

1. The First Letter to the Faithful

This early writing of the saint is an exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of the Order of Penitents, those lay people who desired to share in Francis' Gospel vision. It has been included in the new Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order approved by Paul VI in 1978.

In the name of the Lord!

Those Who Do Penance

All who love the Lord with their whole heart, their whole soul and mind, and with their strength, and love their neighbour as themselves, and who despise the tendency in their humanity to sin, receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and bring forth from within themselves fruits worthy of true penance.

How happy and blessed are these men and women when they do these things, and persevere in doing them because “the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon them,” and the Lord will make “His home and dwelling place with them.”

They are the children of the Heavenly Father whose works they do. They are the spouses, brothers and mothers of Our Lord Jesus Christ. We are his spouses when the faithful soul is united by the Holy Spirit with Our Lord Jesus Christ. We are brothers when we do the will of the Father who is in Heaven. We are mothers when we bear Him in our hearts and bodies with divine love and with pure and sincere consciences; and we give birth to him through a holy life which should enlighten others because of our example.

How glorious it is to have so holy and great a Father in Heaven; and to have such a beautiful and admirable Spouse, the Holy Paraclete; and to have a Brother and Son, so holy, beloved, blessed, humble, peaceful, sweet, lovable and desirable over all things: Our Lord Jesus Christ who gave up his life for his sheep and prayed to the Father, saying: Holy Father, keep in your name those whom you gave me in the world; they are yours and you gave them to me. And the word which you gave me I gave to them, and they accepted it and truly believed that it came forth from you. And they have accepted that you sent me. I pray for them and not for the world. Bless them and sanctify them. I sanctify myself for their sakes. I do not pray only for these but also for those who, through their word, will believe in me; may they be holy in oneness as we are. Father, I wish that where I am they too may be and that they may see my glory in your kingdom.

Letter to Brother Leo

The letter is a touching document, which offers guidance in discernment, gives witness to the brotherly concern of Francis for his “lamb of God” – Brother Leo.

Brother Leo, wish your brother Francis health and peace!

I say to you: Yes, my son, and as a mother; for in this word and counsel I sum up briefly all the words we said on the road, and if afterwards you have need to come to me for advice, this I advise you: In whatever way it seems best to you to please the Lord God and to follow His footsteps and poverty, so do with the blessing of the Lord God and in my obedience. And if it be necessary for you on account of your soul or other consolation and you wish, Leo, to come to me, come!

2. A Letter to the Rulers of the Peoples

In this Letter Francis addresses the consuls or leaders of the Italian communes, and reminds them of their Christian duties. He particularly reminds them of the duty to provide means for praising God, and to see to it that their citizens be good Christians.

To all mayors and consuls, magistrates and rulers throughout the world, and to everyone who may receive these letters: Brother Francis, your little and despicable servant in the Lord God, sends his wishes of health and peace to all of you.

Pause and reflect, for the day of death is approaching. I beg you, therefore, with all possible respect, not to forget the Lord or turn away from His commandments by reason of the cares and preoccupations of this world, for all those who are oblivious of Him and turn away from His commands are cursed and will be totally forgotten by Him. And when the day of death does come, everything which they think they have will be taken from them. And the wiser and more powerful they may have been in this world, so much greater will be the punishments they will endure in hell.

Therefore, I firmly advise you, my lords, to put aside all care and preoccupation and receive with joy the most holy Body and the most holy Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ in holy remembrance of Him.

And you should manifest such honor to the Lord among the people entrusted to you that every evening an announcement be made by a town crier or some other signal that praise and thanks may be given by all people to the all-powerful Lord God. And if you do not do this, know that you must render an account before the Lord your God, Jesus Christ, on the day of judgment.

Let those who keep this writing with them and observe it know that they will be blessed by the Lord God.

3. A Letter to Saint Anthony

Before Anthony, taught theology to the friar-students in Bologna around the year 1222 he sought Francis' permission. Francis approves Anthony's academic vocation, but exhorts him not to extinguish the "spirit of prayer and devotion"

I Brother Francis send wishes of health to Brother Anthony, my bishop. It pleases me that you teach sacred theology to the brothers, as long as in the words of the Rule you "do not extinguish the Spirit of prayer and devotion" with study of this kind.

4. A Letter to a Minister

In this beautiful letter Francis encourages a minister, a regional leader among the friars, to trust in God and live in compassion – even in the most difficult situations.

To Brother N., minister: May the Lord bless you

I speak to you, as I can, concerning the state of your soul. You should accept as a grace all those things which deter you from loving the Lord God and whoever has become an impediment to you, whether they are brothers or others, even if they lay hands on you.

And you should desire that things be this way and not otherwise. And let this be an expression of true obedience to the Lord God and to me, for I know full well that this is true obedience. And love those who do these things to you. And do not expect anything different from them, unless it is something which the Lord shall have given to you. And love them in this and do not wish that they be better Christians. And let this be more valuable to you than a hermitage.

