

# Unit Two, Module One

## Introduction to the Writings of Francis

In recent decades Franciscan scholars have devoted great energy to research concerning the writings of Francis of Assisi. Today we are able to read and study his writings, confident in the knowledge that they have been critically edited and translated into several languages so that many people can enjoy and/or study the various authenticated writings.

The primary aim of this module is to introduce you to Francis' writings (contained in Volume 1 of *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, "The Saint"). It is hoped that while you will recognise several prayers among the writings, you will discover where, in the original texts, some of his well known prayers are to be found. The module will introduce you to a range of documents which Francis contributed to and approved, such as rules. You will discover a number of letters addressed to a wide range of people, a work to which Francis seems to have devoted himself during the last years of his life when he was so riddled with illness that he could no longer travel either easily or with any comfort.

Francis referred to himself as ignorant and unlearned (*Letter to the Entire Order*, 39, hereafter LtOrd). By this we should understand that he had not been educated to the higher level of the clergy. He had received a reasonable education in Assisi which equipped him for reading and writing to the standard expected for someone of his social status. This meant he knew Latin. We have about 30 texts that scholars agree Francis wrote. Of these we only have two texts written in his own hand – *The Praises of God* and the *Letter to Brother Leo*. The norm was for a scribe, with better literary skills, to write a manuscript which Francis would approve. The *Canticle of Brother Sun* and the *Canticle of Exhortation to St Clare and her Sisters* were written in the Umbrian dialect, providing two early Italian writings.

Francis' writings indicate that he had an excellent memory, for scriptures and liturgical texts which he would have used, and for writings which he may have come across as part of a reading or sermon – such as the Patristic writings. On his wide travels, he must have stayed with various religious communities where he would have joined in prayers and had conversations. Lateran Council IV was an important Church event during the early years of Francis' brotherhood and discussions, on the sources used in preparations before, and after in the decrees and as an aid to their dissemination, would have taken place among the clergy and religious. Some such sources may have been accessible to Francis. Scribes would have provided the correct scriptural citations where necessary.

A note on Francis' use of Scriptures:

Francis alluded to or directly cited scriptures throughout his writings. You will recognise the Johannine influence, reference to the synoptics, Peter and Paul in several writings. His writings are not exegeses, nor was he a fundamentalist. He used scriptures intuitively and instinctively, in the same way as in life he listened and acted upon the word of God.

For your study, a practical way of becoming familiar with a range of writings could be to focus on themes, as Francis returned to specific topics time and again. An example of this is the Eucharist, which Francis always referred to as “the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ”. You will find that some lessons will have a thematic approach.

Dating texts can be problematic. The *Earlier Rule* was written over about 12 years, based on the lived experience of the fraternity and on regulation of a fast-growing religious Order. The *Admonitions* are like a collection of beads, combined together at a later time. The *Office of the Passion* was amended and added to over several years. Many texts will have been adapted and finalised as Francis and his brothers followed their mendicant life of preaching. Francis would not have prepared a set “talk” to deliver wherever he was preaching but his preaching would have covered the same ground time and again. The manuscript tradition captures agreed final texts that may have been the fruit of years of experience. We know that the Gospels were written long after Jesus had died and that what we have in the New Testament was agreed by the Church centuries later. This parallel might help you to appreciate that some of Francis’ writings simply evolved into the recorded but authenticated compilation that we can use today.

Scholars have paid particular attention to certain writings. These include the *Testament*, the *Admonitions* and the *Canticle of the Creatures*. Recent scholarship has included new work on the *Earlier Exhortation* and the *Office of the Passion*. Some prayers are popular and frequently used, especially by Franciscans, such as the *Prayer before the Crucifix* and the *Testament Prayer*. Other writings seem to have been of least interest among scholars but all of the writings have received some scholarly attention especially in the past century. In this module you will find reference to a range of scholars chosen according to the subject matter of the lessons. For an overall approach to the writings I recommend *Francis of Assisi: The Message in His Writings* by Thaddée Matura ofm.<sup>1</sup>

A note about authenticity:

- Some writings are deemed authentic because they are part of a recognised collection.
- Some writings are “signed”, known to have been written personally by Francis
- Some are believed to have been dictated directly
- In some cases the scribe would have been authorised to finalise the written text
- There can be written “reports” made by a listener at the time of delivery
- There may be a rephrasing of something known to be true to Francis
- A text can be the fruit of deliberations, sometimes over a period of time, perhaps by the fraternity. In this case, Francis would not necessarily be the dominant “voice” but part of the construction team.
- If something is not thought to be original, attention would be given to whatever might have influenced his thought.<sup>2</sup>

Today we are very concerned about plagiarism. This was not the case at the time of Francis. Many writings contain ideas and thoughts that were not new: Francis approached

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<sup>1</sup> FI Publications, St Bonaventure, NY 14778, 1997 and 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Translation from the Introduction(pp 20-21) by Théophile Desbonnets, in *François d’Assise: Écrits*, Sources Chrétiennes, CERF 2003

some of his writings in a manner already familiar, such is the case with the *Paraphrase of the Our Father*). Yet Francis is regarded as original in his selection of elements from other writings, by the ordering of elements within a writing, by omissions or slight alterations, or by combining elements from different sources. This can be clearly seen in the *Office of the Passion*.

It is hard to define the character of the writings: some seem spontaneous, some are formal and address a certain situation, some are prayerful and/or poetic, some convey instructions. Francis can mix the first, second and third persons in a single text. It is possible to “hear” Francis writing from his heart. It is also possible to see a maturation of thought. The more familiar you become with the writings the more you recognise that Francis has penetrated great mysteries, such as the Trinity, yet his writings are not teachings on the mysteries. In summary, Francis’ writings reveal someone who has meditated and reflected deeply on a range of spiritual sources. There can be an urgency in his “message”, notable on the importance of the Eucharist. The writings, then, reveal a person of great conviction who was compelled to transmit to others from the vast riches that he believed God had revealed to him.

### **Summary of Lessons:**

- Lesson One: The Testament, Prayer Before the Crucifix and the Letter to the Entire Order
- Lesson Two: The Earlier Rule (Regula non Bullata) with a note on the Later Rule.
- Lesson Three: Those Who do Penance
- Lesson Four: Themes in the Writings of Francis
- Lesson Five: A prayer Inspired by the Our Father and the Office of the Passion
- Lesson Six: A Medley of Writings

# Lesson One

## **Title: The Testament, The Prayer Before the Crucifix and the Prayer at the end of the Letter to the Entire Order**

In the first lesson you will study three writings of Francis. The aim is personal reflection. They mark the early stages of his conversion and the end of his life. The Testament is a text that Francis wanted to leave for his brothers. The two prayers have a similar theme but one is from a seeker while the other is from a spiritually mature, remarkable man. The purpose of studying them together is to enable you to become more aware of the transformation.

The first text is the *Testament*<sup>3</sup> because it is the only writing that we would recognise as in any way biographical. It has been, and remains today, a very influential text.

In the introduction to the text in *Francis and Clare: the Complete Works*<sup>4</sup>, the importance of this document is summarised:

The work contains statements that go beyond mere exhortation and seem to lay down commands that are binding under obedience. Thus the Testament has become one of the most controversial documents to come to us from the Seraphic Father. At the same time, the Testament has always been held in great respect as an expression of the profound wisdom and vision of the Seraphic father and of his care and concern for those who would follow him.

In fact the interpretation of the *Testament* and the weight that brothers believed should attach to it were to prove the cause of serious divisions within the Order of Friars Minor.

This lesson aims to introduce you to the *Testament* as a writing of Francis rather than to enter into the debates that were to develop around it.

There are other documents with the title of Testament that need to be acknowledged before looking at this text. These are mentioned in the *Assisi Compilation*, 59,56,106 and 23. The Testament of Siena outlined the principles of Francis' Gospel vision, another "testament" concerns the care brothers must have for the Portiuncula and another one concerns guidelines for building new dwellings.

