



Studying the Rule of the OFS

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Prologue

Exhortation of Saint Francis to the brothers and sisters of penance *1

In the name of the Lord!

(Chapter One)
Those Who Do Penance

All those who love the Lord with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind, with their whole strength and love their neighbour as themselves, who hate their bodies with all their vices and sins, who receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and who produce worthy fruits of penance. O how happy and blessed are these men and women while they do such things and persevere in doing them, because the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon them and make Its home and dwelling place among them, and they are children of the heavenly Father Whose works they do, and they are spouses, brothers, and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are spouses when the faithful soul is joined by the Holy Spirit to our Lord Jesus Christ. We are brothers to Him when we do the will of the Father who is in heaven. We are mothers when we carry Him in our heart and body through a divine love and a pure and sincere conscience and give birth to Him through a holy activity which must shine as an example before others.

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

Holy Father, in your name, save those whom you have given me in the world; they are yours and you gave them to me. The words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they accepted them and have believed in truth that I have come from you and they have known that you have sent me.

I pray for them and not for the world. Bless and sanctify them; I sanctify myself for them. I pray not only for them, but for those who will believe in me through their word that they might be sanctified in being one as we are.

I wish, Father, that where I am, they also may be with me that they may see my glory in your kingdom. Amen.

*1 As translated and printed in the new Omnibus, *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents: 1* FA:ED (p 41-44) – with scholarly foot notes and italicised text provided

(Chapter Two)
Those Who Do Not Do Penance

All those men and women who are not living in penance, who do not receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, who practice vice and sin and walk after the evil concupiscence and the evil desires of their flesh, who do not observe what they have promised to the Lord, and who in their body serve the world through the desires of the flesh, the concerns of the world and the cares of this life: They are held captive by the devil, whose children they are, and whose works they do. They are blind because they do not see the true light, the Lord Jesus Christ. They do not possess spiritual wisdom because they do not have the Son of God, the true wisdom of the Father. It is said of them: Their wisdom has been swallowed up and Cursed are those who turn away from your commands. They see and acknowledge, know and do evil, and knowingly lose their souls.

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

And every talent, ability, knowledge, and wisdom they think they have will be taken away from them. And they leave their wealth to their relatives and friends who take and divide it and afterwards say: 'May his soul be cursed because he could have given us more and acquired more than what he distributed to us.' Worms eat his body and so body and soul perish in this brief world and they will go to hell where they will be tortured forever.

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

And whoever has not done these things will be held accountable before the tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ on the day of judgment.