Let all the brothers wear poor clothes and they may mend them with pieces of sackcloth or other material with the blessing of God. ¹⁷I admonish and exhort them not to look down upon or judge those whom they see dressed in soft and fine clothes and enjoying the choicest food and drink, but rather let everyone judge and look down upon himself.

[Chapter III]

The Divine Office, Fasting
and How the Brothers Should Go About in
the World

¹Let the clerical [brothers] recite the Divine Office according to the rite of the holy Roman Church excepting the psalter, ²for which reason they may have breviaries. ³The lay [brothers], however, may say twenty-four Our Fathers for Matins, and five for Lauds; seven for each of the Hours of Prime, Terce, Sext, and None, twelve for Vespers, and seven for Compline. ⁴Let them pray for the dead.

⁵Let them fast from the feast of All Saints until the Lord's Nativity. ⁶May those be blessed by the Lord who fast voluntarily during that holy Lent that begins at the Epiphany and lasts during the forty days which our Lord consecrated by His own fast; [Lk 4:2](#) but those who do not wish to keep it will not be obliged. ⁷Let them fast, however, during the other [Lent] until the Lord's Resurrection. ⁸At other times they may not be bound to fast except on Fridays. ⁹During a time of obvious need, however, the brothers may not be bound by corporal fast.

¹⁰I counsel, admonish and exhort my brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ not to quarrel or argue or judge others when they go about in the world; ¹¹but let them be meek, peaceful, modest, gentle, and humble, [2 Tm 2:14](#) speaking courteously to everyone, as is becoming. ¹²They should not ride horseback unless they are compelled by an obvious need or an infirmity. ¹³Into whatever house they enter, let them first say: "Peace be to this house!" [Lk 10:5](#) ¹⁴According

to the holy Gospel, let them eat whatever food is set before them. [Lk 10:8](#)

[Chapter IV]

Let the Brothers Never Receive Money

¹I strictly command all my brothers not to receive coins or money in any form, either personally or through intermediaries. ²Nevertheless, the ministers and custodians alone may take special care through their spiritual friends to provide for the needs of the sick and the clothing of the others according to places, seasons and cold climates, as they judge necessary, ³saving always that, as stated above, they do not receive coins or money.

[Chapter V]

The Manner of Working

¹Those brothers to whom the Lord has given the grace of working may work faithfully and devotedly ²so that, while avoiding idleness, the enemy of the soul, they do not extinguish the Spirit of holy prayer and devotion to which all temporal things must contribute.

³In payment for their work they may receive whatever is necessary for the bodily support of themselves and their brothers, excepting coin or money, ⁴and let them do this humbly as is becoming for servants of God and followers of most holy poverty.

[Chapter VI]

Let the Brothers Not Make Anything Their Own;

Begging Alms, the Sick Brothers

¹Let the brothers not make anything their own, neither house, nor place, nor anything at all. ²As pilgrims and strangers in this world, [1 Pt 2:11](#) serving the Lord in poverty and humility, let them go seeking alms with confidence, ³and they should not be ashamed because, for our sakes, our Lord made Himself poor in this world. [2 Cor 8:9](#) ⁴This is that sublime height of most exalted poverty which has made you, my most beloved brothers, heirs and kings of the Kingdom of Heaven, poor in temporal things but exalted

in virtue. [Jas 2:5](#) ⁵Let this be your portion which leads into the land of the living. [Ps 142:6](#) [Vulgate, [Ps 141:6](#)] ⁶Giving yourselves totally to this, beloved brothers, never seek anything else under heaven for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁷Wherever the brothers may be and meet one another, let them show that they are members of the same family. ⁸Let each one confidently make known his need to the other, for if a mother loves and cares for her son according to the flesh, [1 Thes 2:7](#) how much more diligently must someone love and care for his brother according to the Spirit! ⁹When any brother falls sick, the other brothers must serve him as they would wish to be served themselves. [Mt 7:12](#)

[Chapter VII]

The Penance To Be Imposed on the Brothers Who Sin

¹If any brother, at the instigation of the enemy, sins mortally in regard to those sins concerning which it has been decreed among the brothers to have recourse only to the provincial ministers, let him have recourse as quickly as possible and without delay. ²If these ministers are priests, with a heart full of mercy let them impose on him a penance; but, if the ministers are not priests, let them have it imposed by others who are priests of the Order, as in the sight of God appears to them more expedient. ³They must be careful not to be angry or disturbed at the sin of another, for anger and disturbance impede charity in themselves and in others.