And by this I wish to know if you love the Lord God and me, his servant and yours if you have acted in this manner: that is, there should not be any brother in the world who has sinned, however much he may have possibly sinned, who, after he has looked into your eyes, would go away without having received your mercy, if he is looking for mercy. And if he were not to seek mercy, you should ask him if he wants mercy. And if he should sin thereafter a thousand times before your very eyes, love him more than me so that you may draw him back to the Lord. Always be merciful to brothers such as these. And announce this to the guardians, as you can, that on your part you are resolved to act in this way.

At the Pentecost Chapter, however, with the help of God and the advice of the brothers, out of all the chapters of the Rule that treat of mortal sin we shall make one chapter such as this:

If any one of the brothers at the instigation of the enemy should sin mortally, he is bound by obedience to have recourse to his guardian. And all the brothers who might know that he has sinned are not to bring shame upon him or speak ill of him, but let them show great mercy toward him and keep most secret the sin of their brother; because it is not the healthy who are in need of the physician, but those who are sick (Mt 9:12). Likewise let them be bound by obedience to send him to his custodian with a companion. And let that custodian mercifully take care of him as he would like to be taken care of if he were in a similar position (cf. Mt 7:12). And if he falls into some venial sin, let him confess this to a brother who is a priest. And if there is no priest at hand, let him confess to his brother, until he has contact with a priest who will absolve him canonically, as it has been laid down. And the brothers who are not priests should have no power to enjoin any other penance except this: Go and sin no more (cf. Jn 8:11).

Keep this writing with you until the Chapter of Pentecost that it may be better observed, when you will be there with your brothers. And you will take care to add, with the help of God, these things and all else which is lacking in the Rule.

5. To All the Custodes

This letter forms part of Francis' 'Eucharistic Crusade' – he writes of the importance of loving reverence for the gift of the Eucharist on the part of priests and all the faithful.

To all the custodes of the Friars Minor to whom this letter shall come, Brother Francis, your servant and little one in the Lord God, sends greeting with new signs of heaven and earth which on the part of the Lord are great and most excellent and which are accounted least of all by many religious and by other men.

I entreat you more than if it were a question of myself that, when it is becoming and it may seem to be expedient, you humbly beseech the clerics to venerate above all the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and His Holy Name and written words which sanctify the body. They ought to hold as precious the chalices, corporals, ornaments of the altar, and all that pertain to the Sacrifice. And if the most holy Body of the Lord be lodged very poorly in any place, let It according to the command of the Church be placed by them and left in a precious place, and let It be carried with great veneration and administered to others with discretion. The Names also and written words of the Lord, wherever they may be found in unclean places, let them be collected, and they ought to be put in a proper place.

And in all the preaching you do, admonish the people concerning penance and that no one can be saved except he that receives the most sacred Body and Blood of the Lord. And while It is being sacrificed by the priest on the altar and It is being carried to

any place, let all the people on bended knees render praise, honour, and glory to the Lord God Living and True.

And you shall so announce and preach His praise to all peoples that at every hour and when the bells are rung praise and thanks shall always be given to the Almighty God by all the people through the whole earth.

And to whomsoever of my brothers, custodes, this writing shall come, let them copy it and keep it with them and cause it to be copied for the brothers who have the office of preaching and the care of brothers, and let them unto the end preach all those things that are contained in this writing: let them know they have the blessing of the Lord God and mine. And let these be for them through true and holy obedience.

6. The Rule for Hermitages

This short Rule provides guidance for a contemplative experience of fraternity in solitude.

Let those who wish to live religiously in hermitages, be three brothers or four at most. Let two of them be mothers and have two sons, or at least one. Let the two former lead the life of Martha and the other two the life of Mary Magdalene.

Let those who lead the life of Mary have one cloister and each his own place, so that they may not live or sleep together. And let them always say Compline of the day toward sunset, and let them be careful to keep silence and to say their Hours and to rise for Matins, and let them seek first “the kingdom of God and His justice.” And let them say Prime and Tierce at the proper time, and, after the hour of Tierce, they may break silence and may speak and, when it is pleasing to them, they may go to their mothers and may ask an alms from them for the love of the Lord God, like little poor ones. And after that, let them say Sext and Nones and Vespers at the appointed time.

And they must not allow any person to enter into the cloister where they live, or let them eat there. Let those brothers who are mothers endeavour to keep apart from every person and, by the obedience of their custos, let them guard their sons from every person, so that no one may speak with them. And let these sons not speak with any person except with their mothers and with their custos, when it shall please him to visit them with the blessing of God. But the sons must sometimes in turn assume the office of mothers, for a time, according as it may seem to them to dispose. Let them strive to observe all the above diligently and earnestly.

7. The Admonitions of St Francis

The Admonitions are a group of 28 short, deeply spiritual exhortations given by Francis to the brothers, probably during the celebration of General Chapters of the Order.