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3 1 FA:ED pp1124-126

4 *Francis and Clare: the Complete Works*, Regis Armstrong and Ignatius Brady, Paulist Press, 1982, p153

## The Testament

This document was written in 1226, the year of Francis' death. In it he writes about aspects of his vocation that he recalled as particularly significant so the brothers would have a record of these. 1 – 23 detail elements of the inspiration he intuited from God. From 24 onwards Francis is exhorting the brothers, some of whom would remain convinced that they should follow the instructions literally despite Pope Gregory IX's conclusion that a personal testament could not be binding, unlike the agreed Rule of Life.

Read the text, n1-23, carefully. Note the frequent use of the phrase "The Lord gave me.." and what Francis regarded as gifts, starting with how the Lord helped him to understand how he was to live penance. In this text Francis focuses on the way God's mercy was to alter his approach to lepers and lead him to exercise mercy. This caused him to undergo a radical transformation, the crucial point in his conversion. N 4 contains the so-called Testament Prayer which Francis encouraged the brothers to say at churches. The section on priests and why the brothers must "respect, love and honour them" shows how important the Eucharist and holy words were to Francis. This theme recurs in many writings, so Francis must have exhorted all those listening to him to esteem increasingly highly these aspects of their faith. Francis believed the brothers were called to follow the Gospel simply. He writes about receiving Papal approval for the primitive, oral rule very shortly after he was joined by companions. Brothers were expected to work and to have recourse to alms whenever necessary. He also wrote about greeting people with peace.

These lines continue to be inspirational and valuable for their unique insight into Francis' understanding of his vocation.

The remainder of the Testament relates some of his preoccupations concerning the future of the Order. The insistence he places on brothers reading and observing the Testament lets us see why this text became so crucial in the evolution of the brotherhood.. The reality of living as part of a great Order was to force brothers, with the help and guidance of the Church, to move on from the personal vision and experience of the younger Francis and his early companions. The facts that Francis first acted for his own "pope" concerned with the development of the brothers and later withdrew from administrative responsibility is an indication of his personal realisation and acceptance of the reality that the Order had to change.

Once you have read the whole text consider how it could be both inspirational and problematic.

The Testament can be seen as:

- An expression of the will of Francis near the end of his life.
- As is a personal reminiscence of his conversion and the principles behind his vision of fraternal life.
- As a call for readers to attend to certain aspects of the practice of faith.
- An admonition and exhortation for the brothers.

In addition:

- It includes a prayer.
- It demonstrates Francis' continued sense of his own minority despite having to

assume the authority of the founder of a way of life: so, in his Testament Francis calls himself “little brother Francis” and commands the brothers to retain and read his words.

## **The Prayer Before the Crucifix<sup>5</sup> and the Prayer at the end of the Letter to the Entire Order**

Most high, glorious God, enlighten the darkness of my heart. Instil in me a correct faith, a certain hope and a perfect love; a sense and a knowledge, Lord, so that I may do your holy and true command.

The date given for this prayer is early in Francis’ conversion, 1205-1206. It has a strong manuscript tradition.. In Franciscan tradition it is probably most strongly associated with the episode when he heard Christ speak to him in the ruins of the San Damiano church<sup>6</sup>, later to become the home of Clare and her sisters.

Francis praises God in the opening lines and he is aware of the great contrast between his own heart and God to whom he turns for enlightenment. He is conscious of the need for light to be shone into the heart – there are shadows that only come to light when a light is shone on them

Francis desires certainty and conviction, he seeks perfection. He refers specifically to the three virtues. He seeks enlightenment of both sense and knowledge which represent different aspects of human experience. He wants to follow God’s command, knights followed the commands of their Lords to whom they promised obedience and fidelity and in whom they trusted.

This prayer is unusual among the writings because at this early period Francis is struggling and searching God’s will. The prayer is personal, interceding for discernment and guidance.

## **Prayer at the end of the Letter to the Entire Order<sup>7</sup>**

This prayer closes a letter that Francis wrote to be read at the General Chapter, 1225, which he was unable to attend because of his grave sickness. The stigmata episode happened in 1224 and Francis had many and various ailments by this time.

The following points may be of interest before you begin your personal reflection and comparison.

Francis addresses God at the beginning of this prayer and closes with the Trinity.

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<sup>5</sup> 1 FA:ED p40

<sup>6</sup> This episode appears first in the *Legend of Three Companions 13*, FA:ED Vol 2.

<sup>7</sup> 1 FA:ED pp120-121

Mindful that this was written for the brothers, note that by using “us” Francis includes himself with them. Miserable shares part of the root of the Latin word for mercy, misericordia, the mercy of God who understands and has perfect compassion for us in our wretchedness. Out of love, the heart of God (cors) touches us even at our most miserable. We depend totally on God’s grace to follow Him.

In the spirituality of Francis’ time there was familiarity with the “three ways”, purgative, illuminative and unitive. A soul had to first be purified before being able to follow God faithfully, ready to be enlightened and find their way to God with Whom every soul has the desire to be united. The words “cleansed, enlightened and inflamed” would be associated with these three “ways”.

The closing lines indicated that Francis grasped the perfect Trinity and simple Unity of the Trinity.

Finish this lesson by praying with and making your own observations as you compare these two prayers.

# Lesson Two

## The Earlier Rule – *Regula non Bullata*

This lesson aims to introduce you to the *Earlier Rule*<sup>8</sup> (hereafter *ER*), a document that evolved over the period 1209-1221, which indicates that the text we have to-day is a final version of a work in progress throughout that period. The *ER* has been studied extensively in the Franciscan Tradition.

The *ER* consists of general principles which emerged through the lived experience of the primitive vision of Francis and his first companions. The articles it contains would have been agreed at Chapters: the primary aim of these gatherings was for the Brothers to be reunited with Francis and with one another, to exchange and build upon lived experience, to seek correction and direction and to celebrate and encourage one another. From their lived experience the Brothers reached agreement about diverse aspects of how they should live as Lesser Brothers in the context of the times.

There are several reasons for examining this text:

- It gives a unique insight into the early community of Francis and his companions, originating from the experience of the brothers as they felt their way in their new and exciting project.
- It can be shown that this text evolved because certain parts of it resulted from historical events during the period of its development.
- It contains a range of types of writings although they were all subsumed into this “rule”.

When you read the text you will find that some sections are recognisable as articles befitting any rule, concerning such things as reception into the Order, fasting and prayer, but that there are some surprising elements.

As this is designed to be an introduction, the lesson will outline some of the conclusions of scholars; cover selected sections for detailed study and provide a bibliography for those who want to examine the text in greater detail.

### Title

Many students will know this text by its Latin title, the *regula non bullata*, which translates into the Rule that was not bulled (given the official seal of papal approval). This differentiates it from the *regula bullata*, still the approved Rule of the friars of the First Order. That text is more formal and is a canonical document. It is much shorter.

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<sup>8</sup>

1 FA:ED pages 63-86

## Structure

The *ER* is a long document consisting of 24 chapters.

The Prologue and chapters 1-3 are concerned with the way of life and reception of the brothers.

Chapter 4 is an instruction to ministers.

Chapter 5 concerns correction.

Chapter 6 distinguishes the Franciscans from existing religious orders by stipulating that “no one be called prior, but let everyone on general be called a lesser brother. Let one wash the feet of the other.”<sup>9</sup>

Chapters 7 – 9 relate to how certain elements of the way of life were to be carried out. This was essential because the brothers were learning how to follow a simple proposal of life through experience. They had to solve problems they encountered in the field.

Chapter 10 concerns the sick.

Chapter 11 exhorts the brothers to treat one another with great affection and respect.

Chapters 12-13 concern relations with women and the avoidance of fornication.

Chapter 14 – 17 are about how the brothers should present themselves to the world in their itinerant, preaching ministry.

Chapter 18 is about holding chapters.

Chapter 19 – 20 concern fidelity to the faith and reception of the sacraments.

Chapter 21 is a prompt for brothers as they preach

Chapter 22 is sometimes described as a testament given by Francis before travelling to the Holy Land where he expected to attain martyrdom. It contains a commentary on the parable of the seeds sown by the sowers; it talks about personal evil and the work of the devil; it exhorts to prayer and contains scriptural citations that Francis wants the brothers to attend to.

