

ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS - Initial Formation for Enquirers -

Chapter 1: In the beginning—Francis

The Franciscan family, as one among many spiritual families raised up by the Holy Spirit in the Church, unites all members of the People of God—laity, religious and priests—who recognise that they are called to follow Christ in the footsteps of St Francis of Assisi. In various ways and forms but in life-giving union with each other, they intend to make present the charism of their common Seraphic Father in the life and mission of the Church. [Rule, 1]

What do we know about St Francis?



1181/2, born Assisi, baptised Giovanni, renamed *Francesco* by his father Pietro Bernadone

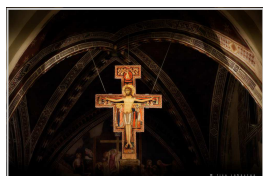
1190, attends parish school at San Giorgio

1199-1200, civil war in Assisi; destruction of feudal nobles' castles

Nov 1202, war between Perugia and Assisi; Francis spends year as prisoner in Perugia till ransomed by his father; Francis very ill

1204, Francis begins to recover from illness

1205, Francis sets out for war in Apulia; returns next day after vision in Spoleto—beginning of gradual conversion



Autumn—winter 1205, receives message from crucifix in San Damiano 'repair my Church!'

1206, Francis' conflict with father ends with trial before bishop Guido; begins to nurse lepers; repairs chapels of San Damiano, San Pietro & Portiuncula



24 Feb 1208, hears Gospel of St Matthias' Mass; becomes barefoot preacher

Spring 1208, joined by Bernard of Quintavalle, Peter Cantanii & Giles; soon 4 more join

Early 1209, total of brothers now 12

Spring 1209, Francis writes brief Rule; obtains informal approval from Innocent III in Rome; on return friars stay briefly at Rivo Torto



1209/10, friars move to Portiuncula

1212, Francis receives Clare; she moves to San Damiano in May

1213, gift to Francis of Mount La Verna

1213/14, Francis travels to Spain [?]

Nov 1215, Francis is in Rome for Fourth Lateran Council



1217, 5000 brothers gather for Pentecost general chapter; missions to Germany, Tunis, Syria

1219, Chapter of Mats; Francis preaches to the Sultan

1220, first Franciscan martyrs; Francis goes to Acre and Holy Land; Hugolino appointed Protector of the Order; Francis resigns as Minister General—appoints Peter Cantanii as vicar

1221, Elias becomes vicar; Rule of Friars Minor approved by Honorius III

1221-22, Francis on preaching tour to southern Italy; August 1221 Francis preaches in Bologna



1223, Francis composes Second Rule for Friars Minor; pope approves in November

December 1223, Christmas crib at Greccio

15 August-29 Sept 1224, receives Stigmata at La Verna; 1224 friars led by Bl Agnellus of Pisa arrive in England

Early 1225, Francis nearly blind & cared for by Clare at San Damiano; composes the Canticle of Creatures



Summer 1225 to summer 1226, treatment for Francis' ailments to no avail

Sept 1226, knowing that he is now nearing death, Francis asks to be taken to the Portiuncula—where he dies on 3 Oct & is buried the next day in San Giorgio

16 July 1228, canonised by pope Gregory IX

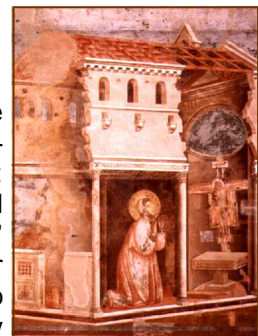
25 May 1230, Francis' remains are moved to the new basilica of San Francesco

1.

How the Crucifix spoke to Francis for the first time

[*Legend of the Three Companions*, V]

...while he was walking by the church of San Damiano, he was told in the Spirit to go inside for a prayer...he began to pray intensely before an image of the Crucified, which spoke to him in tender and kind voice: 'Francis, don't you see that my house is being destroyed? Go, the, and rebuild it for me.' Stunned and trembling, he said: 'I will do gladly, Lord.' For he understood that it was speaking about that church, which was near collapse because of its age. He was filled with such joy and became so radiant with light over that message, he knew in his soul that it was truly Christ crucified who spoke to him.



Upon leaving the church, he found a priest sitting nearby and, putting his hands into the pouch, he offered him a handful of coins. 'My Lord,' he said, 'I beg you, buy some oil and keep the light before the Crucified burning continually. When this money runs out, I will again give you as much as you need.'

2.

The Feast of St Matthias, 24 Feb 1208

[Mark Galli *Francis of Assisi and His World*, 56-57]



Larger Church reform...was in the air that Francis breathed, but such a large scheme did not inspire him until he experienced what he believed was another divine revelation.

It happened at the third church which Francis restored. It was legally owned by the Benedictine Abbey of Monte Subiaso, but except for the occasional mass said there by a visiting priest, the chapel was neglected and in serious disrepair. Francis fell in love with the chapel almost immediately. It was secluded, located in the midst of a quiet forest. The chapel, though nicknamed the Portiuncula [the 'Little Portion'] was officially dedicated to St Mary of the Angels, and thus, because of Francis' devotion to Mary, became a much-favoured place.