I. THE BODY OF CHRIST

1. The Lord Jesus says to his disciples: I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me. 2. If you had known me, you would also have known my Father and from now on you will know him and have seen him. 3. Philip says to him: Lord, show us the Father and it is enough for us. Jesus says to him: 4. Have I been with you for so long a time and you have not known me? Philip, whoever sees me, sees also my Father (Jn. 14:6-9). 5. Sacred Scripture says that the Father lives in inaccessible light (cf. 1 Tim. 6:16), and God is Spirit (Jn. 4:24) and, No one has ever seen God (Jn. 1:18). 6. Therefore he cannot be seen except in the Spirit since it is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh does not offer anything (Jn. 6:64). 7. But neither, inasmuch as he is equal to the Father, is the Son seen by anyone other than the Father [or] other than the Holy Spirit. 8. Therefore all those who saw the Lord Jesus according to [his] humanity and did not see and believe according to the Spirit and the Godhead that he is the true Son of God were condemned. 9. And now in the same way, all those who see the sacrament (of the body of Christ), which is sanctified by the words of the Lord upon the altar at the hands of the priest in the form of bread and wine, and who do not see and believe according to the Spirit and the Godhead that it is truly the most holy body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, are condemned. 10. [This] is attested by the Most High himself Who says: This is my body and the blood of my new testament [which will be poured out for many] (cf. Mk. 14:22, 24) 11. and he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life (cf. Jn. 6:55). 12. And so it is really the Spirit of the Lord, Who lives in his faithful, Who receives the most holy body and blood of the Lord. 13. All others who do not share in this same Spirit and who presume to receive him eat and drink judgment to themselves (cf. 1 Cor. 11:29). 14. Therefore, O sons of men, how long will you be hard of heart? (Ps. 4:3) 15. Why do you not recognize the truth and believe in the Son of God? (cf. Jn. 9:35) 16. See, daily he humbles himself (cf. Phil. 2:8) as when he came from the royal throne (Wis. 18:15) into the womb of the Virgin; 17. daily he comes to us in a humble form; 18. daily he comes down from the bosom of the Father (cf. Jn. 1:18) upon the altar in the hands of the priest. 19. And as he appeared to the holy apostles in true flesh, so now he reveals himself to us in the Sacred Bread. 20. And as they saw only his flesh by means of their bodily sight, yet believed him to be God as they contemplated him with the eyes of faith, 21. so, as we see bread and wine with [our] bodily eyes, we too are to see and firmly believe them to be his most holy body and blood living and true. 22. And in this way the Lord is always with his faithful, as he himself says: Behold I am with you even to the end of the world (cf. Mt. 28:20).

II. THE EVIL OF SELF-WILL

1. The Lord said to Adam: Eat of every tree; do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (cf. Gn. 2:16-17). 2. He was able to eat of every tree of paradise since he did not sin as long as he did not go against obedience. 3. For the person eats of the tree of the knowledge of good who appropriates to himself his own will and thus exalts himself over the good things which the Lord says and does in him; 4. and thus, through the suggestion of the devil and the transgression of the command, what he eats becomes for him the fruit of the knowledge of evil. 5. Therefore it is necessary that he bear the punishment.

III. PERFECT OBEDIENCE

1. The Lord says in the Gospel: He who does not renounce everything he possesses cannot be my disciple (Lk. 14:33); 2. and: He who wishes to save his life must lose it (Lk. 9:24). 3. That person leaves everything he possesses and loses his body who surrenders his whole self to obedience at the hands of his prelate. 4. And whatever he does and says which he knows is not contrary to his [prelate's] will, provided that what he does is good, is true obedience. 5. And should the subject sometimes see that some things might be better and more useful for his soul than what the prelate may command him, let him willingly offer such things to God as a sacrifice; and instead earnestly try to fulfill the wishes of the prelate. 6. For this is loving obedience because it pleases God and neighbor. 7. But if the prelate should command something contrary to his conscience, although [the subject] does not obey him, still he should not abandon him. 8. And if in consequence he suffers persecution from others, let him love them even more for [the love of] God. 9. For whoever chooses to endure persecution rather than be separated from his brothers truly remains in perfect obedience for he lays down his life (Jn. 15:13) for his brothers. 10. There are indeed many religious who, under the pretext of seeking something better than what the prelate commands, look back (cf. Lk. 9:62) and return to the vomit of their own will (cf. Prv. 26:11; 2 Pt. 2:22); 11. these are murderers who cause many souls to perish by reason of their bad example.

IV. LET NO ONE APPROPRIATE TO HIMSELF THE ROLE OF BEING OVER OTHERS

1. I did not come to be served but to serve (cf. Mt. 10:28), says the Lord. 2. Those who are placed over others should glory in such an office only as much as they would were they assigned the task of washing the feet of the brothers. 3. And the more they are upset about their office being taken from them than they would be over the loss of the office of [washing] feet, so much the more do they store up treasures to the peril of their souls (cf. Jn. 12:6).