[Chapter VIII]

The Election of the General Minister of This Fraternity and the Chapter of Pentecost

¹Let all the brothers always be bound to have one of the brothers of this Order as general minister and servant of the whole fraternity and let them be strictly bound to obey him. ²When he dies, let the election of his successor be made by the provincial ministers and custodians in the Chapter of Pentecost, at which all the provincial

ministers are bound to assemble in whatever place the general minister may have designated. ³Let them do this once in every three years, or at other longer or shorter intervals, as determined by the aforesaid minister.

⁴If, at any time, it appears to the body of the provincial ministers and custodians that the aforesaid general minister is not qualified for the service and general welfare of the brothers, let the aforesaid brothers, to whom the election is committed, be bound to elect another as custodian in the name of the Lord.

⁵Moreover, after the Chapter of Pentecost, the provincial ministers and custodians may each, if they wish and it seems expedient to them, convoke a Chapter of the brothers in their custodies once in the same year.

[Chapter IX]
Preachers

¹The brothers may not preach in the diocese of any bishop when he has opposed their doing so. ²And let none of the brothers dare to preach in any way to the people unless he has been examined and approved by the general minister of this fraternity and the office of preacher has been conferred upon him.

³Moreover, I admonish and exhort those brothers that when they preach their *language be well-considered and chaste* for the benefit and edification of the people, announcing to them vices and virtues, punishment and glory, with brevity, because our Lord when on earth kept his word brief. [Rom 9:28](#) [Is 10:22](#)

[Chapter X]
The Admonition and Correction of the Brothers

¹Let the brothers who are the ministers and servants of the others visit and admonish their brothers and humbly and charitably correct them, not commanding them anything that is against their soul and our rule. ²Let the brothers who are subject, however, remember that, for God's sake,

they have renounced their own wills. ³Therefore, I strictly command them to obey their ministers in everything they have promised the Lord to observe and which is not against their soul or our Rule.

⁴Wherever the brothers may be who know and feel they cannot observe the Rule spiritually, they can and should have recourse to their ministers. ⁵Let the ministers, moreover, receive them charitably and kindly and have such familiarity with them that these same brothers may speak and deal with them as masters with their servants, ⁶for so it must be that the ministers are the servants of all the brothers.

⁷Moreover, I admonish and exhort the brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ to beware of all pride, vainglory, envy and greed, of care and solicitude for the things of this world, of detraction and murmuring. [Mt 13:22](#) [Lk 12:15](#) Let those who are illiterate not be anxious to learn, ⁸but let them pay attention to what they must desire above all else: to have the Spirit of the Lord and Its holy activity, ⁹to pray always to Him with a pure heart, to have humility and patience in persecution and infirmity, ¹⁰and to love those who persecute, rebuke and find fault with us, because the Lord says: *Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute and calumniate you.* [Mt 5:44](#) ¹¹*Blessed are those who suffer persecution for the sake of justice, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* [Mt 5:10](#) ¹²*But whoever perseveres to the end will be saved.* [Mt 10:22](#)

[Chapter XI]
The Brothers May Not Enter the Monasteries of Nuns

¹I strictly command all the brothers not to have any suspicious dealings or conversations with women, ²and they may not enter the monasteries of nuns, excepting those brothers to whom special permission has been granted by the Apostolic See; ³and they may not be godfathers to men or women, so that scandal may not arise among the brothers or concerning them on account of this.

[Chapter XII]

Those Going Among the Saracens and
Other Non-Believers

¹Let those brothers who wish by divine inspiration to go among the Saracens or other non-believers ask permission to go from their provincial ministers. ²The ministers, however, may not grant permission except to those whom they see fit to be sent.

³In addition to these points, I command the ministers through obedience to petition from our Lord the Pope for one of the Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, who would be the governor, protector and corrector of this fraternity, ⁴so that, being always submissive and subject at the feet of the same Holy Church and steadfast in the Catholic Faith, we may observe poverty, humility, and the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ as we have firmly promised.