Chapter 23 is a prayer and thanksgiving, including a section known as Francis’ Creed, reference to the whole church, militant and triumphant; and an exhortation to live in prayer, ever mindful of the love and commandments of the transcendent God who revealed Himself through the Incarnation and the workings of the Trinity.

Chapter 24 is the conclusion.

## Approaches to Studying the *ER*

Scholars have worked intensively on the *ER* and I recommend the work of David Flood for those interested in further study.<sup>10</sup> He was part of a group of scholars who hoped to find the traces of the primitive rule that Francis had approved by Honorius III. We know from the *Testament* and Celano’s Life that Francis and his early companions sought papal approval as they started out to follow the Gospel simply and in poverty. Celano tells us that it was short and based on scripture<sup>11</sup>. Flood has made a detailed study in which he suggests that there are various layers within the *ER* with a fundamental core which he believed he had uncovered<sup>12</sup>. He then analysed the whole text, showing how it may have evolved and

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<sup>9</sup> ER chapter 6 1 FA:ED p68

<sup>10</sup> David Flood and Thaddée Matura *The Birth of a Movement*

<sup>11</sup> 1 Cel 32, 1 FA:ED p210

<sup>12</sup> These he identified as Chapter 1, the identity of the movement, the internal focus, chapter 7 n 3, and

pointing to influences that altered the manner of living the life. To cite a couple, Lateran Council IV insisted that religious orders must hold chapters and the rule regulates for these to take place regularly in chapter 18. Another example is found in chapter 2 where brothers are required to have a probationary period of formation. This followed the insistence of Honorius III in *Cum secundum consilium*<sup>13</sup> who issued this demand in response to concerns that the brothers were not being adequately formed and some men were bringing the order into disrepute because of their lack of proper training.

When you come to read the text, given its length, I do not recommend sitting down to read it at a session. I am suggesting some approaches that might help you find your way through it and help you discover why it is such an important text.

## Exploration 1.

One way to explore the *ER* and so become familiar with it, is by scanning it, focusing on a single Franciscan characteristic, for example, to minority, poverty, fraternity, obedience, preaching. You will find sections relevant to each one of these scattered throughout the text. Select and combine these then reflect on what it tells you. I have taken the example of minority:

### Minority

*ER* chapter 9 n1-3 states:

Let all brothers strive to follow the humility and poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ and let them remember that we should have nothing else in the world except, as the Apostle says: having food and clothing we are content with these. They must rejoice when they live among people considered of little value and looked down upon, among the poor and powerless, the sick and the lepers, and the beggars by the wayside. When it is necessary, they may go for alms. It goes on to exhort the brothers to thank God when “people revile them and refuse to give them alms” (9 n 6).

Here you find:

- a mixture of “we” and “they”;
- a scriptural text key for living the apostolic life;
- the attitude to be shown to different marginalised groups among whom some of the Brothers were expected to live;
- that they only sought alms when they needed them and evidently some Brothers found this a shameful thing to have to do.

Chapter 7 gives more details about the manner of serving and working. It cites examples of work that the Brothers, as a result of experience, came to realise clashed with the principle of minority, such as being treasurers and overseers. “Let them, instead, be the lesser ones and be subject to all in the same house” (7 n 2). From the same chapter, we come to know that the brothers were to keep tools and instruments, used in the work they did prior to joining the community, in order to help the Brothers to survive by using their individual skills in familiar trades. They could be paid in goods useful for survival and simple living provided they refused monetary payment.

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Ch 14 – the Gospel inspiration for the Order which refers to the external function of the Order

Other parts of the *ER* show that minority was realised through:

- meeting need rather than want
- rejecting any attitude of ownership
- having a sense of belonging with the lesser, the “nobodies”.

Minority also required service of other brothers, respect for their mutual equality, rather than division according to clerical status and concern to preserve the bonds of fraternity. (See chapters 4,6,9,10and 11)

As we saw above, no-one was to be called prior and the model for service among the Brothers was Christ washing the feet of the disciples at the Last Supper. So Minor Brothers were:

- *Fratres*: equal brothers of one another of the same fraternity
- *Minores*: at the humble service of one another, subject to all

You can discover other Franciscan themes that emerge throughout the *ER*, just read it through noting where the characteristics can be found. For **ministry and service** I suggest you read the following:

4 n1 and nn 4-6

5 nn 9- 16

6 nn 2-3

Chapter 10

## Exploration 2.

Another approach is to find sections that may have been easily learned through repetition as the brothers travelled between places where they would preach. These may have acted as aide-memoires for the brothers who would have had access to copies of the “rule” as they carried out their mission. From reading the introductory sentence, I think this is true of Chapter 21.

Imagine the brothers arriving at a new place and glad of a few pointers to guide them in their addresses to the local people. Chapter 21 reminds them to begin with praise and thanksgiving to God, Trinity and Unity. The next reminder is about exhorting people to penance. Then there is a recall of the part of the Our Father concerning forgiveness. The chapter may make you think of a modern fire and brimstone preacher because it warns people in case they take the path to hell. It ends with a note of perseverance and encouragement to try to follow the good. The points in this chapter also served as a reminder and exhortation to the brothers themselves.

The opening of Chapter 23 has been described as a Laude – that is something that could have been learned and repeated, even chanted or sung. It was another way to store key points in the brain and draw on them, both at a time of uncertainty and as reminders of what they believed.

This chapter, like chapter 21, does not seem to fit into what we would regard as a rule.

For your study, read nn1-6 carefully – noting that this section ends with “Amen”, suggesting it might stand alone<sup>14</sup>. Thaddée Matura describes this as Francis’ Credo. It is addressed to the Father with the other members of the Trinity. It devotes only one short sentence to the Fall. It asks the Son and Holy Spirit to assist us in our prayers to God.

Francis had a sense of the Church as containing those who are already in heaven as well as those who are still on earth. He encourages the brothers to seek intercession from those who have died and joined the communion of saints. N 7 indicates that Francis also considered everyone on earth in this prayer when he mentions the many groups (or orders as understood by his contemporaries) that make up society.

This chapter includes a range of titles and attributes of God.

The chapter shows how Francis understood the transcendent nature of God and also the will of God, to be involved with and to involve humanity. Francis saw God equally as remote and mysterious and as the Son of God made into a fully human man, our elder brother. Francis seemed to grasp both mysteries clearly.

This chapter also shows that Francis understood salvation history as he includes everyone, dead, alive, yet to be born. He felt part of this great plan of God and wanted everyone to desire to share in it because it made sense of everything.

The chapter is also a challenging and urgent exhortation to his listeners to prayer and total dedication to God.

### **Exploration 3**

Exploring individual chapters is another way to get to know this text. I am suggesting two, chapters 16 and 17. Chapter 22 could also be explored for your own interest.

Chapter 16 is a very interesting chapter directed to those who go among Saracens and Other Nonbelievers.

Such missionaries have to be selected with great care and as a result of discernment. Francis advises them first and foremost to be good examples of Christian living. Announcing the word of God, proclamation of the Gospel, can only follow when they discern that it is pleasing to the Lord to spread the good news and introduce Baptism.

It speaks of the need for such missionaries to be prepared to abandon themselves wholly to God, even if this means persecution and martyrdom. The chapter closes with a reminder of the rewards of such dedicated work.

Chapter 17 is for preachers. This ministry also requires discernment and permission. Once again deeds are mentioned first, so a preacher needs to be authentic. Francis often warns preachers against self-exaltation or self-glorification. Preachers are warned to be particularly wary of the dangers of the “spirit of the flesh”. Above all preachers must have a

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<sup>14</sup> Thaddée Matura has examined this section of chapter 23 in detail, for those interested in further reading. *Francis of Assisi: The Message in his Writings* Chapter 2 pp 31-38

right attitude to God to whom all good must be referred. They are reminded that they must recognise God as the source of any good they bring about and be watchful so as not to claim personal rewards for their God given gifts and talents.