V. NO ONE SHOULD BOAST IN HIMSELF BUT RATHER GLORY IN THE CROSS OF THE LORD

1. Be conscious, O man, of the wondrous state in which the Lord God has placed you, for he created you and formed you to the image of his beloved Son according to the body, and to his likeness according to the spirit (cf. Gn. 1:26). 2. And [yet] all the creatures under heaven, each according to its nature, serve, know, and obey their Creator better than you. 3. And even the demons did not crucify him, but you together with them have crucified him and crucify him even now by delighting in vices and sins. 4. In what then can you glory? 5. For if you were so subtle and wise that you had all knowledge (cf. 1 Cor. 13:2) and knew how to interpret all tongues (cf. 1 Cor. 12:28) and minutely investigate [the course of] the heavenly bodies, in all these things you could not glory, 6. for one demon knew more about the things of earth than all men together, even if there may have been someone who received from the Lord a special knowledge of the highest wisdom. 7. likewise, even if you were more handsome and richer than everyone else and even if you performed wonders such as driving out demons, all these things would be an obstacle to you and none of them would belong to you nor could you glory in any of these things. 8. But in this we can glory: in our infirmities (cf. 2 Cor. 12:5) and bearing daily the holy Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Lk. 14:27).

VI. THE IMITATION OF THE LORD

1. Let all of us, brothers, look to the Good Shepherd Who suffered the passion of the Cross to save his sheep. 2. The sheep of the Lord followed him in tribulation and persecution, in insult and hunger, in infirmity and temptation, and in everything else and they have received everlasting life from the Lord because of these things. 3. Therefore, it is a great shame for us, servants of God, that while the saints [actually] did such things, we wish to receive glory and honor by [merely] recounting their deeds.

VII. GOOD WORKS MUST FOLLOW KNOWLEDGE

1. The Apostle says: The letter kills, but the spirit gives life (2 Cor. 3:6). 2. Those are killed by the letter who merely wish to know the words alone, so that they may be esteemed as wiser than others and be able to acquire great riches to give to [their] relatives and friends. 3. In a similar way, those religious are killed by the letter who do not wish to follow the spirit of Sacred Scripture, but who wish to know [what] the words [are] and [how to] interpret them to others. 4. And those are given life by the spirit of Sacred Scripture who do not refer to themselves any text which they know or seek to know, but, by word and example, return everything to the most high Lord God to Whom every good belongs.

VIII. THE AVOIDANCE OF THE SIN OF ENVY

1. The Apostle says: No one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3); 2. and: There is no one who does good, not even one (Rom. 3:12). 3. Therefore, whoever envies his brother the good which the Lord says or does in him commits a sin

of blasphemy, because he envies the Most High Who says and does every good (cf. Mt. 20:15).

IX. TRUE LOVE

1. The Lord says: Love your enemies [do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute and blame you] (Mt. 5:44). 2. That person truly loves his enemy who is not upset at any injury which is done to himself, 3. but out of love of God is disturbed at the sin of the other's soul. 4. And let him show his love for the other by his deeds.

X. THE CHASTISEMENT OF THE BODY

1. Many people, when they sin or receive an injury, often blame the Enemy or some neighbor. 2. But this is not right, for each one has the [real] enemy in his own power; that is, the body through which he sins. 3. Therefore blessed is that servant (Mt. 24:46) who, having such an enemy in his power, will always hold him captive and wisely guard himself against him, because as long as he does this, no other enemy, seen or unseen, will be able to harm him.

XI. NO ONE SHOULD BE CORRUPTED BY THE EVIL OF ANOTHER

1. Nothing should upset the servant of God except sin. 2. And no matter how another person may sin, if the servant of God lets himself become angry and disturbed because of this, [and] not because of love, he stores up the guilt for himself (cf. Rom. 2:5). 3. The servant of God who does not become angry or upset at anything lives justly and without anything of his own. 4. And he is blessed who does not keep anything for himself, rendering to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's (Mt. 22:21).

XII. HOW TO DISCERN WHETHER ONE HAS THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD

1. A servant of God may be recognized as possessing the Spirit of the Lord in this way: 2. if the flesh does not pride itself when the Lord performs some good through him since the flesh is always opposed to every good; 3. rather he considers himself the more worthless in his own eyes and esteems himself less than all others.

XIII. PATIENCE

1. Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God (Mt. 5:9). The servant of God cannot know how much patience and humility he has within himself as long as everything goes well with him. 2. But when the time comes in which those who should do him justice do quite the opposite to him, he has only as much patience and humility as he has on that occasion and no more.

XIV. POVERTY OF SPIRIT

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs (Mt. 5:3). 2. There are many who, applying themselves insistently to prayers and good deeds, engage in much abstinence and many mortifications of their bodies, 3. but they are scandalized and quickly roused to anger by a single word which seems injurious to their person, or by some other things which might be taken from them. 4. These [persons] are not poor in spirit because a person who is truly poor in spirit hates himself (cf. Lk. 14:26) and loves those who strike him on the cheek (cf. Mt. 5:39).