During a mass held in honour of St Matthias..., something extraordinary happened. As the priest read from chapter 10 of the Gospel of Matthew, in which Jesus instructs his disciples to go out and preach, the verses seemed to leap out at Francis: 'You received without payment: give without payment. Take no gold, or silver or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals or staff.'

Francis was mesmerised. After the mass, he rushed up to the priest and begged him to explain. The priest went over the passage line by line, adding parallel readings from the Gospels of Mark and Luke. He explained that Christ's disciples were not to possess gold or silver, nor any money at all for that matter, nor carry a wallet or a sack, nor bread, nor a staff, nor have shoes and no more than one tunic, so that they could preach the kingdom of God and penance.

An overwhelmed Francis blurted out, 'This is what I want! This is what I seek, this is what I desire with all my heart!'

3.

Three Principal Texts

[Francis, Bernard & Peter discovered by 'random selection' from the Gospels the guidance of the Holy Spirit]

- (1) Matt 19.21
- (2) Lk 9.3
- (3) Lk 9.23

4.

The Christmas Crib, Greccio, 1223

[Thomas of Celano *First Life of St Francis*, XXX]



'If you desire to celebrate the coming feast of the Lord together at Greccio,...hurry before me and carefully make ready the things I tell you. For I wish to enact the memory of that babe who was born in Bethlehem: to see as much as is possible with my own bodily eyes the discomfort of his infant needs, how he lay in a manger, and how, with an ox and an ass standing by, he rested on hay.'

As they could, the men and women of the land with exultant hearts prepare candles and torches to light up that night that has lighted every day and year...Indeed, the manger is prepared, the hay is carried in, and the ox and ass are led to the spot. There simplicity is given a place of honour, poverty is exalted, humility is commended, and out of Greccio is made a new Bethlehem...The people arrive, ecstatic at this new mystery of new joy...The brothers sing, giving God due praise...The holy man of God stands before the manger, filled with heartfelt sighs, contrite in his piety and overcome with wondrous joy. Over the manger the solemnities of the Mass are celebrated and the priest enjoys a new consolation.

The holy man of God, is dressed in the vestments of the Levites, since he was a Levite, and with full voice sings the holy gospel...Then he preaches to the people...and pours forth sweet honey about the birth of the poor King and the poor city of Bethlehem...since in the hearts of many the child Jesus had been given over to oblivion. Now he is awakened and impressed on their loving memory by his own grace through his holy servant Francis. At length, the night's solemnities draw to a close and everyone went home with joy.

5.

Stigmata, Mount La Verna, 1224

[Bonaventure *Major Life*, 13]



On a certain morning about the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, while Francis was praying on the mountainside, he saw a Seraph having six wings, fiery as well as brilliant, descend from the grandeur of heaven. And when in swift flight, it had arrived at a spot in the air near the man of God, there appeared between the wings the likeness of a man crucified, with his hands and feet extended in the form of a cross and fastened to a cross. Two of the wings were raised above his head, two were extended for flight, and two covered his whole body. Seeing this, he was overwhelmed and his heart flooded with a mixture of joy and sorrow. He rejoiced at the gracious way Christ looked upon him under the appearance of the Seraph, but the fact that he was fastened to a cross pierced his soul with a sword of compassionate sorrow.

Eventually he understood from this, through the Lord revealing it, that divine providence had shown him a vision of this sort so that the friend of Christ might learn in advance that he was to be totally transformed into the likeness of Christ crucified, not by the martyrdom of his flesh, but by the enkindling of his soul. As the vision was disappearing, it left in his heart a marvellous fire and impressed in his flesh a likeness of signs no less marvellous. For immediately the marks of nails appear in his hands and feet just as he had seen a little before in the figure of the man crucified. His hands and feet seemed to be pierced through the centre by nails,...and the upper side of the feet...Also his right side, as if pierced with a lance, was marked with a red wound from which his sacred blood often flowed, moistening his tunic and underwear.

6. The Canticle of Creatures, 1225

- 1 Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,
yours are the praises, the glory, the honour, and all blessing.
- 2 To you alone, Most High, do they belong,
and no man is worthy to mention your name.
- 3 Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,
who is the day through whom you give us light.
- 4 And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour;
and bears a likeness of you, Most High One.
- 5 Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,
in heaven you formed them clear and precious and beautiful.
- 6 Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of
weather
through which you give sustenance to your creatures.
- 7 Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Water,
which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.
- 8 Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom you light the night.
And he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.
- 9 Praised be you, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains and governs us,
and who produces varied fruits with coloured flowers and
herbs.
- 10 Praised be you, my Lord, through those who give pardon for
your love
and bear infirmity and tribulation.
- 11 Blessed are those who endure in peace
for by you, Most High, they shall be crowned.
- 12 Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Bodily Death,
from whom no living man can escape.
- 13 Woe to those who die in mortal sin.
Blessed are those who death will find in your most holy will,
for the second death shall do them no harm.
- 14 Praise and bless my Lord and give him thanks
and serve him with great humility.