## **Conclusion**

Having taken time with these explorations it is worth at least skim-reading the whole text to know what it contains and to capture a sense of the Order at this early period of amazing and rapid development.

There are sections that you can take for your personal reflection and return to later on.

## **A Note on the Later Rule**

As this will form part of a later study module, this text will not be studied here. In brief:

The *Later Rule* (1223) was written with the influence of Pope Honorius III, by Hugolino (Cardinal Protector, later Pope Gregory IX) some brothers and Francis. This was the Rule finally sealed and approved for the Brothers, known as *the Later Rule* or *Regula Bullata*. It was an essential instrument of government for a large Order. There are changes concerning work, the focus being mainly pastoral and clerical, and accommodation, as many Brothers lived in settled places. The Brotherhood was now established as the Order of Friars Minor, with a system of government, and there were distinctions between the Ministers Provincial and the Minister General. The text is much shorter, more orderly and clearer.

# Lesson Three

## Those Who Do Penance

This lesson is designed to explore what Francis' writings tell us about the life of penance. This phrase occurs in many writings. The *Earlier Exhortation* (hereafter *1LtF*) is divided into two parts, one entitled "Those Who Do Penance" and the second "Those Who Do Not Do Penance". Francis divided humanity into these two groups and I believe that he saw that humans could freely choose to do either. He desired everyone to reach salvation and this can be equated with "doing penance".

I have selected the two short passages, extracted from the *Earlier Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance* (1 Lt F) and the *Testament* of Francis, where he concisely presents the life of penance.

### Earlier Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance (1 Lt F)

A subtitle to the text appears in the earliest remaining manuscript we have of it, "These are the words of life and salvation"<sup>15</sup>. Francis devoted himself to spreading the good news of salvation because Christ had totally transformed his life and he was impelled to exhort everyone to come to know Christ and so share the joy and peace he had experienced.

Many people were attracted by the person and message of the mendicant Brother Francis. Inspired by his words and deeds, listeners wanted to follow the gospel more seriously. As he progressed through different territories, Francis advised that it was neither practical nor feasible for everyone to give up their homes, families and daily work. He offered to write words of encouragement and reminder for those wanted to do penance while living in their homes. This is thought to be the reason for 1 Lt F.

*1 Lt F* is in two parts. The first part entitled, "Those who do Penance", the second part to "Those who do not do penance", remaining deaf and blind to the life-giving words. The first few lines contain a summary of penitential life.

### **All those who love the Lord with their whole heart, with their soul and mind, with their whole strength and love their neighbours as themselves<sup>16</sup>**

The exhortation opens with the two great commandments of Jesus, "Love the Lord with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind, with their whole strength and love their neighbours as themselves". Penitents strive to obey these, by living lives centred on God and neighbour, in contrast to people whose lives are centred on earthly values and promotion of self.

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<sup>15</sup>See 1 FA:ED. Introduction to the text, page 41.

<sup>16</sup> I will use FA:ED throughout this chapter

### **Who hate their bodies with their vices and sins**

The world extols power and riches, and tempts individuals to succumb to other “vices and sins”. Hating “their bodies with their vices and sins,” is an admonition to be aware of earth-bound attractions and drives, with no thought of the Kingdom, God’s revelations or spiritual matters. As was the norm for medieval penitents, Francis was austere for most of his life although he later apologised to his body. These words are not an exhortation to punish the body but a commendation to re-orientate one’s life, to scrutinise the heart and recognise honestly what is really at the centre of one’s life.

Bonaventure used the image of man bent over because of original sin. In this state, vision is limited to the realm of the earth, where vices and sins are naturally attractive. Penitents must be able to recognise the dangers and then despise them. No-one can perceive the supernatural realm without grace which will be bestowed once the sinner lifts up his/her heart to God.

### **Who receive the Body and Blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ**

Penitents “receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ”. This phrase resonated clearly in the post Lateran Council IV Church because the Council decreed that Christians must receive the sacrament. To set the context, at that time, the reverent practices, of adoration and contemplation, had displaced frequent reception of the Eucharist. The fact that reception of the Eucharist had been in decline is well documented<sup>17</sup>. The Church was concerned about the Albigensian heresy which denied that God could be present in material substances, including the Eucharist. Franciscans helped to spread orthodox doctrine and encouraged believers to follow this decree particularly. As we have already seen, in his writings, Francis always uses the whole expression “the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ” to refer to the sacrament Holy Communion. The words instil due reverence in the listener/reader and attest to his orthodoxy. In his day, they would have been recognised as a direct attack on the Albigensians.

*I Lt F* does not name all the sacraments. Francis singled out reception of the Eucharist, by extension, penitents are expected to the teachings and practice of the Church.

### **And who produce worthy fruits of penance**

Everything a penitent does from the heart will necessarily reflect that God is the centre of his/her life. As Paul said to King Agrippa, “They should repent and turn to God and do deeds consistent with repentance”<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Nguyen – Van – Khanh Chapter 6

<sup>18</sup> Acts 26:20

## Conclusion

*I Lt F* is addressed to all penitents. It is firmly rooted in Scripture: Francis chose to start with Jesus' answer to the question, "Which is the first of all the commandments?"<sup>19</sup>. Jesus immediately cited the *Shema*, "the central prayer and confession of Judaism"<sup>20</sup>, to which he added a second "You must love your neighbour as yourself" saying "there is no commandment greater than these". These have become fundamental guiding principles for Christians. "On these commandments hang the whole Law."<sup>21</sup>

The law must not remain dead, a true disciple hears "the word of God and put(s) it into practice"<sup>22</sup>. A penitent examines his/her values from the new perspective of love of God and neighbour and earthly values become a challenge.

For Francis, a penitent is rooted firmly in the tradition and practice of the Church. The life of a true penitent will attest to their conversion so that in all that they do they will produce worthy fruits.

## The Testament

In his *Testament*, Francis presents another summary of what it means to live as a penitent. This is no longer general but refers to Francis' personal life and experience.

## **The Lord gave me Brother Francis, thus to begin doing penance in this way: for when I was in sin<sup>23</sup>**

The opening introduces a vital conviction that Francis held and lived by – God initiates this process, calling the sinner to conversion, as in the call of biblical figures such as apostles and prophets. The words "when I was in sin", indicate a specific period in his life, when he lived fully in the world. Becoming a penitent marked a new phase in his life which became "evangelical" once he freely responded wholeheartedly to God and determined to discern and obey His will.

## **It seemed too bitter to me to see lepers**

At the end of his life Francis recognised the change in his response to lepers as the defining moment of his conversion. He overcame his self-proclaimed horror of them because of God's grace. The weak human Francis had to take the courageous step of encountering a leper as a fellow human being for grace to take effect. This visible and tangible sign confirmed the authenticity of his conversion of heart. The experience was life-transforming. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I showed mercy to them.

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<sup>19</sup> Mk 12: 28 f

<sup>20</sup> Footnote to Dt 6:4 *CTS New Catholic Bible* p 261

<sup>21</sup> Mt 22:40

<sup>22</sup> Lk 8: 21

<sup>23</sup> 1 FA:ED 125

Francis was convinced that the Lord was at work in him personally: Physically, he received strength to associate lovingly with lepers; spiritually, he was liberated so that he could show compassion and mercy. Learning to treat others as he had experienced God in his life became an outstanding hallmark of Francis' life. He firmly believed that this was a personal gift from God. He saw others with fresh eyes. He acted fearlessly out of love and responded in a new way to everyone because he had experienced God's unconditional love in his life.

In sum, Francis was impelled to follow Christ's love because of his own experience of God's grace and mercy. It is the nature of love to flow out to others. Francis desired that everyone experience this new, life-giving love and his life became an inspiration to others as he witnessed to God's unconditional love.

### **And when I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body**

Francis' embrace of lepers remains iconic within the Franciscan tradition, and followers of Francis acknowledge its great significance. It inspires faith that God's mercy and grace can empower them to confront their personal "bitterness" or "leper".