It is forbidden, therefore, for anyone to tamper with this decree which we have confirmed, or rashly dare to oppose it. If anyone presume to attempt this, let him know that he shall incur the anger of Almighty God and of His blessed Apostles Peter and Paul.

Given at the Lateran, the twenty-ninth day of November, in the eighth year of Our pontificate.

The Life of St. Francis – Chapter 4 – Julian of Speyer

Francis of Assisi - The Saint – Vol I - pp. 383-387

HOW HE RECEIVED A RULE AND PERMISSION TO PREACH FROM THE POPE, WAS REFRESHED IN SOLITUDE, DETERMINED TO BE PERPETUALLY POOR AND TO HELP HIS NEIGHBORS, AND HOW HE GUARDED HIMSELF AND HIS OWN BROTHERS WITH STRICT VIGILANCE.

²¹Seeing that the number of brothers was gradually increasing, Blessed Francis explained more fully to them his heart's purpose, not to mention the hidden design

of divine revelation. He wrote a rule in simple language, including words from the holy gospel, for the perfection of which he strove as much as he could. He wanted what he had written to be confirmed by the supreme pontiff, so he took the eleven brothers that he had *with him*, [Mt 12:45](#) himself being the twelfth, and made his way with them to Rome. When he arrived, he went to one of the cardinal bishops, an esteemed and discreet man, and explained fully and in an orderly manner the cause of his coming to Rome. The cardinal carefully heard the business of the poor man of Christ and, even though he justly commended the plan as praiseworthy, he nonetheless first suggested to Francis that he enter the eremitical or monastic life. But the servant of Christ stuck firmly to what he had begun and, as modestly as he could, refused to agree to suggestions of this sort. But, *with the Lord's cooperation* [Mt 12:45](#) he persisted until, thanks to the arrangements of the same bishop, the matter came to the hearing of the supreme pontiff.

Divine Providence was with the blessed man in everything he was doing, and its clear revelations and visions made him confident. At that time he saw a vision that promised the Lord Pope's assent to his plan: *a mighty tree, wondrously tall*, [Dn 4:7](#) whose top he easily bent down to the earth with his hands. Later on, when the most excellent and magnanimous Lord Pope Innocent III, who was then ruling the church, deigned to give his assent to the poor man, the meaning of this vision became evident. The supreme pontiff gave the twelve brothers his kind consent concerning the confirmation of their rule and also gave them his mandate concerning the preaching of penance. With joy, he blessed and dismissed them, but he promised that later, when their number had increased, he would give them even more.

²²Therefore, it was not without reason that Blessed Francis thought it a wondrous thing that he had obtained such great benefits from the Vicar of Christ, and so he gave thanks to divine mercy for all. Completing his visit with a prayer at the tomb of the

Prince of the Apostles, he joyfully left the city with his brothers.

The purpose of the gift moved him to act immediately, lest perhaps he remain ungrateful, and he dutifully began to make plans with the brothers: first, how by observing the rule they could make progress in virtue; and second, how by edifying their neighbors they might earn interest for the Lord on the *silver piece* [Lk 19:13](#) entrusted to their care.

As they were dutifully discussing these and other similar things, it happened that they came, *late in the day, to a deserted place* [Mt 14:15](#) where they seemed to be bereft of all human aid, though they were in need of bodily refreshment because of the hardships of their journey. But divine providence, which was with these poor ones, provided bread through a man who came up unexpectedly and disappeared all of a sudden. They ate the bread, marveled at the manner it had been provided, and, returning thanks to the Lord, continued their journey much comforted. Then they came to a solitary place near the city of Orte, where they remained for almost forty days in great lack of necessities. Some of their number went begging in that same city. There they renewed the beginnings of holy poverty with great joy and confirmed it with a perpetual covenant.^c

²³These zealots of a new justice next entered the Spoleto valley, and a pious discussion arose whether in the future they should live in solitary places or among people. But truly, the holy man of God, as if despairing of his own efforts, anticipated every undertaking with devout prayer—through which he infallibly learned what he was to do—and, impelled by a zeal that came from God, chose to live for the gain of his neighbors rather than for himself alone.