XV. PEACE

1. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God (Mt. 5:9). 2. The true peacemakers are those who preserve peace of mind and body for love of our Lord Jesus Christ, despite what they suffer in this world.

XVI. PURITY OF HEART

1. Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God (Mt. 5:8). 2. The truly pure of heart are those who despise the things of earth and seek the things of heaven, and who never cease to adore and behold the Lord God living and true with a pure heart and soul.

XVII. THE HUMBLE SERVANT OF GOD

1. Blessed is that servant (Mt. 24:46) who does not pride himself on the good that the Lord says or does through him any more than on what he says or does through another. 2. That person sins who wishes to receive more from his neighbor than what he is willing to give of himself to the Lord God.

XVIII. COMPASSION FOR ONE'S NEIGHBOR

1. Blessed is the person who bears with his neighbor in his weakness to the degree that he would wish to be sustained by him if he were in a similar situation (cf. Gal. 6:2; Mt. 7:12).

XIX. THE HAPPY SERVANT OF GOD

1. Blessed is the servant who attributes every good to the Lord God, for he who holds back something for himself hides within himself the money of his Lord God (Mt. 25:18), and that which he thought he had shall be taken away from him (Lk. 8:18).

XX. THE VIRTUOUS SERVANT OF GOD

1. Blessed is the servant who esteems himself no better when he is praised and exalted by people than when he is considered worthless, simple, and despicable 2. for what a man is before God, that he is and nothing more. 3. Woe to that religious who has been placed in a high position by others and does not wish to come down of his own will. 4.

And blessed is that servant (Mt. 24:46) who does not place himself in a high position of his own will and always desires to be under the feet of others.

XXI. THE GOOD AND THE VAIN RELIGIOUS

1. Blessed is that religious who takes no pleasure and joy except in the most holy words and deeds of the Lord 2. and with these leads people to the love of God in joy and gladness (cf. Ps. 50:10). 3. Woe to that religious who delights in idle and frivolous words and with these provokes people to laughter.

XXII. THE FRIVOLOUS AND TALKATIVE RELIGIOUS

1. Blessed is the servant who, when he speaks, does not reveal everything about himself in the hope of receiving a reward, and who is not quick to speak (cf. Prv. 29:20), but wisely weighs what he should say and how he should reply. 2. Woe to that religious who does not keep in his heart the good things the Lord reveals to him (cf. Lk. 2:19, 51) and who does not manifest them to others by his actions, but rather seeks to make such good things known by his words. 3. He thereby receives his reward (cf. Mt. 6:2, 16) while those who listen to him carry away but little fruit.

XXIII. CORRECTION

1. Blessed is the servant who would accept correction, accusation, and blame from another as patiently as he would from himself. 2. Blessed is the servant who when he is rebuked quietly agrees, respectfully submits, humbly admits his fault, and willingly makes amends. 3. Blessed is the servant who is not quick to excuse himself and who humbly accepts shame and blame for a sin, even though he did not commit any fault.

XXIV. HUMILITY

1. Blessed is the servant who is found to be as humble among his subjects as he would be among his masters. 2. Blessed is the servant who remains always under the rod of correction. He is the faithful and prudent servant (Mt. 24:45) who for all his offenses does not delay in punishing himself, inwardly through contrition and outwardly through confession and penance for what he did.

XXV. TRUE LOVE

Blessed is the servant who would love his brother as much when he is sick and cannot repay him as he would when he is well and can repay him. Blessed is the servant who would love and respect his brother as much when he is far from him as he would when he is with him and who would not say anything behind his back which in charity he could not say to his face.

XXVI. THE SERVANT OF GOD SHOULD HONOR THE CLERGY

1. Blessed is the servant who has faith in the clergy who live uprightly according to the norms of the Roman Church. 2. And woe to those who look down upon them; for even though they may be sinners, nonetheless no one is to judge them since the Lord alone reserves judgment on them to himself. 3. For inasmuch as their ministry is greater in that it concerns the most holy body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which they receive and which they alone administer to others, 4. so those who sin against them commit a greater sin than [if they sinned] against all other people of this world.

XXVII. HOW VIRTUE DRIVES OUT VICE

1. Where there is charity and wisdom, there is neither fear nor ignorance.
2. Where there is patience and humility, there is neither anger nor disturbance.
3. Where there is poverty with joy, there is neither covetousness nor avarice.
4. Where there is inner peace and meditation, there is neither anxiousness nor dissipation.
5. Where there is fear of the Lord to guard the house (cf. Lk. 11:21), there the enemy cannot gain entry.
6. Where there is mercy and discernment, there is neither excess nor hardness of heart.

XXVIII. HIDING A GOOD THING THAT IT MAY NOT BE LOST

Blessed is that servant who stores up in heaven (Mt. 6:20) the good things which the Lord has revealed to him and does not desire to reveal them to others in the hope of profiting thereby, 2. for the Most High himself will manifest his deeds to whomever he wishes. 3. Blessed is the servant who keeps the secrets of the Lord in his heart (cf. Lk. 2:19, 51).