### **And afterwards I delayed a little and left the world.**

Franciscan sources recount several stages in Francis' journey of conversion. Francis singled out this episode. In his day, penitents left the values of the secular world. They entered a different social rank and donned simple clothing. Francis changed his clothing when he stripped before the Bishop, when he dressed as a hermit and when he finally put on a cross-shaped, rough tunic suited to evangelical life.

### **Conclusion**

The testament is a record of personal experiences as Francis remembered them and testifies to his personal faith. Although it is specific to his personal conversion, principles emerge for the life of penance.

- The first principle is that God initiates conversion.
- Secondly, a penitent can expect to have a personal relationship with God.
- Thirdly, provided he/she listens attentively and is prepared to respond to, and act upon, whatever has been discerned in faith and prayer, God will direct the penitent and bestow necessary graces.
- Conversion changes every life, but some penitents experience a radical transformation that touches every aspect of life.

This corresponds with the general principles found in 1 Lt F. Francis obeyed the two great commandments; radically changed his values; stayed loyal to, and sought guidance from, the Church; and produced worthy fruits of penance with the help of God's grace and love. He gave his life wholeheartedly to following the Gospel and spreading the good news of the Kingdom.

## **The Later Admonition and Exhortation (2LtF)**

*1Lt F* and *2LtF* are thought to be the way of life Francis proposed for penitents living in their homes and others who did not want to belong to the first or second Franciscan orders. It was only toward the end of the last century that Kajetan Esser brought this text into prominence and it now forms part of the Rules of the Third Order regular and the Secular Franciscan Order. Prior to that attention had been paid to *2LtF*.

These writings are believed to be Francis' response to lay faithful who wanted to follow Christ more faithfully, inspired by the early brotherhood. It is probable that the manuscript versions we have were versions of preachings and exhortations that Francis gave over a period of time and in different places. The version we have of *2LtF* was written as a letter because it includes the words, "realising that I could not visit each one of you personally because of sickness and weakness of body, I decided to offer you in this letter and message the words of our Lord Jesus Christ"<sup>24</sup>.

For those who want to study the beginning of *2LtF* in depth, chapter two of Thaddée Matura's *Francis of Assisi: The Message in His Writings* has a section devoted to this.

As a general introduction, this text gives us insight into Francis' understanding of the Incarnation and the Paschal mysteries. It includes almost the whole of *1LtF* and gives a very practical programme of life to Christians in a list of "We must..." and "We must not/never phrases...." At the heart of the letter is a couple of sentence that sums up minority, which was to apply to lay penitents as well as to the other Franciscan orders:

"We must not be wise and prudent according to the flesh, but, instead, we must be simple, humble and pure" (n45) and, "We must never desire to be above others, but, instead we must be servants and subject to every human creature for God's sake" (n 47).

The letter includes a prayer that every creature praise, glory, honour and bless God and goes on to list some of the attributes of God (nn61-63).

The letter concludes with the equivalent to part 2 of *1LtF*, an admonition to those who do not do penance.

Skim read the whole letter and take time to reflect on what Francis writes about the mysteries. As you read through the practical instructions, consider how relevant these may be for you in your life today.

### **Conclusion:**

Francis wrote a way of life for lay penitents but throughout his writings he exhorts people to a penitential way of life. In reading *2LTF* we see that Francis regarded himself as one of the penitents because he did not keep to the third person, as we have seen the letter contains "we" phrases. The message he wanted to give began with a reminder of the Incarnation, the Passion and the Eucharist which are the foundations upon which penitential

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<sup>24</sup> *1Lt F* n3

life is built. The letter then gave practical instructions. It leaves no doubt that everyone can choose – to do penance or not to – with eternal consequences. Little brother Francis wanted everyone to hear the message of salvation as he received and understood it in his own life.

All his followers were directed to live a life of penance, which can be regarded as a true and faithful Christian life, so many writings exhorted listeners/readers to consider to what extent they were being faithful to the way of life they wanted to live.

The main elements of what it meant to do penance can be found in the two extracts given at the beginning of this lesson.

# Lesson Four

## Themes in the Writings of Francis

This lesson introduces you to a range of themes that recur in the writings. The main subject is the Eucharist which the lesson presents as a model. You can take the other themes that will be listed after the section on the Eucharist and follow the method used for any of them.

There are several external reasons why Francis dedicated so much energy and devotion to the Eucharist and inspired his brothers to do the same. Lateran Council IV imposed, upon all the Christian faithful, the obligation to receive the Eucharist regularly and at least once a year. Canon 20, admonished that everything appertaining to the Eucharist must be treated with the greatest of respect and the Eucharist has to be kept under lock and key. In 1219, Honorius III issued the decree *Sane cum olim*<sup>25</sup> to reinforce good practice. The Cathars denied orthodox belief about the Eucharist and this had exerted a great influence in certain parts of Christendom. The clergy were not all educated well enough to revive the practice of frequent reception and the laity had a poor understanding of the sacrament. Franciscans played a major role in transmitting the Church's teachings on everything concerning the Eucharist.

### The Eucharist in the Writings of Francis

Francis clearly had great devotion to the Eucharist: remember that he only and always refers to this sacrament as the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Francis' theology of the Eucharist includes his belief that the Eucharist continues the revelation of the Incarnation and that it commemorates Christ's redeeming sacrifice. In this sacrament we see, in a very concrete way, a realisation of the promise that Christ would be with us always.

Writings concerning the Eucharist:

*Adm.* 1

*Later Admonition and Exhortation* 6 – 13, 22 - 24, 33-36)

*Earlier Rule* Ch 20

*Test.* 8 – 13

*Letter to the Clergy* (whole text)

*Letter to the Entire Order* (esp 12 – 37)

*Letter to the Rulers of the Peoples* 6

*A Prayer Inspired by the Our Father* 6

*Second Letter to Custodians* 4

### Admonition 1

This admonition opens with Christ's words, "I am the way, the truth and the life." This admonition is the first admonition of 28, aimed at to his brothers, so it sets the scene, not only for this admonition but for the whole. Concerning the Eucharist, this is the opening

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<sup>25</sup> This decree can be read in footnote a, 1 FA:ED p55.

sentence of an admonition devoted to the meaning of this mystery and sacrament<sup>26</sup>.

The admonition continues with John 14:6-9:

- No-one comes to the Father except through me
- If you knew me you would know my Father
- From now on you do know Him and have seen Him
- Then Philip's question about showing us the Father
- Whoever sees me sees my Father as well

The admonition builds on the revelation of the Father through the Son, although the Father remains inaccessible. The Father is spirit and can only be seen through the Spirit: there is a spiritual, faith-based sight as well as physical eyesight. The Holy Spirit alone enables the faithful, not only to see our Lord in the Eucharist, but to receive Him worthily. For Christians, in the Eucharist, the eyes of faith have to be used alongside the eyes of the flesh. Seeing encompasses contemplation, insight, revelation and appearance (all of which feature in this admonition). The Spirit brings life which the body cannot offer.

Francis states that faith was essential even when Christ lived among us: for the disciples because it was not enough for them to respond to the physical and human presence of Jesus of Nazareth, they had to spiritually see His Divinity.

The Eucharist leads to eternal life.

Given all this, Francis admonishes Christians to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord in the right spirit, or face condemnation. Reception must be in the Spirit.

Francis then points to the humility of Jesus, the Son of God "each day He humbles Himself as when He came from the royal throne into the Virgin's womb: each day He comes down from the bosom of the Father upon the altar in the hands of a priest" (nn16-18<sup>27</sup>). The revelation today is just as it was for the apostles in the flesh, we see bread and wine with our bodily eyes but with our spiritual eyes we see "that they are his holy Body and Blood living and true. And in this way the Lord is always with His faithful, as He Himself says: Behold I am with you until the end of the age,"(n 22-3)

In addition to having a fervent desire to see Jesus, Francis also desired to be with the Father and it is Jesus that makes this possible, "I am the way the truth and the life". Christ reveals and leads us to the Father; the Eucharist is a continuation of the revelation that took place in the womb of the Virgin and Francis saw the consecration of the bread and wine on the altar as a new Incarnation. The altar is like a crib where the Son of the Father comes each day.