Then, comforted *in the Lord*, [Eph 6:10](#) Saint Francis began *to speak out more boldly* [Acts 9:28](#) owing to the apostolic authority he had been granted, and going around through *cities, towns and villages*, [Mt 9:35](#) he steadfastly preached penance. He was

particularly careful *to show himself blameless in all things*, [Tb 10:13](#) [2 Cor 6:4](#) lest he be thought to gloss over the truth with flattering words. Educated men marveled at the power of the words of him who had not been taught by man, and seeing the noble and lowborn, rich and poor crowd around him in bands, they astutely made their way to him as though to a new star rising in the darkness. In fact, he provided a plan of salvation to persons of every state and condition, age and sex, giving them all a rule of life. Today, the church rejoices that his felicitous leadership of both sexes has brought about a threefold army of those who are to be saved.

As we mentioned above, he founded three Orders, the first of which he prized above all others by profession and habit, and which, as he had written in its Rule, he called the Order of Lesser Brothers. The Second Order, the Order of the Poor Ladies and virgins of the Lord, also mentioned above, likewise took its fruitful origin from him. The Third, also an order of considerable perfection, is called the Order of Penitents, which profitably brings together clerics and laity, virgins, unmarried, and married persons of both sexes.

²⁴Who will be able to tell in detail just how Blessed Francis himself magnificently served the Order of Lesser Brothers in the perfection of every virtue by going beyond what was asked, or how he instructed his brothers and sons concerning all matters of true religion?

Now sufficiently taught in all things perfect by his tutor, the grace of the Holy Spirit, he wished to come to know in himself every kind of perfection by experience. And so, he first taught his brothers by his example those things which he later urged on them by frequent sweet words.

How these brothers, personally serving as knights under such a leader, became more proficient in all perfection by his teaching and example, must, I think, be kept secret rather than described in detail with profuse words. For the blessed man *stood watch* with the highest vigilance over¹⁵

21:8 himself and his brothers. He continually forewarned them most diligently not only lest they suffer some obvious attack of sin, but also lest a secret thought grow into a vice, lest any deceit, under the guise of virtue or the occasion of necessity, rush upon them, or death penetrate their inner selves through the unguarded openings of the exterior senses.

He did not allow in himself or others, any punishable offense to pass with impunity, lest perchance a lax hand bring on the sluggishness of neglect. In fact, he exercised the rigor of justice in himself so greatly that if ever, as sometimes happens, a temptation of the flesh stole over him, if it was winter, he would throw himself into a place full of ice or snow to drive away the illicit impulse.

25 Seeing him hold himself under such great restraint, the other brothers were moved to do similar things. Thus, as has been said, the man of God not only uncompromisingly repressed the urgings of the flesh, but also secured his bodily senses with bars of the greatest caution, lest they cling to any vanity.

While he was staying at a place called Rivo Torto near Assisi, it happened that the Emperor Otto, with much pomp and a great retinue, was passing on the way to Rome for his coronation. Blessed Francis, who was residing *beside the road* Mt 13:19 with his brothers in their hovel, wished that neither he nor any of his brothers go out or even look out to see the emperor, but he instructed one of them to proclaim to the emperor continually that this sort of glory would endure only a little while.

26 That most true zealot of poverty settled himself, together with his brothers, in an abandoned dwelling, in the area noted above, that they might protect themselves there as best they could from the heat and rain. This dwelling was so confining that they were unable to rest comfortably in it. But the narrowness of the place did not constrict the *wideness of their hearts*. Ps 119:45 [Vulgate, Ps 118:45] Jer 17:1 Quite the contrary, they lived happily in this extreme want and persisted in *giving thanks and praise to God* Is

51:3 continually. The holy man wrote the names of the brothers on the beams of the little house so that no one could disturb in the slightest another who wished to rest or pray, and that each brother might know the place assigned to him.

One day a man came to the place with an ass, maybe looking for shade, and wanting to enter freely and without rebuff said to the ass: "Get in there. We'll do this place a favor yet." But the man of God liked neither the words nor intentions of this fellow who believed that the brothers had come together there to build houses and enlarge or appropriate the little spot for themselves. So the saint soon left the little house and moved to the place called the Portiuncula, where he had rebuilt a church of the Glorious Virgin.

Scripture Reflection Matthew 5:13-16

The Similes of Salt and Light.

13i "You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

14 You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden.

15 Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house.

16 Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.