8. The Rule of St Francis

The Papal Bull on the Rule of the Friars Minor given November 29, 1223 A. D. This Gospel Way of Life is the Rule the friars profess and it forms the foundation of their life within the Church.

To our beloved sons, Friar Francis and the other friars of the Order of the Friars Minor, health and apostolic Benediction:

The Apostolic See is accustomed to grant the pious desires and to share her kind favor with the upright desires of those petitioning her. Wherefore, beloved sons in the Lord, having yielded to your pious entreaties, We confirm by Our apostolic authority your rule, approved by Our predecessor, Pope Innocent, of good memory, quoted herein, and We strengthen it with the patronage of this present writing, which is as follows:

Chapter I

In the name of the Lord, begins the life of the Friars Minor.

The Rule of the Friars Minor is this, namely, to observe the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ, by living in obedience without anything of our own, and in chastity.

Brother Francis promises obedience and reverence to the Lord Pope Honorius and his canonically elected successors, and to the Roman Church; and the other friars are bound to obey Francis and his successors.

Chapter II

Concerning those who wish to adopt this life, and in what manner they should be received.

If any would desire to adopt this life and would come to our brothers, let them send them to their ministers provincial to whom alone, and not to others, is the permission to receive friars conceded. Let the ministers examine them very diligently concerning the Catholic Faith and sacraments of the Church. If they believe all these things and desire to observe them faithfully and firmly unto the end, and if they have no wives, or if they do, their wives have already entered a convent, or having taken a vow of chastity, permission [to enter one] has been granted to them by authority of the bishop of the diocese, and the wives are of such an age that it is not possible that suspicion arise concerning them, let them say unto these the words of the Holy Gospel, that they should go and sell all that is their own and strive to give it to the poor. If they cannot do that, their good will suffices.

Let the friars and their ministers beware, lest they be solicitous concerning their temporal things, so that they may freely do with their own things, whatever the Lord will inspired them. If however should they need counsel, let the ministers have permission to send them to other God fearing men, by whose counsel they may give their goods to the poor. Afterwards let them grant them the clothes of probation, namely two tunics without a capuche, a cord, pants, and a caparone [extending] to the cord, unless it seems to the ministers [that it should be] otherwise according to God. Having truly finished the year of probation, let them be received to obedience, promising to observe always this very life and rule. And in no manner will it be licit to them to leave this [form of] religious life, according to the command of the Lord Pope, since according to the Holy Gospel “No one putting hand to the plow and turning back is fit for the Kingdom of God.”

And let those who have already promised obedience have one tunic with a capuche and if they wish to have it, another without a capuche. And those who are driven by necessity can wear footwear. And let all the friars wear cheep clothing and they can patch these with sack-cloth and other pieces with the blessing of God. I admonish and exhort them, not to despise nor judge men, whom they see clothed with soft and colored

clothes, using dainty food and drink, but rather let each one judge and despise his very self.

Chapter III

Concerning the divine office and fasting; and how the brothers ought to travel through the world.

Clerics are to perform the divine office according to the ordo of the Roman Church, except for the psalter, for which they can have breviaries. Laymen are to say twenty-four “Our Fathers” for matins; for lauds five ; for prime, terce, sext and none, for each of these seven, for vespers, however, twelve; for compline seven; and let them pray for the dead.

And let them fast from the Feast of All saints until Christmas. Indeed those who voluntarily fast the holy lent, which begins at Epiphany and for the forty days that follow, which the Lord consecrated with His own holy fast, let them be blessed by the Lord, and let those who do not wish [to do so] not be constrained. But they shall fast the other [lent] until the [day of the] Resurrection of the Lord.

At other times however they are not bound to fast, except on Fridays. Indeed in time of manifest necessity the friars are not bound to the corporal fast.

I truly counsel, admonish and exhort my friars in the Lord Jesus Christ, that when they go about through the world, they are not to quarrel nor contend in words, nor are they to judge others, but they are to be meek, peaceable and modest, kind and humble, speaking uprightly to all, as is fitting. And they should not ride horseback, unless they are driven [to do so] by manifest necessity or infirmity.

And into whatever house they may enter, first let them say: “Peace to this house.” And according to the Holy Gospel it is lawful for them to eat of any of the foods, which are placed before them.

Chapter IV

That the brothers should not accept money.

I firmly command all the friars, that in no manner are they to receive coins or money through themselves or through an interposed person. However for the necessities of the infirm and for the clothing of the other friars, the ministers and even the custodes are to conduct a solicitous care, by means of spiritual friends, according to places and seasons and cold regions, as they see expedites necessity; with this always preserved, that, as has been said, they receive neither coins nor money.

Chapter V

On the manner of working.