As with the apostles, we have an incarnational faith: For Francis the Eucharist is the mystery of manifestation.

This admonition contains almost everything Francis will go on to write about the

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<sup>26</sup> The source for much of the content of this admonition is the *Tractatus de Corpore Domini* written by the anonymous Cistercian, the Pseudo-Bernard and can be found in *The Admonitions* by Robert Karris.

<sup>27</sup> "Comes to" and "comes from the royal throne". Are taken from a liturgy for the Christmas season, Wisdom 18:5.

Eucharist although you need to read and reflect upon all the writings to have a full insight into what Francis believed and taught. Therefore you should read the extracts listed above. Some of the developments that emerge are given below:

### **The Eucharist in Other Writings of Francis:**

Of *2Lt F*, which you studied in Lesson Three, nn4-5 is concerned with the Annunciation and the Incarnation, nn6-13 is about whole the Paschal mystery. This latter section talks about the sacrifice and oblation of Christ on the Cross and how that is to be an example for us. Nn 22-24 emphasise devout reception of the Eucharist which Christians must receive.

*ER*, Ch 20 n 5 is about being prepared properly and receiving the Eucharist “with great humility and respect”.

*Test.* 10-13 follows Francis’ statement of faith in priests.

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 honoured and venerated above all things and I want to reserve them in precious places.

Other features of Francis writings on the Eucharist appear in the Testament, namely respect is universally due to all priests because they administer the Sacrament (and Francis also talks about them administering the Word); and great reverence is also to be accorded to the places in which the Sacrament is reserved. In fact, Francis exhorts and admonishes respect for anything and any place directly connected with the Scriptures and the Sacraments, so holy Words must be gathered up if found in appropriate places. This is spelt out in great detail in the *Exhortations to the Clergy*.

In *LtOrd*, Francis has many instructions specifically for priests. It contains a powerful exhortation concerning the Eucharist:

Let everyone be struck with fear, let the whole world tremble, and let the heavens exult when Christ, the Son of the living God, is present on the altar in the hands of a priest.

O wonderful loftiness and stupendous dignity!

O sublime humility!

The Lord of the Universe, God and the Son of God, so humbles Himself, that for our salvation He hides Himself under an ordinary piece of bread!

Brothers, look at the humility of God and pour out your hearts before Him! Humble yourselves that you may be exalted by Him! Hold back nothing of yourselves for

yourselves, that He Who gives Himself totally to you may receive you totally!<sup>28</sup>

This short text summarises why Francis saw Jesus as the model of poverty and humility. It captures the mystery of divinity, not only willing to take on the infinitely poorer state of humanity, but to go even further, taking the form of bread. Francis wrote this after the stigmata episode, at the end of his life. Something of his mysticism and his sense of appreciating the humility of his Lord remains for us in these words. Francis exhorted his brothers, as he drove himself, to surrender totally to God. The incarnation and humility of the Divine demand nothing less if we are seriously intent upon following faithfully in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Most of Francis' writings are directed towards followers, people for whom he was a spiritual and pastoral guide. Such was his concern about the Eucharist that Francis even wrote a letter to the Rulers of the Peoples, which is not in any way qualified, so was addressed to anyone who had the authority of ruling people. This letter includes the following:

Therefore, I advise you, my Lords, to put aside all care and preoccupation and receive the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ with fervour in holy remembrance of Him. May you foster such honour to the Lord among the people entrust to you that every evening an announcement may be made by a messenger of some other sign that praise and thanksgiving may be given to the all-powerful Lord.

As we will not refer again to this letter I added the second part to draw attention to another drive in Francis, to exhort in everyone a spirit of praise and thanksgiving to God.

There is nothing new in the other two references above. Another lesson will include the *Paraphrase of the Our Father* and will return to this subject.

### **Conclusion:**

Studying this topic will have introduced you to some very important aspects of Francis' thoughts and beliefs. You will have seen that Francis readily used other sources although they would not always be recognisable to us today. In his writings he shows that he has accepted and understood them.

Francis saw both the Incarnation and the presence of God in the Eucharist as examples of the incomprehensible scope of the humility and poverty the Lord. His understanding and grasp of this seemed to deepen and always seemed to inspire him. This inspiration can be as powerful today as it was in his time. Reflection on the readings you have studied may help you to understand better why Francis is so influenced by the poverty of Jesus and that the spiritual poverty Christ willingly experienced was as important as the physical poverty of his life on earth. Everyone can seek to live in a spirit of spiritual poverty regardless of their status in society.

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<sup>28</sup> *LtOrd* nn 26-29

We may sometimes forget that only priests touched the Body and Blood of Christ at that time but the call to respect everything connected to this sacrament may touch all those who can administer the Eucharist today. For Francis, respect was due to every priest because of this ministry and nothing in the human life experience of a priest rendered them unable to consecrate and administer. When the priest was exercising ministry of the sacraments he was being Christ to those he served and this grace was not removed because of human frailty. Priests were exhorted and admonished so that they would be models of Christian living but nothing removed them from the grace of Ordination and its consequent rights and obligations.

Familiarity with these writings gives us some insight into how greatly Francis was affected by the institution and practice of the Eucharist. It helps us to see why the Franciscans were inspired to spread the teachings of the Church on everything concerning the Eucharist. It may renew our reverence for the sacrament and develop a fresh appreciation for what the Lord did when he left us this gift.

## Lesson Five

### A Prayer Inspired by the Our Father and the Office of the Passion

This lesson is devoted to two particular writings. The first one is a manuscript version of a commentary on the Our Father, something that has been common in the Christian tradition, providing a “catechism of prayer”<sup>29</sup> for listeners or readers. It is a development of a process familiar to Christians as part of personal prayer: breaking the prayer down into phrases that we meditate upon. The existence of a manuscript version suggests that Francis’ meditation was used to inspire, encourage or teach others. The second writing is from the *Office of the Passion*.

These two writings are familiar methods of prayer, the first because we practise it, the second because it was based on the liturgical format of the Liturgy of the Hours. Francis created this devotional office, a practice that stemmed from the monastic tradition and was to continue, although such offices “became increasingly independent and were seen as private prayers” at the time of Francis.<sup>30</sup> It is thought that Francis added this office to the Office of the Church, possible daily when practical.

#### A Prayer Inspired by the Our Father

Scholars have considered the authenticity of the text in the light of the fact that it was common practice in the Middle Ages for individuals to meditate on each phrase of the Our Father, and some such reflections, from respected teachers, were available and familiar to contemporaries. It is doubtful that the the whole content is original. However, Francis loved this prayer<sup>31</sup> and meditated on it frequently. Scholars who believe it is authentic base their argument on the style and selection of Biblical images and passages while acknowledging that he borrowed from other writings. My conclusion is that it is an expression of the inner life of Saint Francis and may be a sort of catechism of prayer.

What follows is a personal commentary on section of this writing.

#### Our Father:

##### “Father...Our Creator, Redeemer, Consoler, and Saviour”

Francis did not think of the persons of the Trinity in isolation. In his thoughts, God the Father referred both to the Father of all creation and, as Jesus was our brother, his Father was also a father to every individual. The Father is the “first person” of the unity which is Trinity so, in the reflection of Francis, Father God naturally encompassed the work we tend to associate with distinct persons of the Trinity: Father: creator, Son: redeemer, Holy Spirit; concoler.d The phrase ends with the addition of a fourth work of God, which we associate with the Son: “Saviour”. God’s plan was the salvation of the world He had created.

<sup>29</sup> Taken from the introductory notes on page 158 of 1 FA:ED

<sup>30</sup> Taken from the introductory notes on page 139 of 1 FA:ED

<sup>31</sup> *EpFid 2 21, ER 22:28*

**Who are in Heaven:**

Francis attributed all goodness to God, a familiar theme in his writings. Christians here on earth desire God to enlighten us, to enflame us with His love and to dwell in us so that we are filled but Francis's vision was not limited to earthly experience: it extended to the work of God in heaven. Francis seemed instinctively to relate to the Church militant and triumphant as a unity.