Let those friars, to whom the Lord gives the grace to work, work faithfully and devotedly, in such a way that, having excluded idleness, the enemy of the soul, they do not extinguish the spirit of holy prayer and devotion, to which all other temporal things should be subordinated. Indeed concerning the wages for labor, let them receive for themselves and for their friars corporal necessities, excepting coins or money, and this [they should do] humbly, as befits the servants of God and the followers of most holy poverty.

Chapter VI

That the Friars should appropriate nothing for themselves, and concerning the begging of alms and sick friars.

Let the Friars appropriate nothing for themselves, neither house nor place, nor any thing. And as pilgrims and exiles in this world let them go about begging for alms confidently in poverty and humility as members of the household of God, nor is it fitting that they be ashamed [to do so], since the Lord made Himself poor in this world for us. This is that heavenliness of most high poverty, which has established you, my most dear Friars, as heirs and kings of the Kingdom of Heaven, making you poor in things, it has raised you high in virtues. Let this be your portion, which leads you into the land of the living. Cleaving totally to this, most beloved Friars, may you desire nothing else under heaven in perpetuity for the [sake of] the Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

And wherever the friars are and find themselves, let them mutually show themselves to be members of the same household. And let them without fear manifest to one another their own necessities, since, if a mother nourishes and loves her own son according to the flesh, how much more diligently should he ought to love and nourish his own spiritual brother?

And, if any of them should fall into infirmity, the other friars should care for him, as they would wish to be cared for themselves.

Chapter VII

On the penances to be imposed on Friars who sin.

If any of the friars, as the instigation of the enemy, should sin mortally, for those sins, concerning which it has be ordained among the friars, that they have recourse to the ministers provincial alone, the aforesaid friars are bound to have recourse to them as soon as they can, without delay. Indeed let the ministers themselves, if they are priests, with mercy enjoin upon them a penance; if indeed they are not priests, let them have it enjoined by other priests of the order, as it will seem to them to better expedite [the

matter] according to God. And they should beware, not to grow angry and become upset on account of the sin of another, since anger and upsetness impede charity in themselves and in others.

Chapter VIII

On the election of the minister general of this brotherhood; and on the Chapter at Pentecost.

All the friars are bound to have always one of the friars of this very same religious [order] as minister general and servant of the whole fraternity and they are bound firmly to obey him. When he dies, let there be made an election of a successor by the ministers provincials and the custodes in the Pentecost Chapter, in which the ministers provincial are bound always to convene together, wherever it will have been determined by the minister general; and this once every three years or at another interval greater or less, as it will have been ordained by the aforesaid minister.

Chapter IX

On preachers

Let the friars not preach in the diocese of any bishop, when they will have been opposed by him. And let no friar even dare preach to the people, unless he will have been examined by the minister general of this fraternity and approved, and there be conceded to him by the same the office of preaching.

I admonish also and exhort these same friars, that in the preaching, that they deliver, their expressions be considered and chaste, for the utility and edification of the people, by announcing to them vices and virtues, punishment and glory with brevity of speech; since a brief word did the Lord speak upon the earth.

Chapter X

On the admonition and correction of the friars.

Let the friars, who are ministers and servants of the other friars, visit and admonish their friars and humbly and charitably correct them, not commanding them something which is contrary to their conscience and our rule. Indeed let the friars, who are subjects, remember, that for the sake of God they have renounced their own wills. Whence I firmly command them, to obey their ministers in all things which they have promised the Lord to observe and which are not contrary to their souls or to our rule. And wherever the friars are, who know and understand, that they themselves are not able to observe the rule spiritually, they should and can have recourse to their ministers. Indeed let the ministers receive them charitably and kindly and be so familiar with them, that

they can speak to them and act as a lord with his servants; for so it should be, because the ministers are the servants of all the friars.

Indeed I admonish and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ, that the friars are to beware of all pride, vain glory, envy, avarice, care and solicitude for this world, detraction and murmuring, and let those who are ignorant of letters not care to learn them; but let them strive, so that above all things they should desire to have the Spirit of the Lord and His holy operation, to pray always to Him with a pure heart and to be humble, patient in persecution and infirmity and to love those who persecute and correct and accuse us, because the Lord says, "Love your enemies, pray for those who persecute and calumniate you" (Mt. 5:44). "Blessed are those who suffer persecution for justice's sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:10). "He who has persevered until the end, however, will be saved" (Mt. 10:22).

Chapter XI

That the brothers should not enter the convents of nuns.

I strictly command all the brothers not to have suspicious company or conversation with women, and not to enter the monasteries of women religious, except those to whom special permission has been conceded by the Apostolic See; neither are they to be godfathers of men or women [so that] scandal may not arise on this account among the friars nor concerning them.

Chapter XII

Concerning those who go among the Saracens and other infidels.

Let whoever of the friars who desires by divine inspiration to go among the saracens and other infidels seek permission from their minister provincial. Indeed the ministers are to grant permission to go to none, except those whom seems to be fit to be sent.