**Holy be Your Name:**

Using a name shows a desire to know that person and Francis prayed that our knowledge of God become clearer. Francis was inspired here by Ephesians 3:18. He reflected on some of the ways God works in salvation history: bestowing blessings; making promises and covenants that demonstrate His special relationship with His people and test fidelity. Francis also reminded the reader of the majesty of God, Who will come in judgment.

**Your Kingdom come:**

God's grace alone leads to the Kingdom. Francis looks forward to seeing and loving God clearly and being part of an eternal companionship in enjoyment of God.

**Your will be done on earth as in heaven:**

This is an exhortation to devote ourselves totally and wholeheartedly to obeying the two commandments of Jesus, in a heartfelt prayer that we develop in our service, love of and desire for God. It ends with a practical and realistic application for Christian living, that we may love our neighbour: "by rejoicing in the good of others as in our own, by suffering with others at their misfortunes, and by giving offence to no-one."

**Give us this day our daily bread:**

I combine these because in the original (Latin) version of the Our Father, *panem nostrum quotidianum* precedes *da nobis hodie*. Therefore, the exposition starts with our daily bread, which Francis understands as "your own beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ" Who is all we need. There is a recall of the sacrament of the Eucharist: "in remembrance, understanding and reverence". This section urges us to remember the love and goodness of God.

**Forgive us our trespasses:**

Forgiveness depends solely on God's mercy and "the power of the Passion" but Mary and the other saints intercede on our behalf.

**As we forgive those who trespass against us:**

As well as the belief that God can teach us to forgive and that we can forgive enemies, Francis includes something practically achievable – intercession for enemies. It ends with the exhortation to strive to return no one evil and to help everyone in God which provides another practical key for living the Christian life.

### **And lead us not into temptation**

A succinct four adjectives that can be applied the range of temptations everyone experiences. They could be used as categories under which you could carry out in an examination of conscience: hidden, obvious, sudden, persistent.

### **But deliver us from evil:**

Another concise exposition that indicates that evil is ever present and reminds us that we can pray for delivery from past and future as well as present evil.

The prayer concludes with the “Glory”.

### **The Office of the Passion (Of P):**

*The Geste of the Great King* by Laurent Gallant and André Cirino has made a major contribution to the Franciscan family by making this writing much better known. It includes new musical adaptations composed so the Office can be sung in a style of that period. Francis.

Of P is a recreation of the Passion, Paschal and Advent-Nativity of Christ in the form of a Psalmody consisting of fifteen psalms. “New” psalms are composed from a re-arrangement of Scriptural texts. Francis knew Scriptures and liturgical readings so well that he could recall appropriate selections for every season. In the Office, Christ speaks through the texts, acting out his own story as if in the present. The resulting compilation removes the reader from chronological time, as salvation history is timeless. The office developed as a work in progress over years. Francis initially focused on the Passion. The last psalm is a Nativity psalm. The later sections are thought to be less “finished”.<sup>32</sup>

The office would have been said regularly, beginning with the *Praises to be Said at all the Hours*; each psalm would begin and end with the same *Antiphon to Our Lady* and the offices finished with the same prayer.<sup>33</sup>

I have selected Psalm VI<sup>34</sup> to show how Francis was able to create something fresh with only slight alterations to the original. Psalm VI is the Psalm for None, the hour of the Christ’s death. Psalm 22(21) forms the backbone of the first ten of sixteen verses. The opening is from Lamentations<sup>35</sup> “O all of you who pass along the way look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow.”

In the previous psalms Francis had used occasional verses from Psalm 21, the psalm from which the Passion narratives in Matthew and Mark had taken the words “My God, my

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<sup>32</sup>Theme of the 15 psalms: 1- 6: Passion of Jesus; Psalm 6- 7: Glorification and exaltation, Ascension; 8-9 continues these themes but composed specifically for Compline on Holy Saturday and Matins of Easter Sunday; 10: Psalm of praise and glory; 11,12: psalms of trust and hope in the Lord; 13-14 Advent psalms; 15: Nativity Psalm. There are suggestions and instructions for anyone wanting to use these psalms, as Francis and the Brother did but in addition to their daily Office. Clear instructions are included in the *Geste of the Great King*.

<sup>33</sup>The Antiphon and Prayer are on page 141 of 1 FA:ED and the Praises are on page 161. The Psalms can be found in between these pages,

<sup>34</sup>1FA:ED p146-7

<sup>35</sup>Lam 1:12

God why have you deserted me” to place on the lips of Jesus at this hour, and that Christians associate, because of its graphic nature, with the crucifixion scene.

Verses 2-5 consist of Psalm 21: 17-19 with a change in the order:

Psalm VI Of P	Psalm 21
For many dogs surrounded me A pack of evildoers closed in on me. They looked and stared at me; They divided my garments among them And they cast lots for my tunic. They pierced my hands and feet They counted all my bones; They opened their mouth against me Like a raging and roaring lion.	Many dogs have surrounded me. A band of wicked men beset me. They tear holes in my hands and my feet <b>16 c</b> * And lay me in the dust of death. I can count every one of my bones. These people stare at me and gloat; They divide my clothing among them. They cast lots for my robe.

Slight changes in the sequence place the staring of onlookers before the division of his garment.

Francis then takes Psalm 21: 14 - 16 retaining the first person, as in the original. Thus, the next verse VI: 6 is “I have been poured out like water...” and the narrative continues until VI : 9, so the reader is drawn into Christ’s inner, personal suffering as if he is being physically emptied.

Of P VI:9 the subject returns to the third person, the source is Psalm 68 (69):22, “For food **they** gave me poison; in my thirst **they** gave me vinegar to drink”. In Of P VI:19 Francis returned to Psalm 21:16c\* (in some versions 16c, as the table above indicates, is part of verse 17 [d] as above) and adds a few of his own words: They led me into the dust of death and added sorrow to my wounds”.

The mood changes in Of P VI :11: “I have slept and have risen and **my most holy Father** has received me with glory.” The section in bold print has been adapted by Francis, the opening phrase is from Psalm 3;6 and the closing phrase is based on Psalm 72 (73):24. Of P VI continues, using Psalm 72 (73): 25 -26; psalm 46:11, psalm 34:23 and 96:11 with allusion also to Luke 1:68 and John 17:11.

Composed for the actual moment of Christ’s death, this re-working enables the reader to engage with and contemplate the Crucifixion scene in a fresh way: verses 1-10 draw the reader into that scene very effectively, especially by the change in order, but a change of mood comes with the phrase, “I have slept and risen”, which restores peace. Then the reader is taken into the Johannine account: “Now has the Son of Man been glorified and in him God has been glorified<sup>36</sup>”, although Francis conveys this using Old Testament Psalms.

This approach can be applied to other psalms in the Of P which can be used as an aid to contemplative prayer. Most editions of the writings of Francis offer suggestions to help the contemporary reader find the biblical sources used by Francis

<sup>36</sup> John 13:31

**Some Observations:**

These are examples of meditations that can be composed by anyone who has the relevant knowledge and understanding. They were common in Francis' life-time. The manuscript editions will have been the fruit of years during which Francis was maturing spiritually and developing insight into the great mysteries of faith.

We have seen that Francis used his knowledge and excellent recall in his prayer and meditation, and both these writings show that Francis was able to bring the past and present together, and that he had a profound understanding of the whole of salvation history. Francis could imagine Jesus in dialogue with His Father on the human level without losing sight of the Divine, mysterious, inscrutable God. He held both of these images and the mysteries surrounding them together comfortably.

There are examples of a very practical approach to faith life so that everyone can live their faith fully in line with their personal experience and spiritual maturity. These meditations could be shared by many Christians.

Francis' writings could bring fresh insights without being "new". The fact that he was not an educated cleric, philosopher or theologian, more a vernacular theologian and mystic, means that he remained free from the restraints imposed on academics and the literary formats and genres that they would have to apply.

The writings give readers an insight into the profundity of Francis' thoughts and his inspiration. They are accessible but through repeated reading, understanding deepens and appreciation grows.

# Lesson Six

## A Medley of Other Writings

This lesson will give a brief introduction to some of the other writings of Francis. From some of these I have taken extracts that may be useful for you to be able to locate and/or seem to convey something of value that will deepen your insight into Francis. I will refer to other texts in full. There will remain some writings that I make no detailed reference to and for those who want to read and explore these, the bibliography provides a useful starting point.

I will follow the order in which these writings occur in 1 FA:ED.

### **A Rule for Hermitages:**

This is an inspirational text. Francis must have seen across many examples of eremitical life on his travels. Many friaries were built around hillside caves, remote from populated areas and some friars preferred the eremitical life. Francis sought the help of St Clare and Sylvester as part of his discernment whether to be contemplative or active – the answer was to be active but with periods of retreat, many of which are detailed in the Franciscan sources.

Francis wanted all the active brothers to take time in retreat. This rule shows that there was a recommended Franciscan way of living the contemplative experiences. There were to be three, at most, four. Two of them were to be mothers and at least one was to be a son but these roles would be alternated. The mothers dealt with the outside world and necessary affairs but the sons were not to speak to anyone other than the mothers. There was to be some communal prayer.

### **The Letter to a Minister:**

This is a very challenging letter and it is a reply to a request from a minister who wanted to abandon his fraternity to live in a hermitage. He was not given permission, as you will see.

The minister was finding fraternal life very difficult and wanted to be free. Francis admonished him to accept the obstacles and impediments he was experiencing, to love his brothers and not to wish that they be better Christians. “And let this be more than a hermitage to you.” (n 8)

The letter then goes in to forgiveness:

There is not any brother in the world who has sinned- however much he could have sinned- who after he has looked into your eyes, would ever depart without your mercy, if he is looking for mercy. And if he were not looking for mercy, you would ask him if he wants mercy. And if he would sin a thousand times before your eyes, love

him more than me so you may draw him to the Lord; and always be merciful with brothers such as these.

We can only feel sympathy for the minister. This letter is about another key characteristic of Franciscan life – fraternity and it is clear from Francis’ admonitions that fraternity life was not always easy. Francis expected much. At the same time we know of episodes where he had compassion when brothers could not live up to the ideal.

### **A Letter to Brother Anthony of Padua**

This is the full content of the letter:

I am pleased that you teach sacred theology to the brothers providing that, as is contained in the Rule, you “do not extinguish the Spirit of prayer and devotion” during study of this kind.

This text is often quoted because of the ambivalent attitude to education in the history of the Franciscan movement. As in other institutions, education took brothers away from fraternal life and required dedication of time and use of books. Some brothers were critical of the privileges and distance that education seemed to bring.

### **The Praises of God:**

I recommend this as a model that can be used in your prayer and because it lists certain attributes of God, including some that you may find surprising.

### **A Letter to Brother Leo:**

This has been seen as a model for spiritual guidance because it encourages Leo to follow the footprints of God as he sees fit but also makes it clear that he is most welcome to come to Francis any time “for the sake of your soul or for some consolation” (n 4).

### **The Antiphon to Our Lady:**

Mentioned in Of P, this is the antiphon for those psalms. It speaks of the uniqueness of Mary. Francis describes her as “daughter and servant of the most high and supreme King and of the Father in heaven, mother of our most holy Lord Jesus Christ, Spouse of the Holy Spirit...at the side of your most holy beloved Son, our Lord and Teacher.”

### **A Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary:**

This contains a litany of titles for Mary in terms of her son: she is His Palace, tabernacle, dwelling, Robe, Servant, Mother.

It also calls her “Virgin made Church” and then describes her as we could describe the Church: “Chosen by the most Holy Father in heaven whom he consecrated with His most holy beloved Son and with the Holy Spirit the Paraclete.”

Francis always had great devotion to our Lady, the Portiuncula is the Church of Our Lady of the Angels and when La Verna was developed as a sanctuary, Francis had a church built there dedicated to Our Lady of the Angels, to be built to the exact dimensions of the Portiuncula, (although it had to be lengthened later). He regarded her as a patron and an inspiration. She was a living part of the Incarnation and the other mysteries in the life of her Son and Francis revered her for her submission and obedience to the will of the Father.

### **The Canticle of the Creatures:**

This writing needs no introduction so I have not included it for further study. I just want to call to mind that Francis composed this near the end of his life, when he was extremely ill and almost totally blind. It is a composition by someone very close to God who wanted God praised, as he praised God, in every experience of life. It demands a spirit of pardon and welcomes sister Bodily Death.

### **The Admonitions:**

This collection of admonitions was written for the brothers. Study of them will give you a great insight into many principles of Francis' faith life. However, I believe sufficient for an introduction to them is simply to read them. For those who want to discover more about Francis through them, I suggest further study with plenty of time and space to meditate on, with and through them.

They include a commentary on the Beatitudes as the ideal for Franciscan fraternal life. We have noted the content of Admonition 1. You may find certain phrases or sections that appeal personally to you from an initial reading.

### **Conclusion:**

You will now have a flavour of the writings of Francis. There are now many scholarly works on them but generally they focus on particular writings or themes, often concerning Francis' understanding of God, humanity, the various Franciscan "families", the recurring concerns his writings return to. They often draw conclusions about Francis' theology, philosophy, spirituality, fitting into such literary categories. I have not found a simple introductory text, except in the introductory sections to collections of writings, or in the introduction to separate writings.

Many writings date from later in his life when Francis had to withdraw from activity because of illness. The letters, in particular, are pastoral. They can have a sense of urgency and there is common subject matter, although with a different emphasis or from a different perspective. There are several rules but generally they are guides to living, or certain aspects of life, rather than juridical documents. Some writing can be classified as prayers but prayers pervade.

Francis' familiarity with, and ability to recall, a range of religious sources is increasingly appreciated as scholars look for influences. The writings are the fruit of many years of reading, listening, being attentive, dialogue, staying in different religious places and a mind that seemed to be hungry for more. The writer reflected, meditated, contemplated, dialogued, fired by a yearning and unquenchable love for the Lord, a desire to empty himself, in obedience to the will of the Father which he struggled to discern. His life brought him to a close communion of love with his Lord which was accompanied by great personal suffering so that his writings hint at a profundity and understanding of the mysteries of faith. Francis was an inspirational leader and lived among the people who often wanted to imitate him. He was not a remote academic He was pragmatic but he learned to be merciful. His life was dedicated to opening his experience of the goodness and love of God to everyone and to spreading the message of salvation which he seems to have understood clearly.

Following the footprints of our Lord Jesus Christ led to Francis seeing everyone, A and all creation, as brothers of Jesus and sons and daughter of the Father. It led Francis to a

way of humility, poverty, minority, fraternity and prayer. His writings bring some of these characteristics into sharper focus and real life.

What we do not have is a systematic opus, nor even works that were designed to be written, digested, analysed and revisited. Some of the writings available to us are, to a certain extent, random – a record of what was captured in the extant manuscripts. The Order only made regular use of very few. The fact that Francis was not an educated teacher meant that his writings would not necessarily have seemed of lasting value.

We maybe have, however, something of the heart of Francis that would never be captured through the legends. I believe that familiarity with his writings help to get to appreciate him better.

## Unit Two, Module One

### Final Assignment

Write an essay answering one of the following:

1. The *Earlier Rule* is a very important source concerning the early years of the Order of Lesser Brothers.  
Explain why it is regarded as a particularly valuable source.  
Consider minority as presented in the *ER*. Assess critically the effect that living according to this principle had on the development of the Order.
2. Describe and evaluate the interpretation, found in Lesson 3, that the life of penance is summarised in the *Earlier Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance* (nn 1-4) and the *Testament* of Francis (nn 1-3)
3. Examine the Eucharist as a subject in the writings of Francis. Consider and comment on the usefulness today of these writings in understanding the Eucharist.