For which sake I enjoin the ministers by obedience, to seek from the lord pope one of the cardinals of the Roman Church, who is to be the governor, protector, and corrector of this fraternity, so that always subject and prostrate at the feet of this same Holy Church, stable in the Catholic Faith we may observe, as we have firmly promised, the poverty and humility and the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Confirmation of the Rule

Let it not be in any way licit to anyone among men to infringe this page of our confirmation, or to contravene it with rash daring. If anyone however would presume to attempt this, let him know himself to have incurred the indignation of the Omnipotent God and of Blessed Peter and Paul, His Apostles.

Given at the Lateran, on the third day of the Kalens of December, in the eight year of Our Pontificate.

Honorius III

9. The Testament of St Francis

In the Testament written near the end of his life St Francis recalls the grace of his conversion and the beginnings of the Order, and exhorts the friars to live their Gospel life with fidelity.

The Lord granted me, Brother Francis, to begin to do penance in this way: While I was in sin, it seemed very bitter to me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I had mercy upon them. And when I left them that which seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body; and afterward I lingered a little and left the world.

And the Lord gave me such faith in churches that I would simply pray and speak in this way: “We adore You, Lord Jesus Christ, in all Your churches throughout the world, and we bless You, for through Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.”

Afterward the Lord gave me and still gives me such faith in priests who live according to the manner of the holy Roman Church because of their order, that if they were to persecute me, I would still have recourse to them. And if I possessed as much wisdom as Solomon had and I came upon pitiful priests of this world, I would not preach contrary to thier will in the parishes in which they live.

And I desire to fear, love, and honour them and all others as my masters. And I do not wish to consider sin in them because I discern the Son of God in them and they are my masters. And I act in this way since I see nothing corporally of the Most High Son of God in this world except His Most holy Body and Blood which they receive and which they alone administer to others. And these most holy mysteries I wish to have honored above all things and to be revered and to have them reserved in precious places. Wherever I come upon His most holy written words in unbecoming places, I desire to gather them up and I ask that they be collected and placed in a suitable place. And we should honor and respect all theologians and those who minister the most holy divine words as those who minister spirit and life to us.

And after the Lord gave me brothers, no one showed me what I should do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the form 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 to the poor everything which they were capable of possessing and they were content with one tunic, patched

inside and out, with a cord and short trousers. And we had no desire for anything more. We who were clerics used to say the Office as other clerics did; the lay brothers said the Our Father; and we quite willingly stayed in churches. And we were simple and subject to all.

And I used to work with my hands, and I still desire to work; and I firmly wish that all my brothers give themselves to honest work. Let those who do not know how to work learn, not from desire of receiving wages for their work but as an example and in order to avoid idleness. And when we are not paid for our work, let us have recourse to the table of the Lord, seeking alms from door to door. The Lord revealed to me a greeting, as we used to say: "May the Lord give you peace."

Let the brothers beware that they by no means receive churches or poor dwellings or anything which is built for them, unless it is in harmony with that holy poverty which we have promised in the Rule, and let them always be guests there as pilgrims and strangers. And I firmly command all of the brothers through obedience that, wherever they are, they should not be so bold as to seek any letter from the Roman Curia either personally or through an intermediary, neither for a church or for some other place or under the guise of preaching or even for 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 minister general of this fraternity and another guardian whom it might please him to give me. And I wish to be so 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 wish nonetheless always to have a cleric who will celebrate the Office for me as it is contained in the Rule. And all the other brothers are bound to obey their guardians and to celebrate the Office according to the Rule. And if any are found who do not celebrate the Office according to the Rule and who wish to alter it in any way or who are not Catholics, let all the brothers be obliged through obedience that wherever they come upon such a brother they must bring him to the custodian nearest to that place where they have found him. And the custodian is strictly bound through obedience to guard him strongly as a prisoner day and night, so that he cannot be snatched from his hands until he can personally deliver him into the hands of his minister. And the minister is strictly bound through obedience to send him with brothers who shall guard him as a prisoner day and night until they deliver him before the Lord of Ostia who is the master, protector, and corrector of the entire fraternity.

And let the brothers not say: This is another Rule; because this is a remembrance, an admonition, an exhortation, and my testament, which I, little Brother Francis, prepare for all of you, my blessed brothers, so that we may observe in a more Catholic manner the Rule which we have promised to the Lord.

And the minister general and all other ministers and custodians are bound through obedience not to add to or subtract from these words. And let them always have this writing with them along with the Rule. And in all the chapters which they hold, when they read the Rule, let them also read these words. And I through obedience strictly command all my brothers, cleric and lay, not to place glosses on the Rule or on these words, saying: They are to be understood in this way. But as the Lord has granted me to speak and to write the Rule and these words simply and purely, so shall you understand them simply and without gloss, and observe them with their holy manner of working until the end.

And whoever shall have observed these things, may he be filled in heaven with the blessing of the most high Father and on earth with the blessing of His beloved Son with the most Holy Spirit the Paraclete and with all the powers of heaven and all the saints. And I, little brother Francis, your servant, inasmuch as I can, confirm for you this most holy blessing both within and without.